

The Void

You stop feeling after a while.

It's not sadness, nor lonesomeness, nor tiredness. It's nothingness.

And you sit there and wait. Wait until it goes away. Maybe it won't go away. Maybe if the house were to crumble underneath your feet, the roof cave in, you would continue sitting. Maybe if a gun were held to your head, you wouldn't have a reaction. Just sit there. No, you wouldn't hold a gun to your own head, although the thoughts may enter your mind. But if you happened to die, well then that was that. You died. And that is where our character, Hettie, is at.

Hettie sat on her bed mattress (the frame had been abandoned a few years back), and stared ahead. Stared at the blank white walls--noticing the hairline cracks amidst an otherwise smooth surface. She noticed them, but didn't necessarily take them in. She just stared. Slowly the night began to pass--Hettie had attempted sleep but every time she tried her body shivered, or more accurately, violently shook. So she had wrapped herself in an olive green felt blanket, and sat still on the edge of her mattress. Hettie watched her old analog clock. It was 2:34. The second hand seemed painfully slow. Finally it was 2:35. Then 3:35. And the time crept on.

Hettie stood up, silently, the blanket falling off her shoulders, her breasts, her back, her legs until it lay--a crumbled lump on the ground. She got up. The morning sun had not yet broke, but she could start getting ready for school. Hettie remembered hating waking up so early, but now it felt oddly peaceful. It was quiet, just her and her thoughts. Hettie cherished winter: the biting cold, the frost laden branches, the midnight blue morning skies.

Hettie walked down her school's hallways, feeling icky. Her school had *that* lighting--the lighting that only schools and 50-70's architecture managed to have. Yellow, but not warm yellow, or harsh laboratory lighting, but sickly yellow. First class: social studies--comparative religious practices. Her professor was a tiny old woman with frizzy white hair, a misfit in a 21st century high school, who spoke in a high pitched mouse voice, that somehow commanded attention.

"Who here thinks the 'Twelve Days of Christmas' is festive? Positive?"

The class murmured an agreement of mild consent. Hettie sat still, upright, shaking her legs to remain awake.

"Well, it's not." The professor paused, pointedly. "The origin of the 'Twelve Days of Christmas' comes from the Pagan holiday Yule and it's about survival. Hard cold survival. None

of this Jesus lovey-dovey bull.” For an old woman she certainly had a colorful vernacular. “During the winter solstice, up in Scotland, the sun does not rise for twelve days because it is so far north. And during these nights, Banshees--lost souls--wandering the hills come out and terrorize those who leave the light created by the hearth. It is twelve nights of terror. You stay huddled by the fire and wait, silently wait. Wait until daylight finally breaks. And when it breaks you know you’ve survived.”

The class broke out into discussions. Giggling, gossiping. It all seemed so distant to Hettie, who sat still, white, in her seat, waiting. Waiting for the time to pass. She just had to make it to the end of the class. And then to the end of the day. That was the goal: live on.

School ended like it began: in the dark. Winter did that--you might not see the sun for a week or more: having to get up so early the sun has not yet risen, and leaving just barely as the sun slips away.

Hettie lay on her bed, this time looking at the ceiling. Breathing calmly, and then sporadically, heavy and then shallow. Hettie attempted sleep once more--her mind was transported.

She was in an empty void. A void in grayscale. A misty void. Voices echoed, “Die, die, die.”

“Stop!” Hettie screamed--but no sound left her mouth.

“Die, die, die”

“Stop!”

“HA Never!”

“No, no, stop, please...” Hettie whispered. And then she was awake again. Cold sweat drenching her whole body. *Wait it out. Wait it out. All I have to do is wait out tonight. Just get to daybreak.* 2:34, 3:34, 4:44. And time crept on.

Repeat. Day 3.

Survived.

Repeat. Day 4.

Survived.

Hettie got up. There was no point staring at the walls or ceiling. She knew all the cracks by heart now: how all the cracks formed, turning into each other, like little pathways in a forest, all connected, forming one body. One cracked body still standing. Fragile, but still standing.

School repeated itself. A monotony of voices, learning, experiencing. Improving their lives.

“Hettie!” an acquaintance called. “How are you?” The acquaintance was one of those average but nice girls, who said, “How are you doing?” not as a question, but as a “hello”. She didn’t really care about the answer, as evident by the fact that she would continue walking to her class before Hettie got to open her mouth.

Hettie supposed it was lucky the girl kept on walking. In truth, she felt like a train had hit her. Not once, but repeatedly. Hettie just breathed and waited. That was how she was going to make it through today. It wasn’t sadness Hettie felt, although there was plenty to be sad about. It wasn’t loneliness, and although she was drop dead exhausted, Hettie felt the void most of all.

Day came and went. The night air was chilly, cool and refreshingly biting. Hettie opened up her bedroom window. Maybe she could memorize star patterns now that she knew her room’s layout so well. Her window opened up onto the roof. Her bare feet grasped the black tiles. She stood, wavering and listening to the echoing sounds of cars in the distant. The sound seemed so hollow. Hettie wavered a bit more. Her muscles were weak from lack of sleep. They crumbled. Hettie let them. She was going to fall off the roof. But for Hettie, the void continued. She was in the void--she had been in the void. She didn’t feel the warm tears tracing her cheek lines. She had lost all sense of time. Hettie was lost in the void.

A warm feeling began to creep into Hettie’s core. It spread, like an eagle opening its wings for flight. The feeling comforted Hettie. It rippled the void. *No. I’m slipping.* Hettie grasped the edge of the roof. She grasped, and breathed, and she was back on her bedroom floor.

Hettie slipped into unconsciousness.

Survived: Day 6.

Survived: Day 7.

Survived: Day 8.

Hettie woke up. Her breath billowed, ghost like around her. And she smiled, ever so briefly. She moved, slowly, closing her open window which she had left for several days. Hettie’s eyes were puffy. Her elbows and knees scraped from the roof tiles.

School repeated itself. Science was the lymphatic system. History was the Great Depression.

“There’s a school assembly today,” Hettie heard a boy whisper to his friend. “Let’s get

out of here before it starts.”

At least the school assembly will help time pass Hettie thought as she walked down towards the theatre.

The school principal was bouncing ever so slightly on her toes, smiling. “Students!” She cried, excitedly, “ Lively learners!”

“Ugh, kill me now,” a girl whispered to her boyfriend who was sitting next to Hettie.

“We are going to be discussing *suicide* today,” the principal whispered.

Hettie felt sick.

“Now suicide is one of the most important life decisions a teenager, well I guess *a person*, can make. Anyone who is suicidal should talk to our amazing counselors. There is no reason why you shouldn’t seek help, dears. There are better ways to handle homework stress than to off yourselves!” The principal beamed, apparently satisfied with her statement. “Now I’m going to invite our counselors onto the stage, who will be discussing signs of depression...”

Hettie blanked out. It was such an odd juxtaposition. *Get me out of here*. The void crept up from her heart and into her mind.

Back at home, Hettie felt the walls. She couldn’t really feel the cracks, but she knew they were there. The walls were cool, smooth. Hettie reached down to feel her face. It was smooth too, and warm. She slowly felt her collar bones, feeling the lines, the curves as they sloped towards her breasts--soft, large, silky. She reached further, down her belly, feeling her breath quicken, to her thighs, feeling the way they spread apart...The void rippled.

Day 10, Survived,

Day 11, Survived.

Hettie got up. For the first time in almost a fortnight the sun was awake before Hettie. Its orange rays expanded through the skyline.

Hettie smiled, the clouds glowed. Rebirth. School was average. Her comparative religious practices class was discussing Saturnalia.

“TEACHERS, LOCK YOUR DOORS!” the principal boomed through the loudspeakers.

“LOCK YOUR DOORS!”

Suddenly another student burst into Hettie’s class brandishing a gun. Hettie had seen him before, eating and walking home alone.

“GET DOWN, ALL OF YOU!” the student shouted, waving his gun back and forth.

“Wait,” Hettie whispered.

The kid’s eyes widened.

Hettie stood up, slowly. “I may not know what you’re going through, but...but...don’t let the void consume you. I know, life, I can’t answer what the point of it all is...I can’t even answer why it’s worth it. But, I do know the void...how...how you stop feeling. The nothingness, it, it, consumes you...it consumed me.”

The boy’s gun wavered, this time less sure.

“I don’t...well I *do* know that even if you are consumed, the void lives on...I guess we can all just fight it, fight it a little bit, until we die, but this...this right here, it won’t end it.” Hettie slowly moved forward. Gracefully, waltzing towards the boy. Reaching out her hand, extending, slightly, touching the boys hands.

He lowered, first his gun, then his whole body slumped forward, “Live on?” he whispered.

Hettie smiled, “I suppose that’s the only way to beat it--the void.”

He dropped to the floor, as did Hettie.

Day 12: Survived.