



Series:

When the Heart Ripens
- and life turns spacious

Episode:

A2. ROOTED

– Creativity of seasoned imagination

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Welcome to another episode in the series “When the heart ripens”, another theme within the idea of rootedness in reality. Please read the Introduction to this Series for more information about the series of episodes.

Story

The afternoon had settled into that muted gold that comes only in late autumn. She sat by the window, sketchbook open, pencil resting lightly between her fingers. She had once used imagination to invent, to reach beyond the world before her, shaping images out of restlessness rather than out of what was given. Now it came to her more like a way of listening. Today the listening began with a pale wash of sunlight falling across the garden wall.

She looked at the page, blank except for the faint smudge she’d made absentmindedly when she first sat down. The blankness no longer intimidated her. Once, she needed a plan before

the pencil touched the page. Now, the page felt like a space where she didn’t need to perform anything. It was simply a surface that waited without expectation.

Her eyes drifted to the garden.

A single leaf – curled, living green shade, trembling slightly – caught the light in a way that stirred a memory. The shape of it reminded her, unexpectedly, of a fragment from years earlier: a day in her twenties when she stood in a studio, paint-splattered and restless, convinced she needed to produce something impressive. She had believed then that imagination required intensity, novelty, some sign of brilliance. The memory rose not as shame but as a kind of affectionate recognition. She could see her younger self clearly, earnest and striving, unaware of the deeper currents moving beneath all that effort.

Now, in the soft quiet of the afternoon, the leaf felt more compelling than any concept she could invent.

She began to sketch, very lightly.

No agenda. No design. Just the outline of what she saw, though even “seeing” was too strong a word. It felt more like receiving – as if the form on the wall were offering itself rather than being captured. It was imagination working through attention, not through invention. She noticed the gentle fold in its centre, the thin shadow the veins cast, the way the light haloed its uneven edges. Her pencil moved slowly, following rather than asserting.

Halfway through, she paused.

Her hand rested in her lap, her gaze returning to the scene outside. The leaf shifted slightly in the breeze. She smiled at the imperfection of



it all. She remembered vividly how hard she once tried to fix life into meaningful shapes – to make the world reveal its patterns, to create significance out of thin ambition. That was imagination pressed into service by the ego. What she felt now was imagination released into truthfulness. Now she found herself content with the imperfect, the incomplete, the half-seen.

She closed her eyes briefly.

Behind the darkness of her eyelids, the memory softened into something more spacious. She recalled a different moment entirely: sitting with her grandmother at a kitchen table long ago, tracing the pattern of light through lace curtains with her fingertip. She had forgotten that memory for decades. But here it was again – intact, warm – the first time she realised that beauty did not need to impress; it only needed to be noticed.

She opened her eyes and looked back at the sketchbook.

Reflection

The drawing was simple, nothing special. And yet it felt true. The kind of truth that does not insist on itself. She darkened a line here, softened a contour there, then stopped. The sketch was unfinished, yes, but it felt complete in its incompleteness.

She sat back in her chair, letting the afternoon wrap itself around her.

The leaf outside trembled again, catching the light differently now, and she knew she would not chase the new angle or adjust her drawing. That impulse – to perfect, to refine, to improve – had loosened over time, not through discipline but through a long, quiet yielding. She no longer needed imagination to lift her out of the world. She let imagination bring her further into it.

She closed the sketchbook gently.

The lines on the page felt like a conversation between her and the small, shimmering ordinary – a conversation without pressure, without shoulds, without the old ache to prove something.

The afternoon was dimming.

She rose, leaving the sketchbook on the table. As she moved around the room, she felt the soft glow of that memory still with her, layered beneath the present moment like an underpainting. Her imagination felt less like a force and more like a companion.

Not a brilliance to achieve.

Just a way of seeing.

And in that seeing, she felt quietly alive.

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There comes a time in a person's life when imagination quietly changes its allegiance. In earlier seasons it may have served ambition, fantasy – imagining what is not present rather than attending to what is – escape, or the restless reshaping of ourselves into something more impressive. But when the inner life matures, imagination begins to work from a gentler centre. It grows quieter, more truthful. It stops fleeing reality and starts attending to it. Daydreaming drifts away from what is; seasoned imagination lets reality reveal the deeper layers it has always carried.

Thomas Merton (1915–1968) understood this transition with unusual clarity. Late in life he wrote, "*The imagination should give us images which meditate on reality, not run away from it.*" In that single line the difference between mature imagination and fantasy becomes unmistakable. Where daydreaming withdraws from the world, seasoned imagination returns us to it with fresher sight. It becomes a lens that clarifies rather than distorts. It listens more than it constructs.

Merton's own journals embody this truth. He did not indulge in grand inner theatre or self-heroic futures. Instead, he paid attention to subtle shifts of light, to how birdsong reminded him of mercy, to the unbidden clarity that came while walking among trees at dusk. His imagination became a servant of perception. It helped him see the texture of experience, the way grace moves in quiet channels, the humour and fragility of being human. Mature imagination is not about inventing meaning but recognising it.

Mary Oliver (1935–2019) points in a simi-

lar direction with her well-loved line: "*Attention is the beginning of devotion.*" In six words she discloses the spiritual usefulness of imaginative seeing. The imagination becomes fertile not because it constructs grand visions but because it attends so fully to the world that the heart begins to open. In its seasoned form, imagination is not a factory but a field, and fields grow only what they receive. Oliver teaches that the imagination grows healthily when it stays close to life.

This is why mature imagination feels surprisingly grounded. It arises naturally when someone has lived long enough to sense the difference between escape and discovery. Such a person is no longer impressed by vast schemes or dramatic insights. They are moved by small truths. This is imagination as a way of perceiving, not a way of escaping. They can look at an ordinary object – a bowl, a book left open, a tree bending slightly after rain – and something in it speaks. Not through symbolism imposed from outside, but through meaning revealed from within. This is the creativity that belongs to a soul no longer needing to dominate its world but willing to be tutored by it.

Bede Griffiths (1906–1993) carried this quality in a different register. In his later writings he speaks of imagination as a place of inner integration: "The eye of the heart sees into the depth of things." This is not mystical exaggeration but the fruit of long attention. Griffiths' imagination did not hover above reality; it descended into it. He wove connections across traditions, landscapes, and seasons of a life, receiving truth wherever it appeared. This is the kind of imagination that becomes spiritually fertile: it widens our belonging.

Such creativity becomes visible in modest gestures. A mature person hears a fragment of someone's story and recognises the thread that

matters. They see the humour in their own limitations and feel gentleness rising rather than irritation. They sense when someone needs silence instead of advice. Their imagination is not spectacular. It is discerning. It has become an organ of compassion.

This creativity grows best in unremarkable moments: a walk taken slowly, an unplanned pause in the day, a task done without haste. Daydreaming tries to escape these moments. Mature imagination receives them. It listens for the inner shimmer that appears when the heart is attentive. It allows thoughts, images, and connections to arise without forcing them into purpose. It is creative because it is receptive; useful because it is honest; spiritual because it is aligned with reality rather than fleeing it.

For anyone wishing to foster this kind of imagination, the invitation is simple: let something today speak to you without requiring it to be impressive. Notice the small thread of life that catches your attention. Let it move in you for a moment. You are not being asked to invent anything. You are being asked to see. And seasoned imagination begins exactly there.

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URL (valid on 2025-12-01): <https://templegate.com/products/return-to-the-centre>

Online and YouTube resources

Mary Oliver poetry readings by public radio, festival, and literary organisations. Examples include readings of "The Summer Day", "Wild Geese", and "Morning Poem". URL (valid on 2025-12-01): https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=mary+oliver+poetry+reading

Talk: "Thomas Merton – Attention and the Contemplative Imagination". Lectures and presentations available via the Thomas Merton Center and related contemplative archives. URL (valid on 2025-12-01): https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=thomas+merton+attention

Talk: "Bede Griffiths – The Eye of the Heart". Talks and retreat recordings circulated through contemplative and interfaith platforms. URL (valid on 2025-12-01): https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=bede+griffiths+eye+of+the+heart

Practice Allow a small moment today to draw your attention without effort – a pattern of light, a colour, a movement, a memory rising gently. Let it rest in your awareness for a few breaths. Do not interpret or use it. Simply receive it, and notice what it reveals.

If you are meeting in a group: Invite participants to name one ordinary sight or memory from the past week that stayed with them for no obvious reason. Listen for how quiet attention can become a form of creative seeing.