

ONE WORLD DAY

Word Count: 4,279

She stands just within reach. As Anya turns to face me, tiny freckles materialize across her delicate face. Her mouth opens, but all I can hear are the blares of...are those *bagpipes*?

My eyes slowly open as reality settles in. I force them back shut, urging the dream to continue in peace. I try to relax but as a trombone solo takes over, I give up on sleep and relinquish myself to the day.

I peel myself away from the sweaty blankets on the ground. My bed is right beside me, but sometimes the floor is just a better place to exist for a bit.

Plus, the sheets still vaguely smell like her, and I don't want to cover what is left of her scent with more tears.

Even before I pull back my curtains, I know that outside is a spectacle. I am immediately greeted by a diverse array of ribbons, flags, and mechanical kites as they sail through the sky. I squint as my eyes adjust to the sun that I have not seen in a while. Has it been 4 days? 5? I have been distracting myself with a lot of virtual reality lately. My internal clock is all sorts of screwed up.

I cannot believe I almost forgot about today...

I open my window to hear the music better. The parade has transitioned to a jazzy melody that I can just barely make out over the roar of the crowd. The smell of freshly cooked lumpia and beignet's waft through the air, and my mouth begins to water. When was the last time I even ate anything?

As I continue to breathe in the comforting smells of celebration, a United Earth flag gets caught on the corner of my roof. I climb out of my windowsill and walk in that direction, careful not to trip over the solar panels. I manage to untangle the flag, and a child on the sidewalk screams thank you in return. I sign 'Happy One World Day!' with one hand and watch as he re-joins the crowd, proudly waving his flag above him.

I envy the kid and his carefree existence. I would do anything to put my broken heart on a shelf for a bit just so I could really enjoy today.

-

My parents are gathered in the family room wearing white shirts and matching tie-dye pants. I watch as my dad applies blue eyeliner on my mom while my other dad smears temporary purple dye onto his beard. My mom finishes telling a joke in Tagalog, something about polar bears, and my dads laugh in unison.

I lean against the stairwell, lost in conflicted feelings. I adore my parents and how much they love one another. I brag to my friends and teachers all the time about how epic their love story is. But right now, I cannot stand to be around them. Their happiness is a painful reminder of everything I managed to lose. I never wanted to be the stereotypical teenager that gets annoyed by their parents but right now, I'm annoyed at my parents.

My three dogs come running up the staircase, overjoyed to see me. All their translators go off, and I laugh as a chorus of robotic collars say, 'I-love-you', 'I-am-happy-you-are-here', and 'I-am-hungry' all at once.

"Is that Diwata? So she's alive after all?" I don't have to see my mother's face to know she is grinning.

My dad looks up from his floating mirror and I can see that his hands are stained bright purple. His eyes meet mine, and he winks.

“Welcome back to the world, kiddo. We missed you.” He says, returning to his facial hair.

I pick up our smallest dog, Swifty, as I make my way to the family room. I melt into my favorite couch and turn the cushion heater on.

“We took bets on whether you’d come down today”, Dad says with his heavy Irish accent as he continues to focus on his eyeliner technique. My mother has heard his voice every day for over 16 years, and she still swoons every time he speaks. “I lost. I gotta take the Tesla in next week for new tires.”

My mom glances in my direction. “I knew you wouldn’t miss out on your favorite holiday. What are your plans for tonight, baby girl?”

“I don’t have any” I confess, focusing on how soft Swifty’s fur feels against my light brown skin. “I had planned on spending today with...you know”.

“Want to spend today with us?” My dad asks as he rubs his purple hands on the back of my mother’s shirt. She laughs and tries to get out of the way, almost tipping over in her chair as she does so.

“I kind of want to stay home today. I’m not really in the mood to celebrate”.

“Don’t-be-sad” says Swifty. Well, Swifty’s collar. She licks my cheek a couple of times.

“Today is-a-fun-day”.

Mom sits next to me, careful not to get paint on the back cushion. “Swiftly is right”. She puts her head on my shoulder, and I rest my head on hers.

“Go out. See some friends. Cause some trouble. Eat your life away. I don’t care what you do,” She places her hand on my knee and squeezes it. “We just want you to have a good day”.

I nod and mutter a small “I will”.

I don’t mean it at first. I just say what I need to say so they will change the subject. But as I continue to watch my parents get ready for their fun day ahead, I am reminded of how much this day means to me. To all of us, really.

Mom puts colorful wigs on my dads, and I begin to lose it. My ribs sting, but I cannot stop laughing. It’s the most I’ve laughed in....well, forever.

They pretend to get mad at me and sign insults in USL. I ignore them and say they look like a sky electric pop-punk wannabe band. Or a bunch of really lost performance artists. Or a funky children’s show from the early 2190’s. With tears, *good* tears, in my eyes, I remember why I love spending time with my parents. They are embarrassingly cool, and they make me laugh more than anyone else.

As insane as they look, a small part of me does want to join my parents. I have not spent One World Day with them in...what, over 5 years? I miss our days painting the world together.

But I also remember how turned on my parents get after they take their annual dose of Acid. So, I decide to let them have a fun night on the town where they can act like horny

teenagers away from their actual teenager. They have spent the last week pushing food through a door crack and listening to their emotional daughter cry her organs out. They deserve this.

Before my parents leave, my purple-haired dad hands me a brand-new turquoise marker.

“From us. Care to do the honors?”

I uncap the marker and take a good whiff. There is nothing better in this world than the smell of a new, open marker on One World Day.

I find a good spot on my father’s back, and I draw a circle around a heart. The symbol of One World Day. I initial inside of it and repeat this process for all my parents.

They take turns kissing my forehead. My mom goes last, as always, and she pulls me into a big hug.

“Heartbreak is the worst feeling in the world. Especially the first one. So I know today is really rough for you, baby.” She holds me so tight; I can barely breathe.

“But just remember that this feeling isn’t forever. And this is not your only shot at love.

There is always hope for the future. And – “

I cut her off.

“-There is always enough love for everyone. I know, Mom”.

She leaves a giant, glittering lipstick stain on my cheek and on my shirt.

“Happy One World Day!” My parents say in unison, as they walk down the steps to join the party outside.

“Happy One World Day!” I shout back, watching my colorful parents go until they melt into the parade of people.

--

By the time I dare to face the outside, the sun is just beginning to set. The golden rays hit the wind turbine farms in the far distance, casting pink hues over its grassy fields. I wish there were someone here to share this sunset with me.

Who am I kidding? I wish Anya were here to see this with me.

“Take a picture” I command. I blink, and my eye camera captures this moment, storing it in my personal server.

Sharing a picture is not the same as a sharing a moment, but it will have to do.

I shuffle my way through the crowds as best I can, trying not to think of her. As I pass by our High School of Visual Arts, I quickly remember why I have not left the house.

Everything reminds me of her.

A group of young kids approach me with different colored markers in their different colored hands. They have flowers painted on their faces, and their white t-shirts barely have any white left on them.

“Will you draw on my shirt?” The kids ask in unison, bright eyed and innocent. Again, I find myself envious of people half my age.

I force a small smile, and take turns picking colors out of their hands to draw as small as I can on their shirts. I draw a semi-colon surrounded by a heart on all their shirts wherever I can find room.

In return, I bend over and let them draw whatever they would like on my jacket.

One of the markers on my back tickles, and I find myself smiling more naturally. Mom was right. There is no way I would have missed today.

I approach the Great Wall of Wonder and get in line to draw on it. This is my favorite tradition.

While in line, another group of kids approach me. They say something in Nigerian, a language I have not studied yet.

I sign 'Do you want to draw on clothes?' in USL, and the kids nod excitedly.

And again, I take turns drawing on the back of kid's shirts and letting them draw on mine. As soon as those kids leave, another group of kids follow. More and more kids flock to my side, holding markers out for me to use.

For a while, I even forget that I am sad.

When it is my turn to draw on the Great Wall of Wonder, I take out my turquoise pen and write $D + ?$ surrounded by a heart. We are supposed to write what is in our hearts and as cliché as this is, that small equation is the only thing I can not seem to get out of my mind.

Who will be my person/people?

My mom met her people when they were just kids. I guess a small part of me hoped I would be so lucky.

-

The shoe tree in all its glory lingers in the distance. It is a 150-foot oak tree in the center of the city that is both a landmark and a public park/garden. Rumor has it that over a hundred thousand shoes hang from its branches. I am not sure how accurate that number is, but I know that somewhere in that tree is a pair of skates from when I was six, and a pair of boots Anya broke on our first date...

I shake the memory out of my head as I approach Old Oaky.

My friends are easy to spot. Kayla insists on wearing a 10-foot top hat every One World Day. Her boyfriend, Aditya, wears a sparkly mermaid tale. He always gets high, straps on his hoverboard, and pretends he is swimming.

As I approach, it seems like he has already done a few laps.

"DIWATA! You made it out! Come! Swim to your mermaid friend!" Aditya floats over to me and pulls me in an awkward hug against his hoverboard.

Kayla approaches, offering a pill in her hand. I take it without question and give her a hug.

"Girl, where were you? We've been trying your Body-Cell for hours." Kayla takes out a bright red marker, and immediately turns me around to do her signature sketch of my face.

“I turned it off. I needed some me time.” I take out my turquoise marker and start to write on Aditya’s shirt that only has a little bit of alcohol on it.

“So by coming out again, does this mean you’re officially done moping over Anya?”

Kayla signs her name under her sketch.

“Kayla. Be sensitive” Aditya burps and starts to doodle on my shirt. He normally draws a mermaid or a genie...always something magical. He loves that sort of stuff.

I tell my friends it is okay, and they don’t have to walk on eggshells around me. I tell them I will be fine and that I hardly even think about her anymore.

The truth is that I just say what I need to say so they will change the subject and we can just have some fun. Thinking about Anya is painful but for some reason, talking about her just hurts more.

As soon as it gets dark enough, the fireworks begin to erupt, and it is an experience shared by millions. Everywhere I turn, people scream and cheer in the streets. Family’s hold up sparklers and kiss their loved ones. Bright fireworks of all shapes, colors, and sizes shine against the starry night, trickling down like electric rain.

These are my favorite moments of One World Day. Everyone stands and stares at the beautiful world around them as the fireworks burst above. I can feel the energy reverberate as every living creature around me laughs and smiles and screams in joy as we celebrate the day that we became whole again.

There is not a single person on Earth having a bad day today.

Even heartbroken, I can still feel the love and passion that fills my soul this time each year where we all celebrate our lives mixed in perfect harmony.

As Kayla and Aditya discuss which trade school they want to go to for higher education, I space out and let my eyes wander.

In the little theater at the end of the park, children perform skits of the past. Their parents watch in awe as their children act out the history that made our lives today.

I remember when Kayla and I used to be in those plays. When we were very young, we played soldiers and protestors in the World War 3 skit. Another year, we played the politicians that argued for 76 days over the United Earth Treaty.

Right before we went to secondary school, I got to play President Ocasio-Cortez. I have since been the lead in several musicals, but my first lead role will always be my favorite. To this day, I remember the speech that I practiced for weeks.

A little girl stumbles on stage wearing a brown wig. She smiles as she speaks into a fake podium. I mouth the words she says, remembering once again just how nice it was to be a kid. How grand the world feels before your heart is broken for the first time.

“To my fellow humans; It is on this day that we put an end to the parts of ourselves we no longer need. Gone are the days of needing to be the best to survive. Gone are the days of taking land, hoarding money, and sacrificing the lives of some, for the lives of others. Gone are the days of unnecessary, malicious crime that we have put up with for far too long. The ‘isms’ that plague our society today will be replaced with love. The greed that has poisoned our ancestors will be erased from existence. For it is on this day that the United Countries of Earth form one world. And it is in this world that all

humans deserve the right to live and love in peace. From this day forward, everyone regardless of age, race, religion, gender, and sexual-orientation will be provided with food, clean water, shelter, and free healthcare. And it is on this day that we move forward as one race: the human race. Because together, we *will* accomplish anything.”

I whoop and holler with the rest of the parents who cheer for their children and the fate of our world as we know it. As I look around at my community, it is hard to believe there was ever a world where life was anything but this.

I watch as a stranger catches a little girl’s biodegradable balloon before it floats away. She signs ‘Thank you’ and gives him a hug before running away to join her friends.

It all seems so easy. Love. Kindness. A sense of family and community.

I can’t ever believe we had to fight a war to have this level of peace and understanding, let alone three. My fathers tried to talk to me about the power struggles and greed that took place in a capitalist society, but the concepts went way over my head.

This is the only world I have ever known. And I should be happy to live in it. And yet...

Kayla and Aditya wrap their arms around me, pulling me into an emotional group hug I did not realize was coming.

“What’s weighing on your mind, good friend?” Kayla hands me a cup of Italian-Ice with Boba in it, my favorite drink. I was spaced out for so long; I didn’t even realize they left to get drinks.

“Who do you think?” I slurp down my entire cup in a few giant gulps. “Thank you for the drink, by the way. When I get sad, I forget to drink water”

“Yeah, I know.” Kayla gives me a peck on the cheek. She sits down beside me, and Aditya joins her on the other side. “Ask me what I thought about Anya.”

I ask her what she thought about Anya.

“I’m glad you asked,” Kayla smiles, and tips her top hat. “I think she was a pretty cool person with a lot on her mind. And you were really good at making her laugh and forget about the future for a bit”.

I tell Kayla I sense a ‘But’ coming.

“BUT...” Kayla drags on, choosing her words carefully. “I think you deserve someone who makes you laugh just as much. She was a good first love. And now that that one is over, a better one is out there.”

“You’re starting to sound like my mom”. I nudge her and take a French fry off of her tray.

“Aditya, are you going to weigh in on this?”

Aditya is playing with his food, completely spaced out of his mind.

“Huh? What did you say? Sorry, I was just....yeah. No. I don’t have an excuse I’m just so freaking high right now”.

Kayla and I laugh as we make fun of Aditya. We continue to share jokes, gossip, and talk about our futures. I am really glad I made it out today. I know that these days the three of us spend together are numbered, and I push my sadness away just so I can cherish these fleeting moments as best I can.

“May I take your pictures? You three look great together”.

I look up and standing before me is this beautiful raven-haired woman with turquoise highlights. Her eyes are this deep shade of...are they green? Blue? Gray? I can't even tell. The closest thing I can compare them to is how a river in the summer looks, right before you're about to jump in. She is wearing a tie-dye dress with white leggings and a matching white jacket. Her makeup is glittery and exotic. I can hardly take my eyes off her.

"Yeah, absolutely!" Kayla scoots in closer, and nudges Aditya to do the same.

The mystery girl smiles and takes a couple of steps back.

"Okay...ready....1.....2...and – take a picture". She blinks, and her eye camera takes a picture of the three of us. She grins and holds her index finger out.

"That was a great picture. Thank you. I'm a photographer, sorry I didn't specify that before." She laughs and it the most contagious sounding laughter in the world. I smile.

"Would you guys like a copy?"

I perk up, ready to get this girl to laugh again as many times as I can for however long she will let me.

"I would, yes. Please. Thank you" I touch her index finger with mine, and the light blue dot appears on our nails, showing that the picture has been shared with my personal drive.

She starts to walk away, but I think fast.

"Wait! Can I draw on your jacket?" I hold out my marker. "It uh – it matches your hair".

She smiles and turns around where she has some white space for me to fill. I uncap my marker and draw a heart inside of a circle. I sign it, and turn around so she can do the same.

“I’m Diwata, by the way. I uh, love your outfit. Really fetch”.

I smile as the marker on my back tickles me again. “I’m Florena. My friends call me Flo. Please hold the period joke, I’ve heard enough of them for a lifetime.”

I laugh a laugh so unexpected; I snort a little. I try to speak, but I end up laughing again – this time out of embarrassment.

This causes her to laugh, and her laughter is so damn adorable. This causes me to laugh more, and soon I forget where one laugh ends and another one begins. We both end up laughing together over nothing yet everything.

Somewhere behind me, Aditya pukes in a trash can. Kayla gestures for some backup.

“I uh...shoot, I gotta go. Looks like my friend had way too much of...something. But uh, Florena. Flo. The period girl. I will, um, connect soon? Yeah?”

Florena nods and laughs. I could listen to her laughter for hours.

And then she’s gone.

For the rest of the night, I don’t care about the puke on my shoes or the weight of the top hat that I now have to carry. I don’t mind waiting for the public transit to open up so I can make sure my friends get on their shuttle okay. I don’t even mind the burning sensation in my shoes as I walk the 5 miles back to my house.

All I can think about is that laugh...that beautiful, infectious, adorable laugh.

“You look like a changed woman” My Dad says as I enter the family room, smearing purple paint across his lips as he wipes his mouth.

“I think I just met an angel” I say, my hand dramatically gripped over my heart.

My mother comes with popcorn and I dip my whole hand into the bucket. “Whoa, hey. Who said you can have some? Danny, do we know who this person is? Because she does not look like our daughter”.

My Irish Dad does not even look up from his mug of black coffee. “Nope, our daughter’s world was ending this morning. This person is smiling too much”.

I ignore my parents and drag my lovestruck legs up the stairs.

“Tell Kayla her drawings of you are getting better!” My mom shouts. “Also, you can invite Florena for brunch tomorrow!”

Florena. How did she-?

I yank off my jacket. Right there, underneath Kayla’s sketch of my face, is a picture of a little daisy. Right next to it in beautiful cursive is the name ‘Florena’ and her personal ID number.

Is this what blushing feels like?

I run my hand over her picture.

“Take a picture,” I command. I’m glad I remembered to keep this memory stored in my personal drive.

“You see, Diwata?” My mom says through a mouthful of popcorn. “And just like that – your heart moves on. Life changes. Beautiful things happen and all that jazz. Have I done enough parenting for the day?”

I look at my parents who are all cuddled on the couch, exhausted from a day of painting the world together.

“Yeah, you guys have done more than enough”.

“Good,” My purple dad says through a yawn. “We decided to retire early. We don’t want to raise you anymore”.

“Okay.” I say, stumbling up the stairs to my room. “I love you!” I call down the stairs. I’m really screaming to the world that has blessed me with yet another chance at young love. It’s cheesy, but it’s true.

“We love you, too!” My parents sing. I close the door to my room.

I decide to sleep on my bed with the jacket curled up around me.

My parents once told me that long ago, teenagers used to grow up fearing racism and sexism and socio-economic problems that they couldn’t even control. I can’t fathom how crazy that must all be. I thank my lucky stars I was born in the 2190’s.

The last thing I think about is just how grateful I am to live in a world where the biggest problems I have to worry about are teenage things....like first loves. And next loves.

And all the loves after that.