

The Hair Is Always Different (2018)

All is flux, nothing is stationary. – Heraclitus

The apartment I live in has three windows. Each one is on a different side – south, east, west. The walls are thin, light grey. I own one relatively expensive sofa.

Note: events in this story take place in three different time periods – before, during and after the division on the good and the bad days, which was necessary for various forms of organization, some simply for my life, and some as attempts to make its language known to you. You'll see.

During the division, on the good days all three windows were dirty and the sky behind not very visible and not very important. This was opposed to them being clean, resulting in them mysteriously reflecting light unevenly, resembling a makeshift stained glass (too beautiful) – so has occurred on the bad days. On the good days there was empathy between the people I encountered throughout the day and me. On the good days I wasn't particularly happy. On the good days I thought about an article explaining why we felt as if time was passing faster the older we got. It argued that the more years have passed since our birth, the smaller the significance is of one year. So, in a way, a year, as a measuring unit, was losing its value. Let's take an example of a two-year-old child: for it one year is 50% of its life. So, by the time it turns three, half of its life has passed. (Which does sound impressive.) However, if one is 20 years old, a year is only 5% of their life. With each year accumulating, the percentage one year represents decreases. Nevertheless, I can't help but notice that the capacity of meaning a year can hold decreases along, as that somehow doesn't adapt to the speed that we forever seek to manage. *A metaphor: we're purposefully cutting our very long hair, by an unchanging unit of measurement, in stable time intervals, until we are completely bald.* People can then finally see our tattooed skulls.

On the good days I remembered I had beautiful hair. On a good day I would cut my nails to the flesh. On a good day I would forget you existed. On a good day nothing would happen on the internet, no emails, no notifications.

The apartment I live in has three windows. I shut them tightly and leave. I've lost track of the good and the bad days by now. I am heading south; so is my phone compass telling me. It doesn't take long until I leave the safety of my immediate vicinity, the place where all my attempts to escape ceased – my home, as Naguib Mahfouz cleverly defined it.

I follow the course and slowly enter a forest. Soon, I see other people, finding their way in too, lighting their paths with various torches. The air is moist, my hair sticks to my face. I keep on, feeling increasingly determent. I seem to simply slide into the torrent of people, whose walk has that particular tempo of moving whilst pursuing a pre-decided destination.

This reminds me of another night voyage.

However, that time I was not alone. I was with you, the one I fail not to mention. The place we found ourselves in was poorly lit. It looked like a long tunnel or hallway. The ground was soft, and unlike this forest, there wasn't moisture in the air, which was pleasant. I tripped. You nodded and I was safe. Just like here, there too were others walking together beside us in the sunless tunnel. I nodded back to you, but you didn't look in my direction. You were the most beautiful person I'd ever met. I had secretly carved your name under the table in my room, it's was bit embarrassing, but it was ok, it was worth the rejoicing the act had yielded. I knew you would have never done something like that for or about me. You possessed a serenity, incomprehensible to me. You never needed such aggressive outlets to feel alive. I subconsciously knew, you didn't care so much about being alive to begin with.

Light has entirely vanished and we stared into the darkness, relying on dormant senses to lead the way. I was saddened that I haven't carved your name onto my thigh or some other body part. I suddenly wouldn't have cared if people on the streets stared at me like I was a freak, I felt breathtaking euphoria; the solution was to shed my blood and wear your name in scabs and scars, a name you didn't even choose yourself.

Oh man. We were walking in silence. The disappearance of light caused my mind to evoke mental images.

My shining naked body: fit, long wet hair, I was not my youngest self, but I was so beautiful. I was observing my body. Sundown. I was sitting on a wooden bench, and there were some incomprehensible voices in the background. I felt the warmth of the air covering me like a thin, silk sheet; my skin was glittering from sweat. I reproduced each mind pixel with clarity. I recalled no before nor after of that moment. In the exaggerated hotness I could sense the bliss of youth, materialized in me. I experienced emptiness, numbness and a kind of buoyancy, simultaneously. All protruding parts of my body were pulsating, sweat was dripping down my face, and then, I saw myself from third person perspective, and it made me strangely uncomfortable, to peek like that.

You squeezed my hand and I was brought back to the walk in the tunnel.

However, soon enough the thick darkness made my mind visualize again:

On the deepest violet there was a face, painted on the sky by blazing flames, with massive brass earrings, and an expression of uncertainty. It spoke: "Things can be so complicated, *maybe we just need to:* confess that we get paralyzed, and our limbs crushed, when faced with all the possibilities; Think about the abundance of daily contradictions and the ubiquitous belittlements of the many truths.

Maybe we need to nod to the powerlessness we encounter when attempting to step out of ideology, as we try to see it with new, victorious eyes, which we will never have again.

We should not forget the irrefutable, burning urge to do so nonetheless. We need to come to no conclusions. Every day come to no conclusions. We have to accept anger and carry it in us, let it bite us on the inside, but not share it with others. Maybe all we owe to the world are these question-raising notions and our devotion to finding ways how not to solve them, but how to contain them. Maybe we need to follow no straights, but only spin in circles and try not to spill."

I tripped again. You lifted me up and held my hand. I believed you smiled at me with compassion, but I could not be certain. The darkness felt so eternal. After a certain, unclear amount of time you stumbled too and fell on your knees. I was neither fast nor strong enough to catch you and hold you. Once you were on the ground, I noticed a tiny crack in the concrete tunnel wall, casting a slim ray of golden light onto your face. You seemed absent; I assumed you were undergoing your mental vision now. Within seconds, your eyes became white, and milky tears ran down your cheeks. You looked like a baby and a mother combined. I don't think to this day you ever realized that happened. Oh, god, you were almost painfully attractive like that. That image saddens me ever since, but there were also times when I masturbated to it.

Back to the tunnel; you stood up quickly, searched for me and, unaware of my (yes) hardly visible and readable intense emotions, as you anyway often were, placed your hand onto my neck and we continued walking towards the end of the tunnel.

The air in the forest is getting physically heavy; all my clothes are damp from the humidity. The trees seem to be coming closer together. The farther I walk the more birches I see. Now, in the middle of the dense forest, the trees suddenly taper and I perceive an opening into a long, narrow meadow. Birches are lined up on the sides of the opening. They resemble

walls, glimmering, lighter than the background vegetation, subtly directing the mass. My hair is completely wet.

Many years later, after the hallway-tunnel voyage, we moved to New York City. I got married to another man and we had a son. You left me, but I will always love you. With my husband everything is different than with you, but I'll come to that later. Here, sometimes, I wake up at night and sit on the sofa, cutting my nails to the flesh in excruciating slowness – utterly unwatchable to others, had anyone ever seen it.

To this journey I have brought only my two most valuable possessions: my phone and an advice given to me when I was 27 years old – the importance of employing a leap of faith when making decisions. The advice suggested doing so because one cannot ever know if one will be satisfied with the consequences or relevance of previously made decisions, so one might as well try and seek some peace in the present day. In opting for the leap of faith, one finds a chance to indirectly encompass all potential futures, exactly by renouncing them, and simply choosing the most preferable one as the outcome. Leap of faith is not truly believing all those fearful detours won't occur, it is a conscious decision to pretend they won't happen. Leap of faith is so real. It is the shortest and most militant way to submit to a belief. With it, the need to believe has been turned into a rational one.

My mother once told me a story of a teacher who wanted to explain how one should solve different issues in life. He advocated solving the crucial, determining matters first and then the more mundane, insignificant ones. To explain why, he had prepared a little experiment. He had brought a glass jar, a pile of sand and two piles of small and slightly bigger rocks, all piles approximately the same size. First, he took the jar and poured the sand in, filling the third of the volume of the jar, and then asking his pupils to imagine the sand as fun, leisure time. Then he took the smaller pebbles and put them in, saying they should represent daily challenges and obstacles, and finally he poured the biggest ones, saying they stand for big life decisions, like career paths or choice of a partner. They did not seem to fit. Then, he emptied the jar of its content and did it in reverse. Everything fit. The message: one has to deal first with major life issues; one should have order in solving problems, if fun ensues only when important questions are taken care of, life will be harmonious. *All parts are equal. Real vision is as good as hindsight.*

As I walk among the trees I think about this experiment. I fear any concept that can be so clearly explained, additionally by an example containing no factual connections to the matter. Stones do stand for something merciless and opposite of the living. They have even killed. I apply however this knowledge when I go grocery shopping. I often bring a shopping bag barely big enough to fit all that I need. Now, I always first put in the biggest products,

followed by the smaller ones, and surprisingly I repeatedly manage to pack everything even though it seemed quite impossible when I began.

These doubtful thoughts don't slow me down though. Here in the forest, nothing can slow down my steps. With each one I make they become more confident, assertive, experienced. The only advice that counts in the practice of walking is just walk more, it doesn't matter how you make your steps, just how many. It's basic math. And, once you start, you never forget it. It's like biking, they say the same for it. Or like HPV: once it's inside of you, it stays in your body forever.

Maybe I need to explain why you left me. In a time when I still haven't made a distinction between the good and the bad days, we had our first misunderstanding, one we had actually never solved. You said something, I said something, and so on. After a lengthy discussion we were both certain we had understood what the other meant – after all, we had known each other so well, the best. However, we were wrong. We couldn't have known this at the time, but there was someone who did. *You and I*: we carried our different lives and steps with us, we gave away snippets into it to each other, amounting to gradually clearer reflections of the complexities they were part of, we have even bridged the inconceivable murky patches with love. Or so we thought.

But, that misunderstanding followed another one. Equally well disguised as the first one – we both thought we understood everything perfectly. We were not fighting, they were simply occurring in conversations, habits and our lifestyles. We still could have not known about the vast presence of these misunderstandings. Years passed, we were happy. Then one day, there was this app launched. Scientists from NASA and stuff. They could determine, with 100% scientific accuracy, whether two people really understood each other, whether they really knew all the nuances and hidden meanings in each argument or opinion, whether all context was known to the interlocutor. So ridiculous, we thought. But curiosity killed the cat, and so we had decided to kill each other. I downloaded it and confidently pressed *ANALYZE*. And – a twist. Years of confusion, of unattainable references from times that preceded our togetherness, of homonyms in places we drew equality signs. Of course, we split, like so many others at the time. All those years felt too heavy to carry them further.

You were more vocal about ending it. It was hard to see the failure of one's efforts to tame the love of another human being and turn into a home. It seemed as if we'd reached too few compromises. You said that with each day the results would haunt us further, and unwillingly I knew you to be right. The tiredness that the thought of forgetting this newly acquired knowledge caused didn't level out with remaining with me. Today, I sometimes toy with the idea of trying to have continued nonetheless. But maybe I'm only saying this because I'm

here, in this forest, a grown woman, walking alone in the night. It was actually very hard to try and mend something with so many flaws – not only because the demise the app had generated was so detrimental, but also because it caused a hype and people perceived it as even more tragic, inevitably resulting in social pressure being too high and making swimming against the current an impossible direction to take. So we gave in, and searched for new ways.

Clothing shopping was a tradition my mother and I have built. My mother grew up in communism, and liked shopping because in her past even the most basic premise of capitalism – having an abundance of things to buy, was lacking. When I was a child, communism was replaced by capitalism, but that is a slow process, so the place I grew up at was a society in transition. My mother was happy to be able to take me shopping and I was enjoying it, because children just love receiving shiny, new things. As I grew up and swapped the society of transition with the one of late neoliberal capitalism, to pursue my personal truths and meet you, I began disliking shopping as part of the integration process. However, in the days after the app, I began succumbing, as this tradition was free from the app destruction. *I bought clothes because I knew everything about it.* It would fill my lungs with clear parental care, recoded in adult terms – something the app never shattered, but something that is forever flattening, at best to a mental image, at worst to a beautiful dress.

My husband and I, just like many others, have found different ways of being together, but I won't talk about them. Some use the app to check conflicts and we have sworn never to use it. We're great and there is no irony; I would never lie to you. I like that I have forgotten which days are bad and which days are good now.

As I walk, I see a small gray bird flying low. Its feathers resemble satin. The bird has released its tiny DNA waste, which lands onto the shoulder of a fellow walker. They stop and joyfully look at the whitish stain. It means luck. I walk on and pass them by. They look as if they've found what they were looking for, maybe unknowingly. As I observe them, the bird just flies by me, leaving me clean. That's alright though, I anyway came here for the visual kick. I prefer seeing the strike of luck than carrying it on my skin. It's enough that my moist body is covered in dust and dirt and that my hair is wet and heavy.

The long, narrow meadow is ending. My phone is showing me I'm close to home. I'm touching the keys of my three-window apartment in my pocket. I see the edges of the city.