

Umar TIMOL

A Day in the Life of a Woman

As she lies in bed in the morning, she is inhabited by two contradictory forces: that of life and that of lassitude, she wants to get a couple of hours more of sleep, wake up as late as possible, which is not like her. This is perhaps the only time she lets go: during a fulfilled sleep, away from everything, away from herself; for her life is discipline and determination, that of surpassing herself: such has always been her life; her husband tells her that she is bright, that everything comes to her easily, she tells him that such is not the case, you do not understand anything, as usual, I work very hard; and it's true that her life has been pre-set, so to speak: a degree at the local university, then a teaching job in a high school, marriage, kids, but there was also this will to keep going, to work on a thesis, to pursue a PhD, get involved in research work: a fierce ambition, not as much to free herself from the traditional fate of a woman, but also, but more so, to be, to exist and to be liberated from mediocrity, for everything in this society reminds her of this mediocrity, this complacency and slackness, of this void; her life is an ongoing quest for excellence in everything that she does, down to the finest detail; she would sometimes have liked to be less ambitious, life would have been less complicated; be less of a stickler for perfection, be like him, perfectionist in some areas of his life but mostly indifferent towards the rest, everything would have been so simple; she finally gets up, with her final plan in mind: the tasks she has to undertake during the day, the kids' school lunch, what would constitute dinner, instructions to be imparted the maid, things that need to be purchased, her current project at work, that letter that needs to be written, an endless list, but everything is done methodically, as always, without procrastination, of which she sometimes blames him, his questioning his artistic talent, unending questions, always dilly-dallying when there is a solution for everything: the scientist that she is has so molded her way of seeing things. The only problem that cannot be solved is death. He is a man who is oblivious of his privileges, of his male privileges, and she would have liked him to be more hands on, but I do everything, he tells her, I take care of everything, you take care of everything but you do not manage, I do everything and I think of everything, but I help you, I do not ask you to help me, I ask you to think, you understand? To think for me; I will try...but he will never change, not after so many years...She then goes to work, not a job of her choice; she wanted to do research work but she is realistic, while she carries the nostalgia of what a real scientific life would be, a fulfilment of her calling, she has resolved to do her best at her job, even if it is purely administrative, and as time goes by, things start looking up for her, her perspectives are exciting, but her daily questioning remains: how to resist the greater forces of inertia and mediocrity, for lack of better; when mediocrity is rewarded and when it is not a question of achieving the zenith but avoiding the worst? It is her daily grind, even more so when one is a woman: the invisible hurdles, the crippling stereotypes...but she will make do, just like she does with her husband and his claims of being a feminist, a fake feminist more like! I am a feminist, can't you see? I support you in your career, I take care of the kids, my son and my daughter enjoy the same rights and privileges, I am a teacher in a high school for girls and not a day goes by without my encouraging them to aim higher; I do the housework, I do almost everything, but you don't cook, she retorts cynically, why do I have to cook? Do you think that I am predisposed to cook? Anyway, you are a man and you can never understand, you are all the same, endowed with your privileges; don't you think you are exaggerating? What privileges are you talking about? For instance, why don't you support the MeToo movement? That's not what I said, I support the movement but I am wary of a culture of denunciation, a man's guilt or innocence is decided in court, not on Facebook or Instagram; you

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definitely do not get it at all, I am talking about patriarchy, about a system of oppression, of women's oppression, of a systemic violence against women and you talk about denunciation? She is so angry that she can no longer take it, why can't he understand anything, why don't they understand anything? That everything is complicated for a woman, that for instance, she always needs to protect herself, that she can encounter a pervert or a maniac, in the streets or anywhere else...Is it so hard to understand? She sometimes believes that life would have been better without him, after all these years; but she loves him in her own way, he is the only one who is capable of withstanding her fits of anger, which is strange, for maybe, in the end, such is married life; but she is not one prone to dilly-dallying. It is already night time, she helps the kids with their revision, more so her daughter, action that is the locus of his admiration of her: such resoluteness! Not a job done lightly, like he does, but a systematic and structured one, a revision done chapter by chapter, which yields its results, which helps this child; deep down, he has always felt that she is superior to him, he is capable, as men are, of one thing, while she is capable of everything; a man who admits to the superiority of women cannot be a fake feminist, can he? But he will never be able to convince her otherwise, it's nearly time to sleep, she is in bed, having gone through another day; time to read for a little while, before drifting off, before plummeting into the night's sleep, torn between a yearning for life and weariness. Tomorrow is another day, another struggle.

Translated by Saffiyah Chady Edoo