

It's the Little Things

Monim Wains

On the podium

There was uproar in the air! A deafening cacophony of miscellaneous noise. Cheering, jeering, standing on their feet. All for me. I could barely hear my own thoughts as I took the steps, one by one, to the top. As my eyeline rose above the horizon, the applause tore through the stands, louder somehow. A million flashes of light burst into my eyes, so bright I could barely see. A wall of flags fluttering in the wind, held high by a wall of people. A cauldron filled to the brim with noise and light.

My nose tingled, dripping with beads of sweat, cooled by my breath, racing and pacing out of my chest. I had my fists clenched shut, trying to hold in the emotion. As I stood at the top of the podium, the memories came flooding back. All those years of training, toil and effort, pushing right up to the limit, and then past it.

It had been one long journey, a lifetime in the making. But I was here, finally. Mum would be proud. I looked out into the crowd again; a thousand and one smudges, each a person, and one of them was her. It was worth a wave, hoping she would know I meant it for her.

The air sang with pride, of a country winning on its home turf – and me, their champion! The medal was brought to me slowly, on a platter, sparkling gold. I couldn't keep my eyes off of it – not the gold, but the symbol. The small picture of a figure tearing through the finish line. Victorious.

I bowed, stiff from the waist up, trying to hold it together.

But as the medal slipped into place, the floodgates opened. A grin pierced out of me, ear to ear. The tears gushed down my cheeks. My arm shattered the air, holding the gold aloft. Finally, I beamed. I did it! I did it!

Dancing on ice

Cheeks flush with the freezing cold. Nose numb. Breath become mist. And freedom, oh freedom, flowed. Slipping left and right, the scratch of blades on the ice, etching its surface as I rushed on. Faster and faster, picking up speed with every stroke.

My legs pushed harder each second, holding the weight of the turns, heavier with each step. My feet weaved between the others, slipping through gaps between flailing arms, wobbling beginners. Just like me, once.

But now the air whipped through my hair, poured into my chest, as I slalomed around the obstacles. No danger, my arms balanced and outstretched, floating and flying. Through the ground, my legs up to my hips, my shoulders and fingers, I felt the energy spring. I felt the rush with every pedal of the skates throwing me on. On, until I could hold it in no more.

The fun overtaking, breath breaking, eyes gleaming, I shot into the centre of the rink and leapt! There was an age of silence, my body suspended mid-air. A split second stretched into the freest flicker of flight for me. I inhaled the emotion, elevated elation, reaching for the landing.

The skates crashed into the rink, my body right behind them, steady. Buoyed by the success, just one more step I took. And then, flowering, blooming, my arms curled, legs wrapped, I was spinning. Like a human top, twirling and twisting. I pulled in my body, forcing the feet faster, round and round I went.

With the spinning at its peak, a blur was all I could see. A long trail of the lights and the others, all blended into one dizzying panorama. So I shut my eyes, let my head back, and spun. Lost in my senses, radiating exhilaration. Waves of adrenaline thrown out, as I twirled and leapt and danced the cold evening away.

Seeing a friend

It had been a while. Not too long since we had talked, but far too long since we had last met. My foot tapped in anticipation, agitated by the suspense. The train carriage rocked side to side, speeding gently along the tracks. The rhythmic rolling of the wheel was calming somewhat. I looked at my watch again, counting down the minutes. Just a little time left, I thought to myself, failing to hide the smile.

It was a good day, too, with the sun sitting back in the sky, its yellow warmth bathed the fields.

There were a few clouds here and there, enough to break the glare. But the crisp and clear blue was unimpeded. Perfect weather for a walk.

I felt like fixing my hair, again, for like the tenth time. It was perfectly fine – well, no worse than the normal tumbleweed that had rolled onto my head a few years back. Not that it would matter; it must have been my normal by now, nothing new between us really. Over all those years, all those changes, all of those distances now. How far and how fast we had grown.

The tannoy clicked, and before the announcer could get halfway through the words, I had jumped out of my seat, and was standing at the doors. The worst part of any train journey is the staring contest you have with the button at the end, waiting for it to turn green before you can bash it and hop off. It felt like it took even longer than usual this time, out of spite.

But eventually the doors slid open, and I practically teleported myself onto the platform. My eyes darted around, checking for the old face I knew so well. I couldn't find it at first, and then even after scanning back over the crowd twice over (not that I was looking carefully enough, anyway). But then a little wave caught my eye, sticking out just above the heads. I followed down the arm, that shirt I had always remembered. There it was, at last, that smile.

No running on the platforms, I knew, but speed-walking is fine. Even my etiquette took a back seat as I decided to just apologise to the people I was slightly shoulderering through. I had more important things in mind, more butterflies to keep shut tight.

This trip had been in the making for weeks, after eventually getting even the chance of the possibility. And today, the day had come, after ages too long. We threw our arms out, a grateful hug at last. Both of us holding on, and basically crashing into each other anyway. We held on tight, pulling close. We were back again!

Coffee

The morning chill had set in. It was thin fog, sprawling across the city floor, seeping into the walls of grey concrete and brick. The dreams of a metropolis spilled out into the air from its slumber, an hour or two before the bustle of the day began. By about eight, the roads would be heaving, choking with car horns and police sirens, the high-pitched racket of the school run as parents and prams and footballs threw themselves across the yard. All the while, I would be trying to keep the peace, bracing myself for another day of 'Miss!! He took my [I couldn't care less]!!'

Breeeathate ...

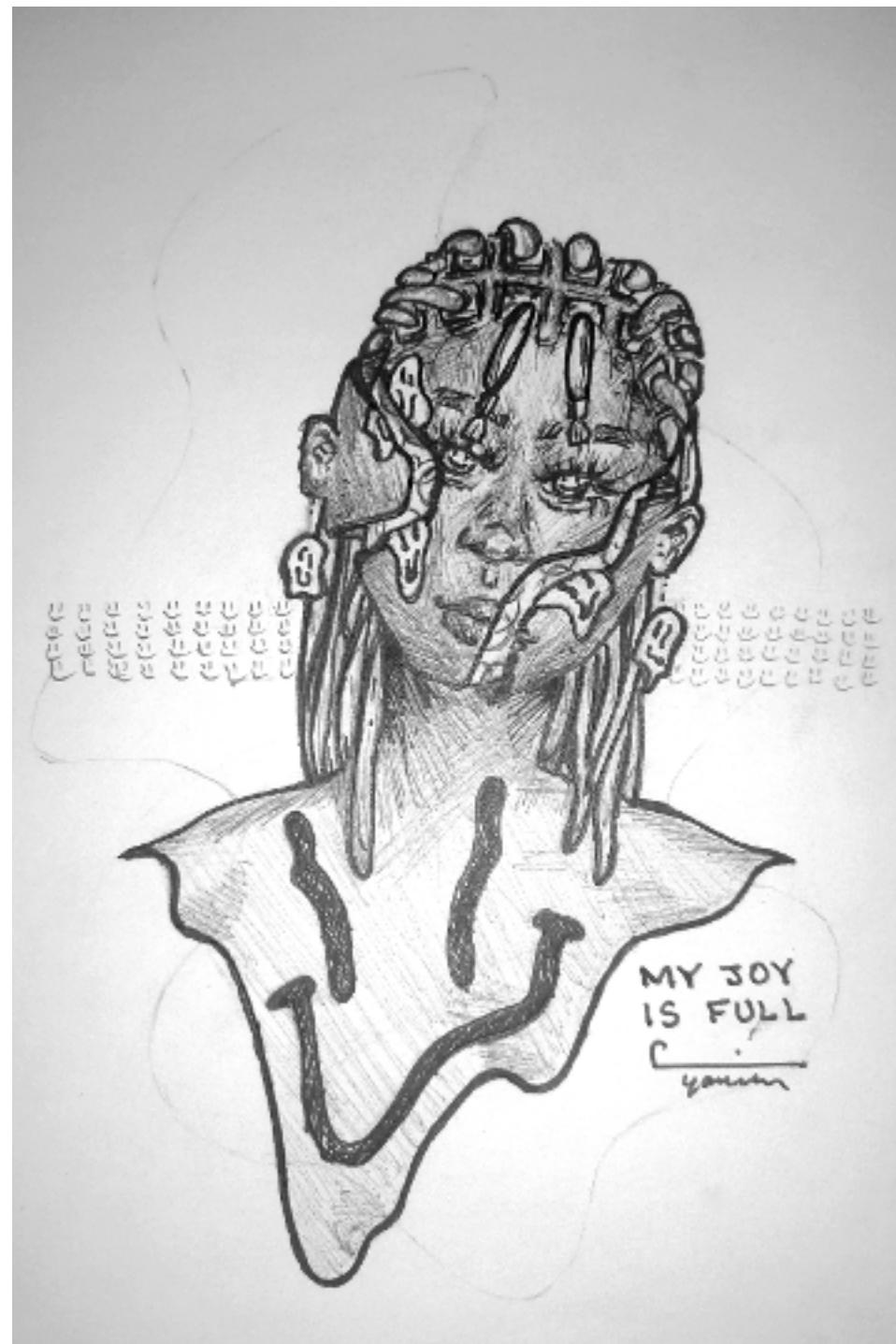
Not right now. Not right now. This was my hour of peace. Away and distant from all of that, looking out over the Lego-brick city that was home. My little window pointed east, and I watched the sun slowly float up, submerged in the orange of winter morning clouds. That little square pane of glass shielded me inside.

I was wrapped up in a blanket, soft and cosy, with my legs tucked right in. The fabric lay on my shoulders, a heavy curtain cocooning me away. I curled my fingers around a mug, feeling its heat spread to my skin. It was too small to hug, but I held it right up to my chin. It felt warmer that way.

And then I heard a tweet, quick and gentle. The birds had woken for the day. Two fluttered across the window, like they were playing for the morning. They were my windchime, the highlight of my day.

I took a few moments, just soaking it all in, eyes shut. My sweet haven amidst the burgeoning buildings of life. Almost without thinking, my hands lifted up, and dipped into the coffee. The steam climbed up into my head, wisps of caramel cocoa. An olfactory lullaby to send me to heaven. I sipped, aware of everything around me. Aware of this moment, all of it.

The chocolate-coloured liquor filled me in, nectar for the morning. Me, my coffee, and the birds. It was bliss. ■



My Joy is Full by Ayomikun Bolaji

A Word from the Editors

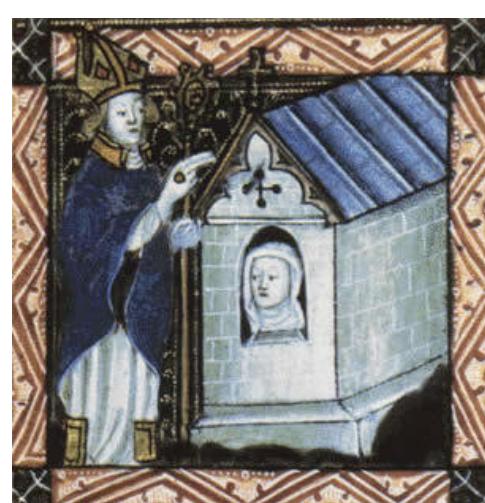
Jerric Chong

A very happy New Year, and welcome back from all us at *The Poor Print* as we embark on Hilary 2022!

'Joy', like so many other utterances in this language of ours, arrived with the conquering Normans, and derives ultimately from Latin *gaudium* through French *joie* (also meaning 'jewel'), which then became *joye* in Middle English.

The word 'joy' is first attested in a treatise known as the *Ancene Riwle*, written in the early 13th century. Strangely enough, it was a manual of rules for anchoresses, women who chose to be walled up in a small, dark cell to devote themselves to a solitary life of prayer and contemplation for the rest of their lives. I can't imagine that many of us would derive much joy from an experience like that!

But the medieval author offers this advice to an anchoress who might start having enough of her isolated lifestyle: 'Efter pe spreoue on ende penne is



pe muchele Ioi' [After the testing, at the end then is great joy]. We quickly see here that joy is far from being an immediate feeling of ecstasy or instant gratification – it is instead the culmination of a long and often difficult journey towards a distant but noble aim.

In this issue, you'll find fleeting snapshots of moments of joy, found both in the elation of a winner's acclamation by a rapturous crowd, and in the intimate reunion of close but separated friends; in that unutterable feeling of flow when fully engaged in an activity you love, and simply in the aroma of freshly brewed coffee. Each is a dream long yearned for being brought to fulfilment, and it is this from in which joy then comes.

But Joy is also a canine companion, enigmatically (but yet poetically) named in spite of a smile that hints otherwise, and the harmony of perfect balance achieved after having striven towards it long. Sometimes we need to be reminded to proclaim joy in our lives, to sing out in lyrical melody with much rejoicing and gladness.

We are often encouraged to be full of joy. But how could that look like, and might it even be possible to have an overabundance of joy?

These and other questions may strike your mind as you explore this issue's contributions. So as you go about a new term's worth of work, pause and ponder about what you could be joyful for. After all, if medieval hermits could find joy in strict seclusion, why can't you? ■

