



One Thing Happy

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Virgin Slate

Issue 3

One Thing Happy

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She was seventeen. That much she knew; that much she could be sure of; that much was hers at least. She held onto that thought as the heavy 'thump', 'thump' in the corridor outside grew louder. She knew what was coming and knew that the worst wouldn't happen for another few hours at least.

The key turned in the lock, it turned easily; she knew later the man would struggle to unlock her door, when he came back a few hours later, stumbling and reeking of alcohol. That smell wasn't so bad; at least it covered his body odour somewhat. She knew that later it wouldn't matter, that she wouldn't be able to escape it. But that was later. And after that, Sarah had formed a plan.

The man plodded in to her white - somewhat grubby at this stage, with mould beginning to creep up the walls - room. Sarah didn't mind the mould, it was something to look at, something that had grown up here with her, something she had begun to consider as her own. Greens of varying shades made up the mould with glistening silver threads and fluffy grey strings streaking through it. She had touched it once, soft and spongy, but a piece had come away in her hand and so she had never touched it again. She didn't want to harm it, it was all she had. That and her plan. She nearly grinned when she thought about what she was going to do, but then she remembered she was supposed to be drugged and caught herself.

He grabbed her arm roughly as she suppressed the urge to struggle. The needle pierced her bruised skin easily and the cool liquid streamed into her system. It made her instantaneously dizzy and she began to sway. He grinned, squeezed her arm more than was necessary, leaving three more angry red marks on her arm, before yanking out the needle and leaving. Sarah let the drugs take her, she knew it wouldn't last long, the effects had begun to wear off as the years went by and every day she was getting more and more of herself back. How she had managed to keep this to herself was beyond her, obviously the big oaf of a man wasn't very clever. She heard the lock click shut, once, twice and then the heavy thump of his steps as the man went off to wherever he went. She hugged herself tight and rocked back and forth as the pain came on, not as sharp as it used to be, more like

a dull throb and she was still able to think around it. She couldn't control her body though, and knew she would soon go completely numb. Lately it had been wearing off after about an hour or so, so she knew she had time yet.

Slowly the pins and needles began to prick as she regained feeling in her body and with that, slowly movement again. She guessed she'd have little more than an hour to finalise her plan, little more than an hour and a half and she would finally be free!

Scurrying around her little white room, she collected all the needle points she hidden over the years, since the drugs had become ineffective enough to leave her with some coherence. She plucked around thirty from her various hiding places in the mould. Her mould. She smiled fondly as she remembered the SECOND time she had discovered the interesting use of her mould. When squished between her fingers and chewed slightly so it mingled with her saliva, it became a fairly adequate glue. She made three sets of ten with her needle points, still dangerously sharp, and furiously chewing and spitting out the furry mould. She didn't have much time left. She could hear the distant unsteady footsteps of her captor pounding down the hall. She hurriedly stuffed the makeshift weapons into her socks, he never took them off. She knew exactly what she was going to do. Sarah allowed herself a small grin before settling down into the drug addled position he expected to find her in. The key missed the lock, once, twice, slipped and fell to the floor. He was drunk. She sighed as she resigned herself to the ordeal ahead, a half hour at most and never again would she have to go through with it. She held on to that one thing happy as he stumbled into her room. He closed the door behind him, but was too drunk to lock them back inside. She'd been counting on that.

He leered at her as he made his way towards her. She cowered a small bit, wishing it wouldn't happen but thankful it would be the last time. He unbuckled his belt and let his pants fall, his throbbing membrane barely contained in his grubby, grey-white boxers. He ripped off her dress and she remembered not to fight back, she was meant to be drugged after all. She lay limply in his arms as his mouth bit her lip, drawing blood, and his podgy fingers groped her breasts, twisting her nipples so she thought they might come off. His other hand groped lower, scratching sensitive parts that were already sore and still raw from the last time. Finally he could contain himself no more and he thrust deep inside her. She concentrated on her plan of

escape and willed herself out of this place as she was harshly rocked back and forth. After an eternity she sensed he was nearly done and it was time to enact her plan; she reached for her sock, for the weapons she had hidden there, but with a shuddering jerk he was finished. Lightning quick her hand was grabbed as he jammed another needle straight into her neck. She screamed with the agony and shock of it and then her body was paralysed. She couldn't move! Her pupils dilated with fear as his whiskery face came close to her ear.

"I wondered how long it would take you to fight back", he whispered. "I knew you could move, that the drugs wore off, your body became immune to them over the years. I liked that you gave yourself to me willingly."

Sarah wanted to scream that she didn't, she wanted no such thing, but she couldn't move.

"We developed a new drug, not sure of the side effects yet, but your mind will be untouched. You will be awake, be able to see, hear, smell, taste, comprehend what is being done to you, yet be able to do nothing about it. My friends are waiting outside, I'll go let them in."

He sniggered as he fondled her breast once more before going towards the door. A tear seeped down the side of her face as a low pitched keening began. It was her, the only noise she could make, as man after burly, rotten, repulsive man made his way into the room to do as they pleased with her. And there was nothing she could do about it. Her one thing happy, her plan, was gone.

I had firmly resolved, in early October, that there would be no last minute impulsive buying of Christmas presents, often unwanted ones, not this year. So now, here I am in Grafton Street in early December, scouring the festive shops for appropriate presents. I am pleasantly surprised at my achievements, so I will reward myself with a steaming hot cappuccino at Bewleys. Suddenly, I am stopped short in my tracks by an outstretched warm hand clasp and an “Oh my God, can’t believe it is you! We meet again after all the years”.

It was my long lost friend of over thirty years ago, best friends we had been, promising to be there for one another “till death do us part”. In those far-off carefree adolescent days, who would consider the potential obstacles of emigration, distance, relationships or familial pressure; there were no possible impediments to anything then.

Well, two hours, three cappuccinos and four éclairs later, our surprise encounter ended for now. One casual summary throw-away remark by my friend as she parted set in train a whole series of self-analysis, self-doubting, soul searching thoughts: “So glad you have achieved real happiness, some of us never do”, she gently intoned, as she walked sadly away.

On my long train journey home, several definitions and questions on the essence of real happiness plagued my mind. What is happiness? Is it self-fulfilment, or an all-embracing ideal defined by external, material and geographic circumstances? Is it within oneself or completely external and controlled by forces outside ones’ control? Are we, as it were, destined from the outset for happiness or unhappiness? The definition of happiness surely changes as one develops and matures. A baby is happy with a bottle, cuddles and sleep; a teenager with discos, boy/girlfriends, awakening of sexuality; to an adult, happiness revolves around love, sharing, maybe creating and nurturing new life.

While happiness, per se, is as unique to each individual as one's DNA, there must be a common x-factor inherent in all adult stages. If, in maturity, we can combine the fresh joyful enthusiasm of childhood with the learned wisdom of experience then I feel happiness will not escape us as we go beyond the realm of solely sense, to a higher level of happiness.

Oh dear, the train is pulling in to Kent Station; must get my case and suspend my deep pondering for now!!

Oysters

If oysters be the food of love then come with me
A salty lot, you know not what it is
To drink deep of the water
But be thirsty.
Rough, yes outside
But oh! So smooth, sliding and gliding.
Six, eight, no, "I will more".
Feisty festivals, yes
But give me the food
On a warm summer Sunday evening.

A McDonald's Father

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“It’s going to be a great month” says the boy,
“There’s the match and your new place and my
Birthday and Christmas
And the New Year.
It’ll be great”.

I sit, a McDonald’s father, and watch
Him with wonder,
And think again about the foolishness
Of making assumptions
About any person,
In any situation.

It’s a happy thing, this wonder
This young boy teaching
Me to be still alive
Still living.

It’s a happy thing
To smile.

“Tell me one thing happy”, she said.

“What?”, I replied, trying to convey a polite but meaningful amount of weariness with my tone. It didn’t work.

“One thing happy”, she insisted, “Tell me one thing happy”.

“Yes, I heard you, but I don’t know what you mean”. My tone, I thought, was even and carefully patient.

“Well, you were saying you hate your job and you have a cold and somebody emailed you” she explained, “so I asked you to tell me one thing happy”.

I raised my eyebrows at her. I would have only raised one eyebrow, but I can’t raise one eyebrow without squinting the other eye.

“...to cheer you up”, she clarified.

I gave up and gave in. “Okay”, speaking slowly, voice even, “you want me to tell you about one happy thing, is that it?”

“No! Your *one thing happy!*”, and then she grinned at me, like I was a child who didn’t understand.

“I don’t know what that means”, I repeated, “It still makes no sense”

“Your one thing happy”, she persisted, “Tell me one thing happy”.

I knew it wouldn’t end satisfactorily, but I tried to explain, “Yes”, I said, “you keep saying that, but it still makes no sense. I can tell you *about* a happy thing, if that’s what you want. I can tell you about *lots* of happy things, but *one thing happy* makes no sense. The syntax is all wrong.”

“The syntax? Christ, you have issues!”, she complained.

I didn’t feel anger, I felt frustration, and (if you’ll excuse the overlaboured and somewhat clichéd vocabulary), righteous indignation.

“I have issues?!”, I wanted to say, but I didn’t. I didn’t want to think where *that* conversation would end. Instead, I countered her perseverance with reason, rather than emotion: “I have *an* issue, not issues. I don’t know what you want me to tell you. Your choice of words confuses me. I honestly don’t know if you are being lazy and using a weird choice of words ‘cause you think it sounds nice, or if there is a genuine deeper meaning behind your particular choice of words that I am not grasping”. I paused and made a point of taking a deep breath. She didn’t respond, she just looked at me, with a bit of a smirk. “If all you’re asking for”, I continued, “is for me to tell you about a happy thing, just say that. But if my *one thing happy* means something special then you’ll have to explain what.”

“It doesn’t *mean* anything”, she began again, “So you don’t have one thing happy? That’s very sad.”

She might have been joking; I couldn’t tell. There may have been sarcasm in her tone, but as her tone was unflinching, persistently, incessantly chirpy, identifying sarcasm within it was like looking for a grain of salt in a bag of marshmallows.

“I didn’t say I don’t have a single happy thing in my life”, I said through closed teeth, “what I said was that I don’t know what one thing happy *means*. I have lots of happy things to tell you about: my job, my apartment, the trips I’ve planned, my family, my dinner from las....

“But you hate your job!”, she interrupted.

“No, I don’t”, I answered, “I don’t like some par....”

“You said you hate it”

Now she looked at me blankly, “your job doesn’t sound like much of a laugh to me”, she opined, looking a little sad for me.

“You don’t even know what I do”, I replied (any conversations about my job inevitably ended in blank expressions and interrupting questions that lead nowhere), “so maybe it is my *one thing happy*...” I trailed off. Realising I had now said the words myself, I grimaced and felt a bit dirty.

“I don’t need to know what you do to know that it’s not your *one thing happy*”, she commented.

“Okay.”, I said, “Fine. It’s not”, I hoped this was the end of it.

“You’re very cranky sometimes.”

The words “fuck off” did a little dance on the end of my tongue. If my teeth weren’t still clenched, they would probably have jumped out. But they didn’t. I just walked out. And closed the door. And opened my teeth.

“Fuck off”, I said. One thing happy.

About VirginSlate

VirginSlate is a group of would-be creative writers based in Cork, Ireland.

Our inaugural session happened in the Slate Bar in Cork on Tuesday, 11th October 2011. We can blame the teacher of our creative writing class for cancelling that night, so we had nothing better to do than go to the pub and get creative.

Each of our fortnightly issues will begin with a theme (a word or a phrase). We then have two weeks to submit a piece of writing on that theme. The writing can use any form and take the theme in any direction the author wishes.

Every two weeks the group meets (in a pub) to discuss the various submissions and decides upon a theme for the following fortnight. The authors then have a chance to make any edits they like before the submissions are published online.

We provide a forum for would-be creative writers to practice their writing and get some friendly feedback and constructive criticism.

Selecting a theme each fortnight makes it easier to stop wondering what to write about and to concentrate on just writing something.

New members are welcome to either join us in the pub or to submit entries by email or post.

Email us at: virginslate@gmail.com

Or follow us on Facebook: <http://www.facebook.com/VirginSlate>