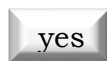


Katherine Xiang

“A Good Day”

The locks reached your waist, they were starting to get tangled up at the ends into little funny shapes. *I’ve sure come a long way*, you think. The urge to shave your head should be considered an addiction. Well to some degree, it made sense to the general public: a breakup, a seasonal change, or lust for something new. But you had often gotten to a point where there was simply no more hair to cut when you still wanted more. There were few things in the world that could satisfy you better than the sound of a crisp cut with shears in both hands, falling layer upon layer, like confetti at the end of a show. This was a ritual that happened behind closed doors for it was too sacred and messy for an audience.

Should I get a wig?



The computer knew your midnight spending habits, curled up in a corner of the bed, eyes straining to see. It knew your card information as well. Your cursor became an unsuspecting traveler in a store gliding so swiftly across the aisles. It hovered above the Place Order button, bright yellow, and jumped off again. On then off.

Do it. You thought. *I dare you.* Thankfully, your lids closed early that night. A tired glow of the screen flickered, exerting itself to keep you company.

That used to be an issue, but now you had gotten better. How wonderful. Harry would do the honors of cutting your hair today. Paid and proper and everything that smelled like a real functioning adult. Harry was sweet as usual. When he washed your hair, his fingers massaged your scalp and you had to stop yourself from letting your mouth open. It was hard to resist the physical touch of a man. You liked him because he had life in his eyes, and liked that it wasn’t hard to find. With the scent of nutty shampoo and trickling of water by your ears, you could easily fall into *The Forest Stream*, a new daydream written and directed by yours truly.

His voice interrupted from above. “What lovely makeup you have today.”

You snap back to consciousness, feeling that you may have misheard him, but quickly laugh to fill the empty space.

“Thank you. I did spend a long time on it this morning.”

It was true. Earlier that day, sitting in front of the wooden vanity, you asked Alexa to play Yoshimura’s “Dance PM” to set the mood. There were just so many colors to choose from the palette. For example: Hot Cheeto, also known as red. Glitter on the nose? Why not. Do you cover the pimple or let it breathe? It would have been a foolish sight to behold if there were people around to see. You are reminded of a time when all you could think about was the romanticized life you’d have living alone and buying your own groceries. How you could get out of the house for once and kick and scream at the world all you wanted without anyone around to say anything. How peculiar it felt when it all came true, when there was really no one else but you.

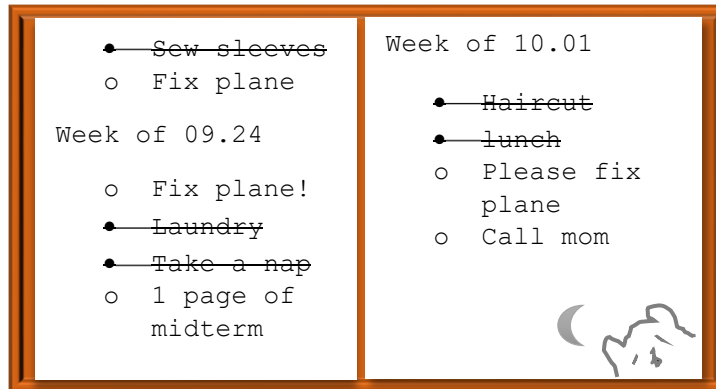
In the reflection, an adult with the orange lips and glitter lids misses his mother.

Harry swoops the cape off your chest as if performing a magic trick.

“I love it!” You say, noticing that it comes out in a higher pitch than usual. Unfortunately, that part repeats in your head and you pray that Harry cannot hear the voice, or else you would just die. The haircut is fine. It resembled a mushroom, which was nice, though you felt you would likely give it a trim later. Hidden beneath a thin layer of concealer, your pimple is calling your attention. Why are you ashamed of me? It seems to seethe. *Be quiet*, you think. *You will never understand me. I am an enigma*. You make sure to greet the receptionist on the way out, but she is asleep, a little puddle of drool on the desk. And you catch a whiff of alcohol.

On the ride home you spot a number of curious sights: five leaves stapled on a tree, an English mastiff walking its owner, and a baby with the face of an adult. The latter stared at you on the train and you tried to stare back. One of you won the contest.

You set down your bags and opened the cellar door. You think about taking a nap, but it is too early. There was one task at hand that had been eating away at your brain for the past few weeks. Day after day, it was the one circle that never got filled in your planner:



When your grandfather moved away, he had left behind his single seater Sopwith Pup (Digital Edition). Never in the decade of living together had he once mentioned a single story from the war. And he confided in you with everything, you thought. Or maybe it was just the other way around. You wondered how many secrets were taken to the grave, decomposed with the brains and cremated with the bones. The land you walk upon, *Haaaa* your breath even. The day you discovered the aircraft in the basement, it was certain that you and he were going to spend a lot of time together. Hard to describe why, it was one of those magnificent gut feelings that simply refuse to give way to doubt. He had taken your dry hands and led you to a purpose.

A paint job was necessary to redo the roundels on both sides as it was now arbitrary and no longer fit your design taste. Inside, he needed an engine replacement, an antifreeze addition, a tightening of base plates, and a lot of other funky maintenance terms. The manual was fairly self-explanatory. When you cracked open the hood, there was a sudden scuttle of what seemed to be a family of sprites. They were terrifyingly beautiful and upset because you had disturbed their sleep. In apology, you quickly performed the mushroom dance that was meant to atone small sins. (For those who wish to follow along, you make a circle with your arms above your head, then wiggle your hips lamentingly for 30 seconds. Precision is key.) Waiting and waiting, the leader of the sprites let out a grunt as if to consider your feeble attempt passing. Starting with her, the rest followed suit as they stomped their feet, gathering dust and speed. A flutter later, they had vanished, so you pulled up your sleeves in several levels of relief and got to work.

Your phone jingled.

Summer

see you soon :0)

Instead of taking the train, you were going to fly over to your friend's house. It was time to put those online piloting classes to the test. You had a type of confidence that rose to the occasion, so you secured your helmet, revved the engine and up and away you went, higher, lighter, deeper. Below, the teeny rooftops turned into skinny roads, into bumpy plains into the big sparkling sea. Migrating flocks sped past, for they had places to be.

A seagull pulled up beside you.

"Hello!"

You did a double take. Was that Finn? Finn from college?

"Haven't seen you in a while! How've you been?" He had aged well. A burlap bag slung on his back. You didn't know if you had the energy to yell against the current in response, but it turned out that that wouldn't be necessary. He held the conversation on his own well. So well that time seemed to slow down. In between his squawks and loose feathers that ended up in your mouth, you were able to catch something about full stack... Full-stack development? Boy, could he talk. It was a mystery as to how his small body had this much energy.

He paused to ask about what your work was, so you hollered over about how you were still figuring it out, freelancing all sorts of art jobs on the side.

"Sounds like a dream," he cooed. You begin to feel heard for the first time in the conversation.

"You'll have to wake up someday."

What? You didn't understand what he meant, but could sense a power struggle amid the confusion. Fuck. And now your goggles were starting to blur.

He threw you something from his bag for 'good luck' and took off further into the clouds.

Although you weren't at all fond of his company it felt like being abandoned regardless.

Reaching between your legs, you picked up a lollipop. It was grapefruit flavored, your favorite, which upset you even more.

You think about taking a nap.

The kind navigation lady was telling you from the screen that you were over halfway to your destination, and a small lake in a clearing of trees would be coming on your left in 2.7 miles. Down you go, making a surprisingly smooth landing onto gravel. This place looked like something out of a Monet painting, only slightly chillier because it was fall. The kind of weather that makes you start thinking about having someone to hold.

You caught a drifting scent of persimmon, sweet, but not of a burdensome kind, and your body let itself fall into the long forsaken nap.

In the meantime, a caterpillar crawled over your hand, the surrounding ferns gossiped while aging ever so slightly, and thousands of miles away, your mother sneezed as she watered the family bonsai. You woke up after half an hour, feeling relatively the same.

Somewhere, some time ago you remembered hearing that if you happened to look at the sky 3 times in a day, it meant you had a good day. It sounded foolish, but you racked your head for the source. Perhaps a passing conversation or some TV show, though that wasn't really the point.

When you glanced up through the canopy, there was a blankness. Neither staring for a few seconds nor a few hours were going to answer any of your concerns. *What were you looking for? What was everyone waiting for?*

Dusting your uniform, you arose to head back to the plane.

You ring her bell sheepishly, but at the sight of you, she takes you with open arms while complimenting your haircut. Summer, your likeness, your energy, your precious Summer. Her living room is noticeably open from the ceiling tall windows, and it all feels a bit like home.

"How was the trip?" she asks fumbling with something in the kitchen.

You'll have to wake up someday. It is the only thing you remember.

"I ran into Finn" you say, flopping onto the couch. "Remember him? He runs some big software company now... It was weird, I don't know how to explain. He wasn't trying to be rude or anything." There is a bowl of candies on the tablemat. One has tried to escape. As you place it back in the bowl, you ponder what being a prison guard would be like. You turn your head and look out the window to see just a smidge of orange on the horizon, stretched out and hazy. On the balcony, the caterpillar has started to hang upside-down from Summer's fig plant. It adjusts

its body to listen, though you are unaware of it. Then, as if possessed by a spirit, you roll to the floor limply. If there is ever an opportunity to fall to the ground, you will take it. That was one of your wisest life mottos.

“He said something weird?”

Summer returns with a tray of sweet things. Two cups of tea, caramel popcorn, and a whole pomelo. Till shadows have grown to the tips of the room, the two of you can talk the world in and out of existence. It is a miraculous ability. These are the moments of silence, moments of fire from the heart, where all kinds of thoughts, soft and perverse, rage alike. And even when you start to shiver inside, you know you will be safe.

“Hmmmrrr” says a new voice. Summer has configured her fingers so that a pair of lips forms on her knee. Scrunched from a crease at the center, the smile takes up half its face.

“Hrrm Cn youu pass n’ popcorn pleuse.”

Feeling a bit like love, your own knee friend appears soon after.

“Yus of curse.” You tossed the last kernel towards her in an eyes-squinted, laughter-ringing love, and see that there are glints of gold on her hair, like trees from the Monet lake. You let out a giggle, then another. It is hard to stop, until something tingles in your throat and you let out a cough. Out falls a feather.

At a point when there are fewer words, a rain shower pours. Summer goes to close the windows, and after, you run with her down the hall into her room. She clicks on the television and throws you a sleep shirt.

You sink further into the mattress, head now facing the ceiling. Little butterflies dangle from the fan which make you feel like a baby in a crib.

She tucks a pillow under your head. The funny man in the screen is making some kind of joke. When the audience laughs, you follow along, without fully understanding why. Looking over at the dancing curtains, they frame another background. One where night and day are changing shifts, though you find nothing so transactional about it. The slowest blend of darker blues, stars fade in, clouds wave goodbye, and a streetlamp turns on. Strangely, it is pink. It makes sense, doesn’t it? And there, you decide that it was a good day.