

Nadia woke up at nine on Saturday feeling tired. She didn't dream anymore, but neither did she feel rested. Logic told her that the six hours of sleep was sufficient, so going back to sleep would be a waste of the weekend. She had a lot to do. Nadia was always busier on weekends. As she went over her to-do list she felt her body getting heavier and sinking deeper into her mattress. Mustering all the strength available in her half-asleep self, she turned to the other side.

Bright light filtered through the curtains and made the books on her table glow along their edges. Nine was a magical time of the morning. The world outside had started but the house was still suspended between the world of dreams and that of the waking. This was the perfect kind of peace, and when it was peaceful, it was time for work. The bed was a place of idleness, and hence she had to leave it. She had no reason not to get up, so she heaved herself out of bed and headed to the window, then drew back the curtains. What a magnificent blue sky. She definitely had to be outdoors today, or it would be a waste of weather.

On her way to the toilet Nadia's stomach felt a little empty but she was determined not to think about it. The less she thought, the better. She tried to block her tiny tingling tummy and train of thought with other thoughts that she didn't truly believe in but would be good to think about. Think energy, think activity, think fun, think outdoors. Think spring. Do not give in to lethargy. Oh snap, don't think lethargy. Fun, fun, energy, sunshine, yippee, yay, freedom. Now is the time to do everything that you can't do later in the day. Go.

*Can't Stomach*

Chen Wei, Victoria

BBC Opening Lines 2015 Submission

Nadia imagined herself being filmed by an invisible camera for the opening sequence of a movie, wondering what the soundtrack would be as she brushed her teeth, washed her face, changed into a loose t-shirt and running shorts and pulled her soft brown hair back into a tight ponytail. She accidentally caught herself in the mirror mid-action—and immediately pretended she hadn't. Nadia hated catching herself in that position. She knew how chunky her arms looked when her hands were raised behind her head; shoulders hunched, it seemed as if she had a short, thick neck and—bleagh it was best not to think about it. Quasimodo—

—No. Shake that thought out of your head and focus on what you have to do.

Nadia dragged the weighing scale out from under her bed with her feet, took a breath, exhaled as much as she could and stepped on it. Think light.

Beep. Thirty-nine kilograms.

Yes. That's three hundred grams lighter than last night. She couldn't wait to weigh herself in an hour.

Ted was still asleep. One leg was on top of his duvet, the other half of his body under, right arm wrapped around his stuffed blue whale named Billy. His mouth was wide open. Nadia smiled to herself and closed his room door gently, hoping he would stay that way for a while longer. This was the perfect kind of peace. She forgot most days, but when she didn't, she really loved her brother. He was growing up so quickly, and it was only a matter of time before his height

*Can't Stomach*

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surpassed hers. In a few years he would be fifteen and she would be almost twenty. He would be big and strong and tower over her and finish everything in the refrigerator and still be hungry.

Hungry...

Not hungry. Get started.

The air was dry and slightly cool, but noise was all around. The neighborhood blurred in her periphery. 'Please', she thought, 'nobody look this way'. She then used this thought as motivation to run faster, feeling a burning sensation rippling through her thighs. Yesssss. She felt one of her old blisters open and a wave of satisfaction surged through her body. 'No pain, no gain.' That was one of the things Nadia believed in. 'Nothing worth having ever came easy,' was another.

As she sailed past a Sainsbury's around the corner she felt her stomach growl ever so slightly, and promptly picked up the pace again. No. Pain. No. Gain. She shook the image of shelves stacked with sweet, savoury snacks from her head, feeling slightly dizzy. 'I hate eating those,' she repeated to herself, forcing her concentration on only stepping on every alternate pavement tile, making sure not to touch the cracks. Her thoughts wandered to the zero-fat Greek yogurt in the fridge she could have when she got home. And a pot of green tea to cleanse her system. Ah, that would be perfect.

*Can't Stomach*

Chen Wei, Victoria

BBC Opening Lines 2015 Submission

Six kilometers later she was back in her bedroom, cautiously avoiding the mirror, but not intentionally keeping her back to it because she wasn't crazy. Her face looked like a tomato and the blood made her cheeks look rounder than usual. She didn't want to destroy this good start to the weekend with that image in her head. Nadia noticed it was half past ten and secretly beamed with accomplishment. She was getting better at this (whatever this was).

She stepped on the scale. Yes, another three hundred grams. 'If only it was another two hundred more', her head lamented. 'Step by step, bit by bit', she assured herself. Nothing worth having ever came easy.

Before her carefully portioned yogurt, Nadia decided to whip up a deliciously simple breakfast. The house was silent for the next twenty minutes except for the sound of rustling plastic, eggs cracking, being whisked and the pleasurable sizzle of a pan coming from the kitchen as Nadia made four thick slices of French toast. She delighted in the heat and smell of fried egg as it engulfed her. She would definitely love watching Ted wolf this down in seconds.

Just as tap water hit the pan hissing she heard the familiar shut of the car door and voices outside. A key clicked in the lock, Nadia's parents returned home and peace left for the day. She remained in the kitchen scrubbing up while their voices travelled mid-conversation from the hall to the dining room.

Then quite predictably, "Mm what is that smell? Who's up so early making breakfast? Nadia?"

"Hi mum. Hi dad."

"Where are you dear? Mummy has food."

*Can't Stomach*

Chen Wei, Victoria

BBC Opening Lines 2015 Submission

A sting in her stomach and her mouth began to water. Nadia became anxious.

"What is it?"

"Chocolate croissants and bagels and waffles. I also bought sausage rolls for Ted.

You can also have some for lunch," and immediately after, "they're all healthy, all organic, don't worry." Nadia knew she was lying and only said that to assure her.

When she joined her parents in the dining room her mother noticed she was in her running shorts. Concern immediately flickered over her mum's eyes, which she quickly concealed.

"Come dear," her mum coaxed gently with a slight tinge of caution, "I bought you breakfast. You don't have to finish everything."

The weekend had started well and there was no reason to ruin it. She loved her family and therefore some sacrifices had to be made. "Yay," Nadia cheered feebly and reached into the bag for a croissant, trying not to look at the huge butter clots that had seeped through the paper. She remained standing. After six kilometers she could afford to have one, right? She could run tomorrow, and after school on Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, which would be convenient since she would be in her P.E. uniform, and she would work harder in P.E. class, then it would be Saturday and she would wake up early again. It would be fine.

Nadia didn't notice her mum crumble on the inside when watching her daughter hesitate. She left Nadia to manage the croissant in private, silently cursing herself for not thinking it through before stopping by Waitrose.

Nadia took a small bite, chewed quickly to avoid the taste and swallowed, then took a slightly bigger bite, repeated the process, and then took another bite

slightly bigger than that and as her teeth sunk into the dough for the third time, her tongue touched a chocolate chip and millions of pleasure signals and chemicals rushed through her brain and her body swelled with ecstasy.

Six minutes later about six croissants' worth of mush was in the toilet bowl. She'd ended up finishing the whole bag and even reached for a slice of Ted's French toast that she practically wolfed down without consideration, and as she was picking stray crumbs off the table, out of the corner of her eye she saw Ted shuffling in and definitely hungry. She jerked away from the table reflexively, euphoria snapped into intense guilt, shame, self-hatred and overwhelming regret, making her stomach churn so uncomfortably she dashed into the bathroom and reversed the eating process. She was crying, and when she remembered her uneaten yogurt she gagged even harder.

"Nadia, what's going on?" her mom knocked on the bathroom door. Through her blurry vision Nadia made out two sets of feet at the bottom. She heard her dad mutter, "how did this happen?" and her mom whisper defensively, "I told her she only needed to eat one."

"I choked," Nadia gasped, acid souring her tongue.

"You sure?" came the response. At this moment Nadia just wanted to bury herself in the safety of her mother's embrace and cry all her problems away. But it was too late for that now.

"I choked," she coughed again, then forced a few extra coughs out for effect. After a moment, the shadows under the door retreated and Nadia sighed in

*Can't Stomach*

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disappointment. That was nowhere near convincing. They knew her too well, which made matters worse because this (whatever this was) was something they had not anticipated, and she could sense them questioning themselves repeatedly without saying anything whenever they looked at her. She hated when they did that, and sometimes wished they would just scream at her instead, but they never said a word.

The damage was done and Nadia was sure she would regret this for the rest of her life. But her family was on the other side of the door, trying to reach out to her. If only she could run far into the other direction and never face them again. Nadia scrubbed the toilet bowl and to avoid leaving the bathroom for a while longer, took a hot shower in an absurd attempt to purge the calories via steam (which she knew was completely illogical, yet at the same time had nothing to lose). When she stepped out, the mirror was fogged and she felt slightly better. She spritzed some air freshener for good measure. Nadia realized her heart was beating rather loudly, and she was tired again.

The weekend had started well and there was no reason to let this ruin the rest of it. It was not yet noon; today could still be a great day for her, mum, dad and Ted. As long as she didn't weigh herself tonight, and only drank green tea for the rest of the day. Green tea improved brain function and boosted metabolism and increased weight loss. It didn't taste as bitter as when she first tried it. It was the perfect remedy. She could also take a flask of it to school each morning and save her lunch money to buy a new box.

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She headed to the kitchen apprehensively. No one looked at her or asked anything, and she relaxed a little. Ted's empty plate was in the sink so she washed that and put the kettle on. Then she went to the fridge and rearranged the contents such that all the candy and biscuits were placed in a lower compartment at Ted's eye level.

Nadia's mother came up behind her. "Sweetheart are you alright?"

Nadia smiled. "I'm fine."

(1999 words)