

Variations on a Summer's Day

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Jade

I prided myself on never snoozing my alarm. I'd simply turn it off and keep sleeping. It's not that I went to bed too late or tried to wake up too early, just the effort of living. A teacher once said that life is like a boat floating down the stream of time and we have the decision to either row around in circles or focus on moving forward. I remember knowing immediately where I fit in.

I'm the girl swimming after the boat.

Warm honeyed sunlight rested on my face, scattering intricate shadows left by leaves from the tree outside my window. With a groan, I squinted. Surely, I could have a little bit longer.

"Jade! The bus will be here in 5 minutes. I hope you're ready to go."

Realisation dawned. "Yep. Yep. Nearly there!"

With a thump, I rolled out of bed and sprinted to my wardrobe. Clothes flew across the room to join the colourful heaps already on the floor. I hopped through the messy apartment, struggling to put my sneakers on, and sprinted down the stairs and into the aroma-filled Vietnamese restaurant I lived above.

Bursting onto the street with nods of recognition to those I knew, my room's gentle, silent bustle collapsed into a celebration of noise and colour, movement, and purpose. I heaved my bag onto one shoulder and rushed down the street, dodging through the crowd. Arriving at the bus stop just in time to see the bus turn the corner, I sighed with exasperation.

The well-known trek of frustration to my photography studio lay before me.

Felix

I prided myself on never snoozing my alarm. I was always awake at least a minute before it even went off. My English teacher said at the end of college that our life is like a boat floating down the stream of time and we have the decision to either row around in circles getting nowhere or ride a fast-moving current to reach our goals.

But I wasn't moving at all. Not in circles. Not towards my goals. Just motionless.

The flawless white paint stared back at me, growing lighter and lighter as the sun rose. My watch read 5:48.

Tired of waiting, I turned off my alarm and rocked onto the edge of my bed. Icy cold seeped through the floor despite it being the middle of summer; I would have to talk to the building supervisor about the air conditioning.

Robotically, I moved through the motions of getting ready for work. Teeth, hair, clothes. I packed my bag and took a final glance in the mirror before walking out the front door. The avenue was silent as always, a row of perfect white buildings, stony-faced. Judgemental.

Jade

Walking through Kings Cross, I observed the world. The lyrical sound of birds and the verdant green of the trees intermingled seamlessly with the joyful evidence of humans. Purposeful streams of traffic and chattering conversations of fellow pedestrians. I smiled with appreciation at the warming golden sunlight, the tingle of energy that a sunny summer's day always creates. In every new sight, I saw potential.

I'd always aspired to be a nature photographer, capturing the surrounding beauty. I had gotten there, but it wasn't what I had imagined. Not peaceful, just a constant run to catch up. With work, with time, with responsibilities. Perhaps dreaming just wasn't worth it.

With a start, I looked at my watch. I was already 30 minutes late for work. Clutching my bag, I ran along the pavement.

Felix

Driving through Mosman, I organised my mind. All the company's upcoming projects were scheduled and prepared, running like clockwork. It wouldn't hurt to check the figures again though.

Done with what I planned to do for the day and stuck at a traffic light, I looked out the window. It was a clear day, the sun was shining, the air was warm. People looked happy. A group of boys were kicking a soccer ball around.

I sighed.

I suppose that had been my dream. The dream of most teenage boys. To play sports. To become the best of the best. The fame, the thrill.

It wasn't exactly how life turned out, though. Just a cycle of diminishing emotional returns.

Jade

Picking at my fingernails, I wandered through the mall, shaking my head in an attempt to clear away the headache. Another punctuality warning from my boss.

The sight of a little girl pointing and gesturing brought a smile to my face. I was her once. Determined, with a dream. Perhaps it really would just be easier to give up. Find an office job.

Photography wasn't really that important to me.

Felix

For once, I didn't have a purpose. There wasn't any more work for me to do, and the apartment was lonely and lifeless compared to the effervescence of the city. Aimlessly, I walked through the mall.

Seeing but not observing. Thinking about the boys I saw earlier.

The younger me would have been disappointed in just how boring the world really was. Mundane routine to the point where there was no point. No point in trying. No point in dreaming for bigger things.

Jade

I was sitting down when I first heard it. Just an echo hiding in the babble of voices. Getting up, and turning a corner, I could see it. A piano.

Felix

Once I heard it, I couldn't ignore it. With a couple of steps, it was in view. A piano.

Jade

Hearing the music, I felt lost for a moment. A kaleidoscope of memories. Colours and shapes overlapping and weaving a shadow of glass. Through it all, I saw myself. Not as I was then, but as I saw myself in dreams. Calm and collected. Punctual. Photographing the beauty of this world. I could see light at the end of a tunnel, serenity that surrounded me, and a clear path ahead.

I suppose things couldn't be that hopeless.

I was gaining on life's boat.

Felix

Everything moved into sharp focus. The way the sun glinted off the piano. The hopeful smile of a small child asking their parents for something. How the leaves outside the window cast small shadows on the girl's blonde hair in front of me. The infinite small things that make life unique. The music tinkled on; each note filled with warmth yet reminding me of evening rain. Not the soggy, sloshy kind. But the romantic type that sparkles on the pavement, swirling the colour of overhead lights together. There was so much interest, so much nuance in one insignificant scene.

True, I wasn't where I had imagined myself, but maybe life wasn't as repetitive as I had thought.

I simply had to pick up the oars.

Jade

With a conclusive chord, the melody ended. I sighed with contentment and turned around to leave.

Felix

"Beautiful, wasn't it?"