

Awakening

The alarm of my phone pulls the blanket of sleep away, violently. I sigh. Slowly, I peel back the warm duvet and courageously place my feet on the cold floor. Good morning, tiredness. Coffee, I need coffee. Another day of work gets in my way before I can embrace the much needed weekend. I bet you know what I am talking about. When I finally slip out of my apartment, I try to make as little noise as possible. Giving in to small talk with my neighbours would definitely make me arrive late for work. Even if I wasn't running late – talking to neighbours? No thank you. If it wasn't for the occasional petting of their dogs, I would probably never have a conversation with them. I rush onto the crowded train, trying to take up as little space as possible. No eye-contact, no body-contact, no anything-contact. I pass the same old buildings, crowded stations and people, half-awake, as every day. Later at work, the same old desk awaits me, nearly tipping over because of all the piles of papers and folders. The weight of a couple more paper clips or staples would break the whole Pisan construction. Observing my co-workers dragging themselves from desk to printer to coffee maker and back, I ponder how I ended up here – in a grey office, filled with grey people and a tiredness that seems to cling to the walls like dust.

At the end of the day I stumble back onto the train and let myself fall into an available seat, hoping that no one will sit down beside me. I stare out of the window into the darkness and can think of nothing more than my warm bed, the relief of sleep. Out of the corner of my eye I notice a motion in front of me and as I turn my head, I see a small child looking at me with large, curious eyes. The child tries to climb over the seats and struggles to pull herself up the back with tiny hands. Just as I move to face the window again, the child begins to smile. But not only does she smile, she smiles at me, her gaze locking with mine. Before I can even help it, I smile back. Then, the curious face disappears as the mother pulls her child back down onto the seat. I stare at the now empty space above the seat. Only a few more minutes are left before the train will stop at my station. All of a sudden, a tiny, soft hand reaches out to me between the seat backs. I hesitate. What does this child want? The hand is followed by friendly, questioning eyes. Slowly I reach out my hand and the child closes her warm fingers around it. A big smile appears on her face as she keeps holding on to me. I let her. The next thing I know, I have arrived at my station and must leave. Gently I pull back my hand and get up. With a last glance at the child I exit the train. She waves goodbye.

Without noticing “I want to be a grown-up” becomes “I never want to grow up” becomes “I wish I was a child again.” We go from being raw beginners with all the courage in the world, from wanting to become superheroes and firefighters, afraid of nothing but maybe the dark or the closet or the neighbour's dog, to grown-up versions of ourselves in dark ties and high heels with printers and coffee mugs to go, not afraid any more of the dark or the closet or the neighbour's dog, but unable to say hi to a stranger in the street and afraid of asking the person we just met to come and spend time with us. When we realize at last what we lost on the way, we cannot seem to find it amongst the piles of bills on the desk and the stacks of dishes in the sink.

I won't be a sleepwalker any more. I will start my awakening by taking my neighbours' pets out for a walk and letting them guide me to places I never knew. I will build little shelters out of sticks and leaves for bugs to crawl under at the side of the road. Or I might just chase pigeons pecking on the sidewalk until they fly up, like I used to when I was younger. From now on, I want to try and live a little more like Alice and allow myself to tumble down unknown rabbit-holes from time to time. I will lie on the sofa and let my head hang upside down. I will look at my room and all the furniture and plants and dishes and bills turned upside down, dangling from the ceiling.

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