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“The tension between the everyday treadmill and the gilded promises of life”

Me, i have a tendency to stumble through life, barely afloat, all in an attempt to reach my certain, chosen destination. This 'destination' or idyllic vision is constantly at the forefront of my mind. It is the source of all my woes yet drives my hope and aspirations. I like to think of it as a journey, a continuous and treacherous uphill battle in which I slay my demons, fulfill my potential and live in ultimate happiness and peace. This ultimacy and these ideations are my gilded promises of life. They conflict each other, hindering my progress and aiding my downfall though simultaneously keeping me alert, forcing me in this 'ideal' direction.

Throughout this journey, I often lose my sense of purpose, I forget why i'm here. I forget to take pleasure from those glorious, instantaneous and seemingly unsubstantial moments. These moments are the essence of life.

I often feel as though I am restlessly pacing the aisles, the corridors, the hills and pathways that accompany this tedious journey, damning the minutes for loitering and waiting for my gilded promises to materialize. I am too busy assiduously and monotonously engaging in routine, performing duties in attempt to fulfill my own (and other's) expectations of me. This constitutes my own everyday treadmill, the loitering, waiting, anticipation and restlessness is the tension that exists between my everyday treadmill and gilded promises of life.

Of course, being a teenager in two thousand and fourteen, tension is life. The anticipation of better things to come, for me, is the summary of my life at present. Living in a world engulfed by images, paradigms and ideations of 'perfection', the tension is more prevalent than ever. The 'gilded promises of life' are even more extravagant and unrealistic than ever before. As I flick through Vogue's latest edition, the glossiness almost sticking to my fingers, my eyes scan in panic and desperate desire, the abundance perfection, the catalogue of my gilded promises. The images of electronically altered women with clear complexions, sun kissed skin, luscious hair and impeccably toned figures stare out at me, tauntingly. The imagery accumulates, like a crescendo building up in my subconsciousness, gradually destroying the small constituents of my mind, my esteem, my well being, even my sanity, while I involuntarily writhe with shame and self hatred.

This is the lamentation of my self made gilded promises. It commences smoothly, the initial motivation gets me started as I engage in this determination to emulate this 'perfection' I am immersed in via social media and magazines. After this however, the tension sets in. I can feel myself descend down hill as I become sick with hunger and exhaustion due to over exertion and restricting my calorie intake. The endless hours scrutinizing myself in the mirror becomes my way of life. This is my tension.

Many of us force ourselves to endure the trauma, pain and unrewarding work and effort only to reside in utter despair and shame. Me, personally, I engage in this vicious cycle of setting high, unreasonable standards for myself and gilded promises which are impossible to fulfill. Sadly, this constitutes the hellish everyday treadmill of the teenager or early twenty something, getting their bearings with social media. The tension tortures my mind, it antagonizes my sense of purpose, my being. This isn't only existent in superficial hopes and aspirations. It subsists in almost every aspect of my life, whether it's love, loyalty, expectations, traditions or professions.

I often catch small glimpses, liliputian moments, instances of my dreams and hopes. These are the moments I truly live for, the laughs and the happiness. Yes, its momentary presence taunts me, though it provides the hope to keep me going. To strive to fulfill my gilded promises. I may experience an instance of love only to result in heartbreak, a flash of success only to reside with failure, or even an immense loyalty rendered to hurtful betrayal. The love, loyalty and success resides in my memory as I progress through life. These magical experiences are fundamental to my internal gilded promises. Though the experience may have ended, either in a good way or bad way, the aftermath is forever poignant. It pains me that it is over, but the hope that one day I may experience something similar again drives me. It is my buoyancy, keeping me afloat amidst the everyday hustle and bustle of life, my treadmill. Yes, the tension is full of complexities, contradictions and suffering. It is like my partner, a toxic boyfriend who constantly betrays me yet promises me better, has a kind of power over me in which I can't help but to forgive him. You try again, you continue, you get back up and resume your life. This is the relationship between the everyday treadmill and gilded promises of life.

Life is full of expectations, if they aren't self-inflicted they're inflicted upon us by our peers or the society in which we live. There is a stereotypical pattern considered 'normal' and substantial with regard to the gilded promises; to marry a devout partner, have children, reap the benefits of hard work and make a living and to spend your years together until 'death do us part'. Though these typical paradigms are gradually evolving and adapting to the modern world, they still uphold their prominence. For me, they carry little significance. Many of us expect to reach our destination, fulfill these promises and live in our idyllic vision within ourselves. We are under the impression that this achievement simply appears at a specific moment in our lives, distinguishable from the everyday treadmill. Me, I have spent my journey with these concepts and 'promises' in sight. I haven't actually realized until recently that these promises don't just materialize instantly or 'come true' at one given moment.

Really, there is no destination, these gilded promises are a journey with numerous peaks and troughs in order to achieve fulfillment. In reality though, this fulfillment is never really everlasting, there will always be a journey in attempt to fulfill these gilded promises. Life is an abundance of experiences. Even though I try and try to reach my idealisms, there is a comforting knowledge, lying in the deep crevices of my consciousness that these 'gilded promises' are not my sole purpose of existence. Yes, the tension, the work, the monotony of daily life is still my major component. Despite this, it is the memories and small moments of joy and happiness, the momentary internal peace and satisfaction of achievement and the small progressions toward this imaginary destination that really matters. As Einstein once said; "The distinction between the past, present and future is only a stubbornly persistent illusion". Life should be a continuous journey, full of memories, experiences and emotions. Life itself is the tension between this 'everyday treadmill' and our 'gilded promises', life constitutes this

relationship and it is what we make of it which determines whether or not we fulfill or come close to fulfilling these promises.

Short story on the theme 'courage'

I remember it so vividly, June nineteen fifty five. I was young, though I had aged about thirty years from then after. Walking down Cruise Street, I inhaled the wonderful aromas of freshly baked bread, I looked in awe at the pastries meticulously arranged on the antique wooden stalls. I was wearing my yellow sun dress Mother had given me last summer after her pay day at the factory. The sun's reflection made my dress twinkle as I stepped on the little cobblestones. There was something about that bright yellow comet in the sky that injected me with an effervescence. I was in utter euphoria.

As I continued my stroll, waving and flashing my pearly whites at the local vendors, I saw him, so suddenly. He was perfection. His smile spread across his cheeks like contagious bliss. His dimples deepened and emerald green eyes sparkled with an inviting mystery. Every time he stood before me I could feel myself falling, deeper and deeper in love. His charm and beauty never ceased to stun me, so much so that I had a tendency to stand rigid as a plank, completely dumbfounded by him. 'His' name was Kevin. That summer's day he swept me into his arms in warm embrace, " Saga, i've been looking forward to seeing you all week. I have a question to ask you!" My heart began to pound in my chest, what could he possibly want to ask me? Our relationship remained abstruse amongst family and friends. The thoughts raced through my mind. Meekly, I asked what it was he needed of me; "Come with me tonight Saga, the city concert is on at eight O' clock and no one will notice our absence." Already the butterflies in my stomach began to flap their wings in corresponding excitement. I knew this must be love.

The night was magical, we kissed, we danced and in passion we embraced. We confessed our love for each other under the clear night's sky, our faces lit by the moonlight. That moment, I was hit with an epiphany, the rather pathetic and naïve realization that Kevin had a power over me, one strong enough to destroy me. He could make me kneel at his feet, heed to his every whim and accede to his torturous request of secrecy. This night under the beautiful June sky was our last together.

As the months passed my heart shattered into a million pieces, a gradual and tediously painful process. I walked down Cruise Street every evening wondering what he was doing, where he was going and who he was with. My mind tortured me with questions. I felt as if someone was holding a double barrel to my head. The panic tickled my throat and cramped every muscle in my body with a fiery pain, burning and dwindling the flickering light that was my soul.

I never gave up my quest for Kevin. The memories were forever with me, his soft yet brusque whisper, his emerald green eyes and his deep dimples were forever at the forefront of my mind. I couldn't give up, though deep down I knew he was never coming back. The pain worsened, I brushed it off as a broken heart, but it was something more. I started crying uncontrollably, vomiting without any precedence and my back and stomach ached. As the weeks went by my stomach began to protrude and I was rapidly gaining weight. It was rounded and big and I knew I had to be pregnant. I smothered myself in layers of clothes, coats, cloaks, you name it. I did everything possible to hide it.

One night however, Mother caught me after feeding the hens. It was August, I couldn't bare the sweltering heat. It was strange to be so hot in August! I quickly dropped my cloak to the floor and ran out and briskly in again after the job was done. I couldn't believe my stupidity, I met Mother on the stairway and within seconds, her faces went from bright peach to ivory white. She stared at my spherical belly, completely flabbergasted. "This, this can't be Saga. What have you done. I didn't raise you to be a prostitute. Who is the father? Who is he?"

That secret will be brought to the grave. I couldn't tell, I made an oath to Kevin that our relationship was and will be a secret. I kept telling myself he'd come back, fruitlessly reassuring and strengthening my pathetic naivety. I never told my Mother, and so I ended up imprisoned behind the walls and wire mesh gates of the Magdalene Laundries. I was rendered a societal rat. I was disgusting, a squashed and half dead irritating fly, repeatedly stamped on by the hierarchy of the Catholic church.

I washed, I cleaned and I ironed. The bleak monotony of life drained my very being. The only thing ensuring and aiding my existence were those tiny feet, periodically kicking from within, reminding me that there was still life and hope. These little feet were the reason I ensued and refused to give up. This little source of life was a product of our love, the love between myself and Kevin. I held onto it, hoping to never forget that June night under the twilight.

Three weeks passed. The other girls were inner city prostitutes, all of them except Dorothy. Dorothy had lost her child after being hurled violently down the stairs by her father. She had been stuck in this horrendous hell ever since the age of fourteen. For Dorothy, life was bleak and grey, even more so than my own. She sacrificed everything for me. I remember we had

laughed one night. I hadn't laughed in months. I slowly began to realize that joy still existed. I remained positive despite the burning pain as a result of the nuns' leather whip. Dorothy nursed me right through, she would do small things, like take the blame for a stain in the clothing or a wrinkled garment. We both made small loving sacrifices to help each other. This continued until Dorothy abruptly brought our friendship to an end with the ultimate immolator.

The baby was kicking and kicking. It was a bright March evening and the clocks had turned back. I needed to leave, I just couldn't give birth to my child in this waking hell, this dungeon. My baby was not going to be born like this nor adopted by a biggoted family. I devised a plan and Dorothy more than willingly helped my cause. She was to pull the alarm at lunch when Father Crosby was due to enter, when the towering gates outside would open to allow him in. Being the idealist that I am, I thought it a flawless plan. Dorothy had more sense, she knew the strings of the place more than me. Had I known what she was planning to do for me, I would've remained in confinement.

I stood cautiously by the doorway, rearing to get out and waiting for the piercing shriek of the alarm. I heard an excruciating scream. It was Dorothy. Instantly, I knew she had jumped from the dorm window. She often talked about jumping from our fifth floor dorm, though she'd laugh and brush it off. I felt the tears well up in my eyes. The nuns dashed across the hall. I was conflicted, I couldn't leave her, though I knew she'd want me to. Instinctively, I made a run for the great Georgian doors. I concentrated on the frenzied tip tap of my feet across the marble floor. Turning the corner outside I came to an abrupt halt, her blood was trickling

down the dusty path, her face and head were reduced to a mass of blood and human flesh. Her long blonde hair was tinged with red and her white robe, stained with vivid crimson. There was nothing I could do, Dorothy had died escaping a grim world, a waking hell. I turned my head in despair and shock only to see Father Crosby's model T boom up the drive.

I ran, sprinted, baby inside, furiously kicking and further conflicting my decision to leave Dor. What I had done was abhorrent, leaving her, but I knew she'd want me to and she was quite dead. There was nothing I could do.

The harbour was only a half mile away. I knew i could make it without them noticing any significant absence. I navigated my way through the back roads, forest paths and dirt tracks until the glistening blue sea and giant ship came into view. I managed to persuade a passenger to sneak me on board. The ship launched from the slipway and I looked back. The memories flashed one after the other into my head like instances of lightening, dazzling my eyes. This was my goodbye, this was my deviation from my old self, the naïve and silly Saga. Who would've known I had that kind of courage and ruthlessness? I think of Dor and Kevin everyday, they are forever in my mind. Elijah was finally born in liberty. He had Kevin's emerald eyes and my sallow skin. I finally realized that he had not been a product of love. Elijah was a beautiful gift given to me by courage and tenacity. In America we reside, free of confinement and immersed in blissful emancipation.

Short Story: Locked in Syndrome

I lie here, motionless. Unable to speak. Unable to feel. Unable to move. I watch those at work, engaging in the monotony of life. I wish I could scream at them. Their faces are grey and dim and everything is taken for granted. Me, i'm just an anomaly. They watch me like i'm some strange, exotic insect, an object of experimentation. My only support are these synthetic wiring systems convoluting around my body, connect me to a complex array of medical machinery. Artificial. Everything is artificial and fake here. The clinical cleanliness is overpowering. I wish I could escape the torment, the confinement of this waking hell. My only route to freedom is death.

I wait today in anticipation for detective Rhode. He leads the investigation which will hopefully elucidate my situation and decipher who and what rendered me with Locked In Syndrome. There is a frail idiot of a nurse assigned to me everyday, if I could, i'd lock her in myself to this deathly existence. My only functioning muscles are those around my eyes, and so, this is my means of communication. The node in my neck is connected to the sight sensitive screen above me. To communicate I simply direct my vision on the letter needed to spell a word. It sounds easy but requires intense concentration. Rhode enters and already I know that these insipient meetings will be futile. He's a bronzed man with thin and wiry black hair. He looked more like a jiggalow than a cop. He bears his blinding white teeth in an awkward smile and I know he is an imbecile before he even speaks. "Hi Jelena, I need to ask you a few questions, firstly I need to know where you first met Johan Elouise." Wow, way to launch ourselves right into it. I close my eyes trying to memorize the letters on screen, I get side tracked as my eyelids close and I fade into reminiscence.

It was a sunny day, in the back garden with Johan by my side. I wasn't always 'locked in'. I should have known, the signs were there, I just missed them or refused to see them. He was psychotic, though instead of leaving him I fought foolishly to salvage what we had, only to be hit by the serious repercussions.

I always felt alone in this world. I was quiet and removed and would always acquiesce solemnly to what was asked of me. I wanted to belong to something, to belong somewhere. I wandered about the blurring multifariousness of life, trapped in a draining monotony. Life was but a dwindling flame until I met Johan. I sat immersed in my misery, sipping on my café latté from Starbucks on Trinity avenue. I was suddenly approached by a tall, dark and handsome man who had dimples that made my heart melt. I often had a problem with staring at people like this, I was completely in awe. Luckily for me, he deemed me sane enough to engage in conversation. Initially, I was shy and I even blushed at the suggestion that there may be an iota of evidence that this man liked me. Despite my social limitations, we truly 'hit it off'. Johan was amazing. I was convinced that he was my soulmate. We spent months happily discussing literature, books, films, documentaries and culture. He had rescued me from the human purgatory that encapsulated my entire life. I began to feel again, to feel happiness, sadness, hope and joy. Before I was emotionally numb and uncaring. He taught me how to live and how to smile. I finally had stamina, energy and passion, all of which lay dormant before I met Johan.

Those few months were a dream. I was living in a bubble, mine and Johan's bubble of safety, security, love and happiness. However on the fifth of March two thousand and thirteen, the

bubble violently exploded. The 'explosion' rendered me 'locked in' and destroyed my entire sense and state of being. Locked In Syndrome is a state of pure and absolute paralyzation except for those muscles around my eyes. I can hear, however I cannot move, feel or even speak. This is my return to a worsened 'human purgatory', my subjection to an anathema which engulfs my entire presence and state. I wait here in anticipation of freedom, in anticipation of death. My fulmination was Johan, I was blinded by it, so out of control that I was completely oblivious to what was going to happen.

In early February I moved in with Johan. I was convinced, I knew he was the one for me. Only he could make me so happy. He was my only medium of stability and sanity in this dull life. As weeks went by Johan became more aloof, more reserved. I spent sleepless nights, tossing and turning in my sheets. The two of us lay beside each other yet it felt like the atlantic was there to separate us. He wouldn't talk or even engage interaction with me. I spent hours at work wondering what i had done, what I should do to fix it. Every night he would leave at two am and take off in his car with a strained urgency. I suspected maybe he was cheating, that would have been the worst possible thing I could've thought of, unfortunately I was sadly mistaken. Yes. 'Sadly'.

One night, I took it into my own hands to investigate his whereabouts. I was oblivious to the fact that I was risking my own life. I convinced myself that whatever was going on would be surmountable. We would get through this. I followed him for two hours until we reached an abandoned armory. I could not comprehend why he would meet his mistress in this dump. After waiting in my fiesta for an hour, I finally got the courage to get out and tip toe down

the stone steps, with my inconvenient 'clunking' heels. I heard a piercing shriek and muttering voices. My stomach began to churn and my ears were ringing with alarm. I turned around and sped up the stone steps, uncaring about the intrusive noise of my high heels hitting the ground. All that mattered to me at that moment was reaching my car.

The twilight shone through the stone masonry and i knew I had almost made it. I fastened my pace until suddenly, my head involuntarily jerked back. Something had broken. Then there was a darkness...

On regaining consciousness I looked down to see my wrists bound by rope to a steel chair, my ankles were sore and were fastened together. Before me stood a crowd of about fifty men and women, all drenched in blood, or what seemed to be each other's blood. I screamed and struggled in desperation. I tried to break myself free but the rope was stronger than my wrists and ankles. They began to chant and sing. It was a religious sacrifice. I knew that for sure I had studied religious psychology in college for my thesis. There was a burning sensation of fear slowly rising up my throat. I could feel Johan's presence behind me. It was irksome, I continued to shriek and scream, doing anything I could to get out. Johan kept mumbling "Insanity is art".

Suddenly, without warning, he clasped his cold hands around my neck and cupped my cerebellum. "You are art Jelena, you are my art". Darkness flooded my vision. I was lying flaccid in a vacuum of dark space. Now it is here I lie, the emulation of hospital roboticism.

I open my eyes, suddenly realizing what I should have been doing, helping Rhode. Dr. Alfredy stood before me, a shocked expression, though it was clear he was relishing in his perturbed satisfaction of my awakening. And I continue, analyzing and delineating the events that rendered me to a slow, painful death. Every minute is a step closer to my dying and it keeps me quietly sane. Life is a waiting game, I wait to die, I wait to be fed, I wait for Rhode, I wait for my sister to visit and I wait to recover.