

MONOLOGUE

WEATHER WE MIND

BY DANIELLE BRAME WHITING

I can't leave the house today. I can't. I mean, look out that window. Go on, look out there and you tell me what you see. At the sky. See it? No? Look harder. Look at the colour of the sky. The texture. See. It's right there in front of you. *(frowns)* What if we open the door?

Mimes open up a door and take a deep breath.

Smell that. Take a big, noisy whiff of that air. What do you smell?

Exaggerates sniffing the air.

Think people, use your heads. Ugh, how is this not obvious?

And... and... and listen. Listen carefully. What can you hear?

Stares at the audience waiting for them to get it. When the realisation hits that they don't, there is a sense of hopelessness.

You should understand. Everyone should understand. How could you have forgotten so quickly? I mean that's how the culture tends to roll now-a-days, isn't it? We get all up in arms about things, build the band wagons, jump on the band wagons, drive them up and down the main streets yelling, and kicking, and screaming. We create banners a mile high and burn bridges with friends, family, colleagues who aren't capable of jumping on the same band wagon as us. Information, pictures, news stories, social media, politicians, journalists, social commentators, shock jocks, experts... And whether it's too much, or not enough, or perhaps shrinks just enough in size, we move on.

But I can't forget this, not yet.

I can't go outside today. Not today.



I guess, if I'm honest, I wasn't sure why at first either. All I knew was, when I opened the door to step outside, a wall of unease smacked me in the face and the gut. Warning bells ringing loudly in my ears and I stepped back inside and closed the door. "Not today. Not today. Not today. Not today." Repeating in my head like a slow freight train crawling over old tracks. "Not today. Not today. Not today. Not today." And I sat here in the hall willing the sound to go away. My body was practically paralysed, but my mind was racing at a million miles an hour. Thinking, thinking, what could it be that was so unsettling about the outdoors. Did I see something or smell something?

The truth of the situation hit me like a proverbial anvil... it was nothing. No, not nothing, I'm not explaining it well. More like... an absence of... something. I opened the door again to check, and there it was, the absence. The world outside today is existing in a state of in between. It's eerily calm, but not. The sky is the same washed-out summer blue we usually get at this time of the year. The sun a pale whitish-yellow. At the tops of the trees I can see the leaves swaying as though touched by the distant sea breeze. In the distance, a mower and a dog, both equally agitated.

What is wrong with me? Who wouldn't want to walk out into a day like that? I'm not normal.

I'm not normal anymore. Well, my personal version of normal.

I know I can't be normal because an absence of something should not make me this anxious. That's what I'm feeling, you know, anxious. Like, because there is an absence of something, I'm expecting that – that 'something' will appear at any moment and it will be way worse than before.

You know?

I mean, for the last eight months I've woken up to something outside. A biting chill that made the ends of my fingers hurt. The wind creeping into the core of my joints and settling there. Thick, wet air that floods my lungs. Pollen filled breezes invading my sinuses. But this time... nothing.



It's absolutely unacceptable that one could walk out into this day of... absence, and haply acquiesce to this kind of uncertainty. I mean, a chill that's bores below the skin, through the bone and permeates the marrow... I know what to expect then. I know it will hurt. I know it will taint everything I attempt to do on that given day with a sense of misery. I know to lug a sweater and gloves and a scarf and a beanie out with me. It's expected and there is a comfort in knowing what comes next.

Pollen!

When I see those first golden blossoms of the yellow wattle, at least I think that's what it's called, or have the strongly perfumed scent of the Jasmin slap me in my face as soon as I open a window or door... I know what to expect! I know that I should only go out if I have to. I know that I need to stock up on antihistamines and avoid old ladies in supermarkets and flush out my nose with a saline solution every night. I know that my eyes will get teary and red, and the little black crease will reappear just short of the tip of my nose, screaming to all and sundry that I am intolerant to this spring that inspires every other poet. There is comfort in my expected discomfort because I know what is coming for me and make myself battle ready.

In three months time, I will also know what to expect. That wet, muggy, rancid heat that makes everything stick and stink and compels you to thrust your barely clad body into whatever depth of cold water is at your disposal. That kind of day that makes it easier to ignore the half-arsed cleaning job that passes at the local cinema so that you can sit in the frigid air-conditioning and pretend to watch whatever new cliché has rolled out of Hollywood. There is no pretence about this kind of day. It is what it is and I appreciate that.

All of these things are something. They are a tangible expectation fraught with consequences, faced with plans, and so utterly familiar.

That is not what is out there today.

*Moves as though peering cautiously out a window, expecting...
something, but receiving nothing.*



It's insidious. Like when you've been caught out by a parent and instead of lecturing you or punishing you then and there, they announce that they'll be talking to you later. Which is, as you'd expect, stage one of the punishment, and a very clear indication that your parents are dark and evil souls hell bent on destroying you from the inside out. You spend the hours, eyes wide and waiting for stage two of the punishment to bear down on you. Everything feels tight and you want to cry, but you don't, because you can't show weakness or fear, because then they'll know they've won.

Tries to look out at the day from another angle.

It's treachery most foul this kind of day. I mean, for starters, what does one wear? Should sleeves be long or short? How many layers will I need? Do I plan for rain? Could I walk or should I assume that a walk would be marred by precipitation of either sky or an overly warm body? There's sport in this, for someone, somewhere.

Retreats resolved.

There is only one thing for this kind of day. The same thing I did the last time I was caught at doing a thing I ought not. I'm going back to bed. I'm going to crawl under the covers with a good book, one I've read before so that no page will add to my anxious start, and wait this out. I'm no-one's fool and if I can't prepare for what might come moving forward, then I shall prepare for what I've left behind. My mind is made and not one of you can change it.

Goes as if to leave then eyeballs the audience.

You're free to make your own decision of course, but take heed, you have been warned.

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