

A SHORT STORY BY VERONICA GARCIA

MY FRIEND, FAILURE



A JOHN BYRNE AWARD ENTRY

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And so I lie in bed once again, fighting the idea of getting up, toying with it; thinking about how many hours I actually slept and how I feel no less tired than the day before. I lie feeling all the aches in my body, knowing that the solution is part of the problem because I have no self-control, no one to answer to but myself, no one to make me accountable; therefore, paralysed by my overwhelming independence, I lie a little more. My joints, my back, my head, my muscles, still so young and all demanding attention, they are all asking to find a way to be released from their current state; to find some distraction or magical recipe to make them feel strong and relaxed again... but I have yet to find such an arrangement that works for me.

I lie awake curled up under my duvet, thinking about all the things I said I was going to do and how they are still left undone. They stare back at me accompanied by self-doubt, guilt, judgement and the ticking of the clock. The more I think about them, the more I realise time has already sneaked by and it is almost lunchtime. I go over the list in my head again, just like the day before and the one before that, look at the vision boards on my wall, and think to myself... "You can do this! You have done so much and gotten this far, this is nothing... Just get it done!" It is with those words that I manage to convince myself, even if just for a moment, that this is more than doable and it is just a matter of having the right attitude towards it. I tick those worries off my mind and proceed naively to the next haunting thoughts.

I lie contemplating the possibilities, the paths not taken and the ones that led me here. I worry that I have made so many wrong choices throughout my life and that I have allowed the time to rectify them to pass me by. So many options, like branches on a tree, they keep diverging and growing more and more in the webs of my imagination as the minutes keep adding up to mock me as they escape. How do you know you are where you are supposed to be? Are you supposed to make it work where you are, no matter what? Are you meant to disrupt and risk everything to get to the right road? Is there such a thing? Are you the person you thought you were going to be at this point in your life? Have you lived up to the hype of the growing expectations imposed by others as well as yourself? Are you saddened by the idea that you have not?

I see in my mind the faces of the people that I will disappoint and let down by my choices. I can picture the conversations and anticipate their interrogatives, and while doing so, I dread the feeling of not having good enough reasons to explain or justify myself. Most of them I know will offer their words of support. They will understand and accept whatever path I choose to go on, but even though I keep repeating to myself, "I need not justify my personal or life decisions to anyone", deep down the thought of their image of me changing in their heads peeks through and pokes my insecurities and need of self-assurance. I want to be that awesome person they thought I was, I want to be that mythical creature they have shared with others and bragged about because I have built myself to believe this as well and it feels nice.

Throughout the years, I built myself to be independent, strong, capable, a fighter with stubborn traits, and a "can-do" attitude. I have convinced myself that there is nothing I cannot do if I feel like doing it, but it is exactly there where the issue lies. How do I make myself feel like doing it? How do you just do it? How do you just get on with it? These are some of the questions I ponder upon from the "encouragement" phrases I get from friends or family trying to push me to finish

this cycle of my life. They remind me of how good it will be to be done with it, the amazing accomplishment feelings that will flood me when I finally see it through, the vast opportunities I will get from not giving up and completing the task I set to all those years ago. Unfortunately, somehow none of that does the trick, not even the threat of regret lurking around the back of my mind if I decide to quit.

So there I lie, facing my fears every morning; deciding if I should get up and seize the day or if I should sleep a little bit longer to be well-rested. Contemplating if today is finally going to be the day that something clicks inside of me; something I have been waiting on for so long. Wishing that somehow, all the prayers from my mum have finally tilted the scale to my favour and I can gather the will to follow through. That somehow I will get up, overflowing with ideas and energy, and just stick with it until it is done and over with. I fantasise about how I would pat my back and celebrate by myself, then immediately share it with everyone that has been along for the ride and hear them say: "See, I knew you could do it!" ... Then again, that is just silly me and my wilful unfounded hope.

If it wasn't for my attention-seeking bladder, for sure, I know I would lie there that much longer pondering that what-ifs of my existence, but like every other day before this one, nature calls and gives me a strong enough reason to leave, even if still groggy and half-asleep, the warmth and comfort of my bed. I would lie if I said that I have not on more than one occasion come back and hid away from my thoughts and responsibilities for a few more hours, and since there is no one here to stop me, time melts again and I return to my quiet place where I can avoid the reality of things while drifting into further sleep. Eventually, the aches of oversleeping come knocking on my door, wreaking havoc, and force me out whether I like it or not, and so the day begins, with the uncertainty of the promises made the day before.

One thought after the other, I try to find order in the things I wish to do and how they best fit together, see the time and decide that a nice round o'clock is the perfect moment to start any real activities, so I tell myself I have enough time for some nice, healthy, energy-supplying breakfast and proceed to find myself in the kitchen. I easily convince myself that since cooking is something I deeply enjoy; it cannot possibly be considered time wasted and that I might just as well prepare several meals to be proficient and ready for the coming days. Thus, at the end of my endeavour, I come back to the room only to realise several hours have gone by and no work has been done, but since the task of getting my much-needed nutrients is still at large, I might as well do it while watching something to keep myself entertained because the reality is silence comes with too much freedom for dreadful thoughts and guilt to roam around back again.

And so my bed, oh my faithful and trustworthy bed, is there to embrace once again the weight of my excuses and avoidances, whilst I lie and think to myself... "It is just one episode while you eat. It will help clear up your mind and get you ready for the real work ahead". Needless to say, that even with an empty plate, that one episode becomes one season or two or three, even at least a couple of movies on the best of days, and by the time it is over, the twilight has come to check up on me, only to realise the day is gone and the magical will to get to work made itself scarce. Between the hours of empty watching, I indulge in short walks to stretch my limbs and perhaps hope that some fresh air and scenery are the missing ingredients that will sort all my problems and bring that much-sought clearance. They are not.

Throughout all of this, I constantly stare defiantly at the setup in front of me, the one I created to minimise distractions, the one everyone said was the key detail needed to finally stop procrastinating, the one that was going to make everything so smooth and easy flowing, the one that contains all the information and resources required to fulfil the task at hand and reach success. I admire my creation, analyse its purpose and the mindset I had when I designed and arranged it, so optimistically

driven and now so futile. I stop, think about the plans I so naively made at the beginning of the day whilst a seed of guilt and disappointment starts growing inside of me, but before I let it win and be the driving force that gets me out of my rut and into victory, the remote finds its way into my hand and my rear its perfect fit on the mattress. The blissful comfort of oblivion and avoidance washes over me until it is time to admit defeat and allow the hopeful thought of tomorrow perhaps bringing a new opportunity to quiet the underwhelming reality.

I repeat to myself that a good night's sleep is all it takes, that taking the extra vitamins along with the healthy diet is going to fix me, that the body stretches and exercises will mend my aching self; yet, I find myself lying in bed every morning wondering why nothing improved. It feels like I am trapped in an infinite loop of cause and effect, where even the smallest adjustments can cause chaos and even further discomfort. I feel confident that I have researched enough the main concepts and ideas revolving around a "healthy lifestyle" that I should be able to put them to practice and see the results. I can picture myself feeling renewed and ready to take on the world if only I followed the right routine. Nevertheless, after each trial, it becomes more and more obvious that nothing seems to be enough or it proves to be too much. So I retire to bed frustrated, having lost, yet again, another day.

The day resets as soon as my eyes close for the night, only to start all over again in the morning. Maybe this time, I will wake up early enough to get a morning run in and pump me full of endorphins to feel like I can achieve anything. Maybe this time, the delicious fruity milkshake with an assortment of seeds will grant me the energy I have been craving for to power through all my duties and work. Maybe this time, prettying myself up will make me feel so good about myself that I will truly believe I am capable of accomplishing everything I set to. Maybe this time, I get my goals for the day achieved without distractions or procrastination. Maybe this time, the universe will take it easy on me and give me some leeway to find myself and feel like myself again, but alas... not today.

In the end, just like anything else that is inevitable and unavoidable, I will have to eventually make a choice, continue like this until forced otherwise, or allow myself to open the door, welcome, and embrace my new friend, Failure. Because no one teaches you to look out for Failure, no one tells you how to really overcome it, how to accept and let it into your life without it affecting your self-worth and identity. That the fear of Failure might be far worst than Failure itself. That evading and prolonging an already impending Failure will most definitely invite some other nasty friends along to occupy its place. That these friends are the type that takes up your couch, drinks the milk, and finishes the toilet roll without offering an ounce of assistance. That some times Failure is here to free you and extend you that lifeline you desperately need.

At some point, whether one likes it or not, the decision will have to be made and dealt with. Accept Failure like the brutally honest friend it is and move on; face it straight forward and stand your ground knowing your true worth and capabilities. Truly believe that it is not here to break you, tear down or take away anything essential in your life but to help you rebuild and reimagine yourself perhaps into something even more powerful and amazing. That Failure is perhaps an end, but the kind that is offered by a full stop at the end of a sentence in the middle of the paragraph or the paragraph in the middle of the story; eager to be followed by something else immediately, not the be left ignored and unlearnt from.

... Or so I tell myself every day while I lie in bed.

