

Darkness

A short story by Mari Mangoshvili

This hour before the Sun begins to rise. The night slowly takes its crown off and surrenders. It doesn't happen at once, the night is stubborn and doesn't want to give up. But the reign of time and balance is stronger so the night has no choice. It knows it has to wait another 12 hours before coming back to take its place in the order Universe has established. Daylight wins. It washes over the world in all its glory and slowly starts bathing everything in light. Slowly, shade by shade...selecting colors as gently and thoughtfully as a painter. It replaces all the dark, gloomy colors the night has left behind with its own, incredibly cheerful ones. Pink, Orange, Blue... And ends up creating such a beautiful masterpiece that no one who sees it can take their eyes away from it. Of course one has to keep its eyes wide open to be able to appreciate this miracle. How is it possible for anyone to ignore all this glory? They mustn't have a heart if such beauty doesn't move them. The beauty of another day being born.

Another chance, another try to make this place we live in a little better. But what if there is in fact someone who doesn't care? "Oh, they must be heartless!" people will say. Because people are always too quick to judge and assume things, because they think they are know-it-all's. But does anyone really know what is going on in the heart of the person living amongst them every day? No, because people mostly care about themselves and their needs and desires. Yes, in fact, there was one person who was looking at all that beauty that unfolded right in front of her very own eyes and yet she didn't care. And no, not because she was heartless, or maybe she was because her heart stopped feeling any joy months ago and was full of pain. She hasn't slept all night again... She's looking at the rising Sun and cursing it for stealing the night. Night is the only time and place where she can be herself. Her eyes feel as heavy as if like someone placed heavy rocks on them and she can't lift them up no matter how hard she tries. Slowly. Very slowly she gets up and goes to the mirror. If she didn't know this look so well she'd mistake it for a complete stranger. Her eyes are red and swollen.

This is what happens when you spend all night crying. She looks at her phone. The screen lights up and shows 6:30 AM. Good. So she has time to make this vampire of a face disappear. She starts putting on make-up. The worse you feel, the better you have to look so people think you are happy. It's a good thing, looks are deceiving in most cases. If people see the happy façade, then no one will have any wish to dig in a little deeper and see the truth that is too

close to the surface, because let's be honest, why bother when everyone has their own problems? And it's not like she wants everyone to see what is going on inside her. They won't understand anyway. Only one of them did....

When all is finished and done she goes to the mirror again. A completely different face looks at her. You couldn't even tell what was happening to this face hours ago. Like daylight and the Sun changed the colors of the night, so did she change her appearance. Now only one final touch left. That smile through which you can see absolutely nothing but happiness.

The University is bursting with activity. She instantly finds her coursemates and starts listening. Usual conversation: Pranks, jokes, homework, discussing lectures. Like always. "Start talking, be active"- she hears some invisible voice saying inside her. Something tells her that it's the right thing to do even if she doesn't feel like being sociable at all so she does. "Laugh with them"- the voice says and she does. Soon she is the most cheerful person in the entire group and even hears herself laugh. Her own voice sounds strange to her ears. Strange because she alone knows that it's as fake as it can get. "Good. Now go in there and answer in the best way possible". She has no idea who the voice belongs to or where it's coming from but she does everything she's told to do simply because it keeps her concentrated on doing something and this way the happy mask won't fall off. She does everything automatically, but her mind is far away. In a place which is filled both with infinite amount of pain and infinite amount of happiness. This place is destroying her and yet she doesn't want to leave. She spends days and nights in there while somehow going around her normal life every day.

Normal?? What even is normal? Nothing is normal in her life anymore. Not ever since....And it almost happens right then and there, in the middle of her lectures she almost breaks down. Almost... because as soon as she wants to give up...the voice comes back. "You are NOT allowed to! Not now! You can't!". And in this moment she wants to scream at the invisible source of the words: "WHY NOT??" Always these restrictions made up by the society. Can't do this. It's not acceptable. If you end up following every rule the society has invented, soon enough it will get easier. Easier because the colorful spark that makes you who you are will be extinguished, the rebel inside will stop crushing the walls in the attempts to break free. And what then? You'll just blend in with the mass. But there are some rules that have to be followed and that's why she gives in to that voice. Deep inside she knows it's her subconscious guiding her but she still hates it. The entire afternoon passes in this struggle and it's time to go home. Home....that house doesn't feel like home anymore...Nothing does. Her definition of home has changed long ago. Home for her isn't a place, home is a person. Now this home is lost.....she goes out into the street and wanders aimlessly through the city for

hours trying to get lost in it, because there's hope that if she manages to get lost in it, the city will open its arms for her and take her in, distract her, even if it's only momentary. As she walks, no matter how much it hurts, her instincts stay sharp and she can't help but notice people going about their lives. All those smiles, laughs, jokes.....just ordinary people enjoying their day.....And she feels herself asking: How can they be happy, how can they seem so carefree?? How? When there's a person among them who represents their complete opposite? How can they be so oblivious when right next to them she is feeling excruciating pain with every step she takes. Deep down, somewhere really, really deep, she knows that she once felt like them too, in fact not too long ago but now can't even remember how it's done. That happy past seems unbelievably distant now...

If people happen to look at her, she just smiles and keeps walking. She wants to do something, to take action because having no aim doesn't help. But no matter what she does, this crushing feeling never goes away. It takes a life of its own, making her entire self its permanent residence. Everywhere she goes, she seems to find something or other that brings memories to the surface and she feels herself relating to things and connecting them, to this or that moment, even more than it ever seemed imaginable. Suddenly all she wants is to open up to someone, ask for help but in the 21st century world showing your emotions is considered a weakness. This is why she is wearing this mask of happiness. Out of hate for tears. As she continues walking, the city's noises get louder. She can hear it whisper "Come deeper into me, let me make you forget everything, let me heal your wounds." In the middle of all this noisy buzz, the city's inner voice feels unbelievably gentle. As soft as the wind. What if she doesn't want to forget? What if those days were the most real thing she has ever experienced? She has never felt herself to be more alive than then. "I will NEVER forget. And how can you help anyway? What can you give me??" She wants to scream. After hours of aimless wandering she reaches the house. Two more minutes and it will be over. Closer now...she grits her teeth. It's all she can do to keep herself from running and scaring people who are looking her right in the eyes. Again this one rule. Smile as broadly and as happily as much it hurts. She gives people the happiest smile imaginable and they smile back at her. A little more... a key in the lock... she hears the door open. Sanctuary. She doesn't need to pretend here. Doesn't have to cover this crushing all-consuming pain up. No one is here. No one except herself.

The mask which was glued to her face falls off easily as if it has never really been there. As soon as she steps into the house, tears start running from her face. Tears she has repressed all day long but which never really went anywhere. They never leave her. She hates being weak, she always makes them go away....but today she can't. Some days are harder than others.

Today she just doesn't care. So she opens up. Completely. Pain. The kind that makes everything go numb. The entire body, all emotions, everything that makes a human who and what it is. To the point where a person feels like a zombie. Except she can feel everything in this zombie-like state. The pain so crushing...one that feels like a thousand knives have been set into the heart in a flash of a second. The kind that makes her want to scream until her throat feels raw and she loses her voice, the one that can bring all the emotions out, even if only for a short while. It makes her want to break something, to hit something countless until she can no longer feel her hands. It makes her want to be violent, unbelievably violent. Wants to express the damage and hurt of the heart in a physical way so the body hurts as much as the soul. Before she realizes it she has already lost control over herself. Let all the wounds, memories, love...every emotion out into the open. It hurts too much... way too much. She's choking on it all trying to breathe but the air doesn't get into the lungs. Her inner animal wants to roar. To escape its cage and break free. But...people will hear. Again restrictions...She can't even be herself in her own house. Everything inside her is screaming. She grips some object. She has to hold on. It's like some border which can help her push all these emotions back in if she holds tight enough to it. But it doesn't help. The pain is so crushing that it feels like someone set her on fire. Not enough air... and in this moment a thought crosses her mind. Maybe that's how it all will end. Her goals will stay half accomplished as they are. What if someone finds her in this state? They will think she has lost her mind, that she is insane. No one ever will be able to understand this. No matter how hard she tries, she still can't breathe. She fights for air and at the same time is glad it's happening like this. A little longer and her suffering may be over. She will be free. Free of everything but love. Love....What happens if her love finds out? "Nothing will happen. He'll just be with some girl and you won't be here anymore." The voice is back. She knows the voice is right and this makes the pain thousand times worse. It gets physical. Every nerve is tense. Tears don't stop, the room starts spinning around, maybe soon.... That's when she hears the voice again. "What happened to you???" It's urgent and worried. Even in this state she feels arms encircling her body. It's not her subconscious. It's her friend.

She tries to come back to reality. She is in her room, her friend is hugging her. She is in her room, can barely see through the veil of tears. Slowly the girl gets up and says "nothing". "It's going to be okay" - her friend says. "Nothing will ever be okay again" - she hears herself say and knows that it's true. The rest of the day is as painful and mundane as every other moment lately. Active. Always being active, doing so much in one day, being on top and yet inside everything is dead. Wake up, study, wake up, study. That's all there what is left. No passion,

no love, no feelings except this monster eating her inside out. But at least it must be working because everyone believes this happy façade. Well..almost everyone anyway. Then comes the night and with it darkness. How does this saying go? Hello darkness, my old friend? Yes, darkness really is her friend through all this. Darkness alone shares her pain and doesn't judge. On the contrary, the night seems to say "Don't be afraid, I'll guard your secret, you are safe with me, open up, I won't judge. I will cover you with myself so no one sees reality." So there they are. Two silent companions, the night and the girl. They don't need to talk, everything is clear without words. They are like an elderly couple which has been together for as long as they can remember and have nothing left to tell each other. They just feel comfortable being together in silence. This is what happens when you give up on your dreams.

This life has enough of negativity, the light is what its lacking. So when you find someone or something that rocks your entire world, makes you feel alive and happy you should hold on to it. Hold on and never let go. No matter what obstacles come into your way. And obstacles will come because life constantly puts you on test to see if you are strong enough to survive. If you aren't, it crushes you. But if you happen to overcome everything, then it gives you the best gift which you couldn't have ever dreamt of. The girl looks at the giant moon but her thoughts turn to him. Like always. Every second of every day no matter where she is or what she is doing. She locks her gaze on the silver light, unblinking, as if like she's afraid that it will go away the second her eyes shift. She tries to take deep breath to calm down and assemble her thoughts but feelings are choking her from the inside. No matter how much of it comes out or how often, it still never goes away. Tears start running...again...when will this stop? She knows the answer even before she finds the right words to answer it. NEVER. A cold breeze comes in from the window making her shiver. So what? What if she catches a cold, what if she feels bad? It still can or will never compare to the unbearable cold in her heart. Cold and Pain. But no. Somewhere in the middle of all of this there is a wild fire inside her. The fire that gives her hope and warms her up when everything else fails. Countless numbers of people have been trying to describe this fire for centuries but it still stays indescribable. It has only one word in itself – LOVE. And this word is both too much and not nearly sufficient to fit this fire into itself. This fire gives her the strength to find the words. When everything else fails, she turns to God. "Please, PLEASE guard my love from any misfortunes or pain, heartbreaks and disappointments and make him happy...as happy as I am hurt now." This prayer goes on for a long, long time. She pours her heart out. Because only God can hear. No one else cares... When she finishes the moon is still there. There's only silence between them but like a gentle whisper it seems to say: "Go to sleep. Go and I will

give you the only gift I can offer. Give you dreams, so at least in them you can be with the one you love more than anything. Sleep and don't be afraid because your secret is safe with me". She is exhausted so she doesn't object. With one last, painful breath she closes her eyes and goes to the only place she feels truly happy in. There, where they can be together...Even if it's only for a few short hours.

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