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And On That Day...

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Author Bio

Vera Ekhatov '19 is a Philosophy major. She says, "How would I describe my life? By breaking it up into tiny pieces."

And On That Day

VERA EKHATOR

A man knelt in the kitchen of his one-room home. He holds a cast iron skillet, which has long ago rusted and smashes it against tiles which were once as white as the Himalayas.

“I want to know. I want to know! I don’t care if I understand but I want to know!” Again, he brings down the skillet, and splits the floor into tiny triangles. Then powder. Then dust. Until, the dust floats into his lungs, and turns his trachea and bronchial tubes into bleached coral.

“I want to know!” again. “I must know.” again. “I need to know.” again. And then, he coughs until he weeps.

A woman sits on a bench halfway across the world. She hears every slam. They pound against her ribcage like mallets on a xylophone. She walks up to a tree and snaps off a branch. Then, with the branch, she plots off a section of land. It is hers because she has claimed it. She has claimed it because it is her own. From the branch’s spurs, flow a river that will later divide the earth. What has she done?

In a country consumed by dust, a drone flies and drops a bomb. A lost eye. A severed arm. A last breath. A fallen lung. A war is fought around their homes. A war is fought and no one knows why, here, children grow ripe before their time. Here, a family of nine passes around an opium pipe. A family who can’t run, so chooses to escape instead. Among them, the youngest to smoke is six. She is a-d-d-i-c-t-e-d, addicted – even if she’ll never learn to spell it. Her brother is too. He is ten, but can pass for eight. At his age, he knows shame. During the day, he wears wrappings to hide his face. And, at night, he sells himself to lose himself in the opium’s haze.

The pastor shouts, “Hallelujah.” He is obese, yet moves with a serpent’s speed. The offering basket rotates like the hands of a clock. The money is put in like pinches of salt. “Give it all to Him. Give it all to him. Give it all to me!” The pastor drops to his knees. Sweat hangs at the end of his eyebrows like bait to a fishing rod. He spends the offering on a designer watch.

In a desert, a rock is lassoed and squeezed until it becomes bread. The cult leader turns to his followers who praise, "It's a miracle! Satan lives and we are lucky to worship him." The leader spreads his arms and they embrace him. Then they pass around a gun and shoot themselves one by one. On their way to hell they see heaven. But heaven is their hell.

An ancient woman approaches her 800th year. She has slain dragons. Overthrown tyrants. Lain with lions. Speared men with a golden sceptre. Grown grapes and eaten them with bees' nectar. And given birth to several nations. On her deathbed, she is told she never existed. She dies before she has time to think about this revelation. Some lie and say she is a work of fiction, others take the stand and say she'll be resurrected.

There is a child who sits on his grandmother's lap. She pats his back and he listens as she tells him lies that he believes. Lies about women adorned in seaweed. Women who rise from the water singing promises that hitch on to the wind and wrap themselves around the necks of deaf individuals. Until, the feet of all those people dangled between scepticism and faith.

A new woman stands in front of her black-spotted mirror and stares. Her shattered reflection stares back with wild eyes. She takes the razor to her scalp and watches her hairs waft down into the sink. Finished, she turns her head from left to right. Her father would've yelled not to clog the pipes. Her father would've yelled had he still been alive.

A couple goes by the same name but comes from different homes. They sit in a tattoo parlour, watching as each gets a motto needled into the other's flesh. "Ink it, then live it," they say. Then, they go home to an apartment without running water or electricity and shoot heroine into each other's necks. Not long after, their bodies are found by a paramedic who is confused by their freshly tattooed gibberish.

The paramedic cocks his head, "They've barely, reached rigor mortis." Yet, the stench of rotting is overwhelming and thick.

He walks over to the refrigerator. When he sees, what is inside, the muscles in his face grow slack and his body, stiff. He stares past the world before him with eyes that failed to focus, "God, to only know a world that's

dark, lonely, and cold.”

He can't bear to shut the refrigerator's door on the smell's source – a swaddled infant with a mouth still open from crying.

A pair of sky divers jump from a plane. Each of them see different scenes. The diver on the left sees a thriving cityscape: there isn't a single tower without an illuminated spire. She imagines that everyone within is busy at work, innovating. Look at the buildings and the people within them, counting numbers on screens. I can't wait to see what all of this work will bring!

The skydiver on the right sees an impossibly condensed ghetto. In the ghettos, are empty recliners. And not far off, opulent mansions separated by miles of distance. In the mansions are the people of the ghetto, cleaning for the occupants - occupants who are elsewhere, busy, working. All of our work is work without end. Upon thinking this thing and seeing these scenes, the skydiver is reminded that he hates himself and he is filled with tranquillity. It is easier not to open his 'chute because he hates himself. All he needed was a reminder. He turns to face the diver on the left and yells, “Why do we hate ourselves? Why do we hate ourselves? Why do we hate ourselves? Why-?”

The left diver cannot hear the right diver over the wind. As she struggles to read his lips, she reaches to release her 'chute but it refuses to work.

The sun shines over a small town. The bell at a railroad crossing rings. A teenager sits in her car with the windows down. Fuck me. She sticks her head out of the window and peers over her sunglasses at the line of cars ahead. She notices a man who rushes toward the tracks with his daughter in hand. They reach the curb and stand. A maintenance truck drives down the tracks.

“Oh, looks like there's no train,” says the man.

“Aw, no train?” his daughter's fragile face shatters in the way only a child's can.

He stoops down and lifts her, “We can always see it next time.”

“When's next time?”

“Maybe tomorrow.”

“But what about today?”

He sees the currents running under her face and quickly says, “Why don't we go through the car wash today? Yea?”

The currents turn to electricity and the little girl beams. “Yay!”

The teenager in the car watches vicariously pleased. The car behind her beeps. “Oh, fuck off,” she whispers, smiling.

In a hospital, a machine beeps a melody that matches the steady leaps of the organ in a young woman's chest. It is not her, but her great-aunt who is connected to the monitor. The room smells of heavily laundered sheets. The smell is tongue drying.

Her great-aunt stirs from sleep, "There's a certain kind of peace in death don't you think, sweetie?"

"Not for the living there isn't. Not for the living. And we're all living until we're dead. So, please, don't even think about it."

"Do you remember when I would carry you on my back, you were about 5 or 6 then?"

The young woman's heart is waterlogged with happiness. "I remember." She remembers so well it is as if she is there. Nose burrowed into her great-aunt's neck, which always had the lingering scent of moth-balls and mints. Together they would descend the steps, through the living room, and onto the porch. The girl would play using nothing but her imagination. If she got bored or tired under the heat of the sun then she would crawl up her great-aunt's leg, rest her head on her chest, and listen to the paired rhythm of their heart's steps.

The young woman takes her great-aunt's leathered hand, "Sometimes, I wish I could go back."

"I hope I haven't made you sad."

"No, not sad... I just don't understand. I feel like I've lost something. It's just not the same when it's all in the past. It's like something I have, but can't quite grasp."

Her great-aunt closes her eyes. "Someday, you'll find that you don't have to grasp. That it's better if you don't. After all, you can only hold so much at a time. If you let go, then you don't have to choose what to hold on to - you can just be."

"What if I want to be with you?"

"Why would you want to spend life waiting? I'm at rest, sweetie."

"Are you happy?"

"I started with nothing and yet, I've achieved my everything. There's nothing else I can be."

"But I can't bear losing you."

With effort, the great-aunt raises her hand to stroke a tear away from the woman's cheek, "Don't be silly, sweetie. You can never lose me. Now wake, you've not yet exhausted."

The woman jolts up in a room full of spirits. She pleads to one of them, through the chasm of darkness, "I know. Though, I wish I didn't. I can't help wanting to grasp. I'd rather just forget." Then she drinks until the spirits fill her before falling backwards into a wooden slumber. When she wakes again, her wish is granted. She remembers nothing. She feels nothing.

She feels worse, like something emptied.

Yes, on that day, the stars bear witness, the Earth hung in space and looked utterly hopeless: rotating and rotating and rotating - without break. As for its people? They found themselves, together, on a planet of life surrounded by darkness. And none of them ever knew exactly what to do. Nevertheless, they found ways to continue – to think “about time”, to think about Time, to think about times, and to live through days.