**HERO IN THE LOOP**

A loop, defined in many ways, from a curved shape to a movement in ice skating. In my case; if something runs in a loop, or is on a loop, it runs continuously so that the same things are repeated again and again…

It was still dark outside when my alarm clock went off. With hesitation, I slowly opened my eyes. I lazily brought the glass of water on my nightstand to my mouth, leaving a faded ring on the dark wood, and took a small sip. I dug my toes in the furry white rug, before putting on my slippers. As I was walking to the bathroom, I mumbled a song I heard on the radio last night while taking the subway back home. I was in a pretty good mood today, feeling energised at this early hour is not usual for me. I looked in the mirror, seeing my sleepy face I slightly smiled and went on with brushing my teeth. I wouldn't describe myself as the prettiest in the universe, but according to my grandma, my dark abyss of eyes could change the flow of time. After my endless skincare routine, I came upon my constant problem - what to wear today, starring at the overstuffed closet, wide open to let it air through the day, I went for a pair of black smart trousers, a white blouse, a pink blazer and silver jewellery to give a variety to the outfit. Before grabbing an apple from the bowl on the kitchen table, I took a glance at myself in the mirror at the end of the corridor. Checking if everything was okay, I swiftly run my fingers through my short, slightly wavy, chestnut hair and blew a few kisses.

The kitchen was clean and tidy as I liked it. I never really cook, I admit the lack of time is just an excuse for me to not bother with all the mess from the tentatives to cook a proper meal. I noticed the clock on the wall had stopped, so I looked for some AA+ batteries to make it work again.

I looked at the silver watch on my wrist to adjust the minute hand on the clock and panicked for a quick second realising I was two minutes behind my usual schedule. I left the clock on the table and walked briskly through the hallway grabbing my pre-packed bag and the bunch of keys on the stand near the door.

Locking the front door I could feel a wet lick on my ankle, it was just Mittens, the neighbour’s cat. Always ready for caresses he snuggled onto my leg, it was his way of asking for some affection and attention. Despite my hurry, I gave in and petted that light brown ball of fur. “Strange,” I mumbled the moment my skin touched Mittens's silky mane, “You have a surprising soft and smooth fur, today, Mittens.” Now I was almost running to the first tube station, the entrance marked with a circular sign. The stale smell of overheated steal hit me and before I knew it, - I was already trapped in a big crowd of people who were all trying to be in time somewhere. When I once again saw the bright light of the now fully risen sun, I took a deep breath, relieved, I managed to escape the morning madness on the underground. It was not over yet, although I was now just 20 seconds behind my carefully calculated schedule, I still had plenty of things to do before showing up at my office. The first stop was my favourite coffee shop, wherein my opinion makes the best takeaway latte ever and they never forget to put a kind message next to my name on the cup. To get there I had to walk past the park, I always spend my free days on the bench near the fountain reading all the different books I find in the library and fantasying about diverse lives I could be living. I could be a princess promised to the son next in line for the enemy's realm’s throne or a super-smart detective solving all kinds of mysteries or maybe a courageous space explorer...

For the past two years, since I`ve been working at the advertising agency, every time I cross the public garden there's a man running his laps around the park, whether it be raining or snowing he never misses a day. The white hair and multiple pronounced wrinkles indicate his old age, 80 or something. Despite his golden years, the man was quite in shape. The wave I gave him brightened up his face, he smiled softly and preceded with his morning activity. Sipping my coffee, I noticed how beautiful the morning sky was today, not even a cloud in the sea of light blue and a few stripes of pastel pink and orange. I felt warm and serene inside, I had the feeling that nobody could ruin that moment or anything in general, it was so perfect, so magical, …

Today was rather peaceful in the city, normally there would be ambulance sirens, sounds of hammers and drills, dogs barking, people arguing, children screaming and chasing each other on their way to school. Today, instead, there were only beautiful melodies the birds were singing. Now being aware of this my body froze for a moment, I got chills. The soft breeze brought a stripe of my hair to my face tickling my nose, the sneeze woke me up from a semi-trans state. A rush of adrenaline raced from my head to my legs. The green light appeared on the walking man's silhouette on the traffic light indicating it is safe to cross the road. My eyes went exploring the surroundings in order for me to calm down and pull myself together. I must admit the bright and colourful buildings brought some kind of calmness into me, I spotted a lady adjusting a disk-shaped neon sign above her bakery, then a sweet scent of freshly baked croissants filled the air surrounding me, exciting a sense of hunger in me. Exiting the bakery shop I realized how much time had passed since had a freshly baked croissant; crispy and buttery, the sweet taste of jam - I could get used to that, but the 5 minutes spent in the bakery could be a problem on chaotic days like today... Licking the residue of jam from my index finger I continued down the street, racing against the clock, already spotting my next underground station. Once I arrived at my office, I noticed a big sign: OUT OF ORDER, right by the elevator. “Great,” I thought to myself, “you’re always working and just today, of all days, you decide to break down.” My office is on the 8th floor, you can imagine the state I was in when I had finally arrived at my workspace. The project on an advertising campaign for brand new outdoor lamps was already waiting for me on the desk. “Wow, ok, that's different,” I was used to always getting the most boring projects, don't get me wrong I love this job, it's a plum job for me, I was just sick and tired of -for a clean and fresh smile- slogans, or even worse -best price, best quality-. This was new, my boss must have hit her head or something. I started working on the campaign and it was surprisingly easy, compared to other projects this one flew by like nothing, before I knew it was already 5 o’clock, time to go home. I was so invested in this project. Now the posters were made, the advertising strategy too, I have contacted all the potential sellers, the only thing missing was the slogan, the task I spend the most time on, always. It has become automatic for me to know exactly what to do and how to do it but the most important marketing part has always been my weakness. I decided to let it set in a little, maybe I would come up with something on my way home or when showering. “I’ll just wait for the idea, I don't have to hurry, I still do have plenty of days to finish and this was the only remaining thing to do.” Right in that moment, my boss came to me all panicked: “I'm sorry, I know I have just given you a new project but, Loren, she got sick and I see you are ahead on your project, could you please take on her work, I really have nobody else to ask.” I smiled and assured her I would take care of it, after all, toothpaste brands weren't something strange to me. “Thank you. Loren said she had almost finished, but I know she likes cutting corners so could you please check on everything once you're done and fix some things?” Surely my boss always loved to load us with work and save herself for important meetings and projects. “I’ll try to do my best.” Satisfied with all I had done and a bit irritated because of all that extra work I had to do now, I packed everything and went home, on my way I stopped at the supermarket to buy some apples and other groceries. Can you believe the price on the receipt was exactly 33,33. I walked past the cinema, there was a huge poster of a movie called The Roundabout exposed outside, I got curious and checked the dates of the screenings and unfortunately, the only one still not sold out was on the day of the meeting with the outdoor lights company. “I guess I'll have to wait to see it. What a pity!” Once at home I couldn't wait to throw the heals off my aching feet. I took a hot shower and got into my comfy tracksuit, then I looked through my cupboards to find some ideas what to prepare for supper, “I must admit, I feel very creative today!” I was dancing and singing in my kitchen while searching for some good recipes in the cookbook my mother once brought me and that I may have opened once till this day. Soon after, the whole flat was filled with an exquisite smell of pork chops and baked potatoes and vegetables. I was quite amazed by my newly discovered cooking skills. “I feel like eating ice cream,” the small space left in my stomach needed to be filled so I decided to go for an evening walk to a nearby coffee shop, I had always seen people getting ice cream there, but I never had the chance to try it. “I guess now is the right moment.” Despite my fear of walking alone after dusk, I confidently marched through the dark streets. The cafeteria was luckily still open, I got two perfectly rounded scoops; dark chocolate and black cherry. I made it home safely, ate my ice cream and placed myself on the sofa watching a series. About one hour in I got tired and decided to go to sleep, I walked into the kitchen to fill a glass of water for the night and remembered I haven't done the dishes and everything was a hot mess. I hate procrastinating, but let's say I'll treat myself today at tomorrow’s expanse.

The alarm clock went off, I could feel the coldness of the morning already and surely it was not inviting. The sip of cold water did not help my grumpiness. I walked to the bathroom, as usual, brushed my teeth, did my makeup and got dressed. I wasn't feeling particularly playful with my outfit today, so I went straight for a grey suit and black heels. I combed through my hair and put a few clips in it to keep everything in place. I ate my apple, grabbed my bag and so soon I was out of the door heading towards the tube station. The weather was of the same colour as my suit, nothing special, another murky day. Closer and closer I was to the centre, taller and greyer the buildings were becoming. The suffocating feeling convinced me to stop and take a seat on a nearby bench. I was carefully observing people passing by. All these dull faces imbued with annoyance and anger... Everybody looking at their feet on the pavement, nobody’s eyes meeting, the only words I could hear being uttered were “excuse me” or “sorry” when the spiritless statues wanted to make their move through the mass walking side by side. They seemed like robots, looking mechanical, automatically going on with whatever they were doing. “Do we always look like that?” I jumped on my feet and made my way to the coffee shop, on my way I waved at the old man running again, yes, he returned the wave, but today his lips weren't curved and his eyes were foggy. “Why does everybody look like there was a spell cast upon them?” At least my coffee tasted as usual. “As usual,” I repeated whispering my thoughts. Today, unlike yesterday, I could only smell the wet asphalt and concrete, no sweet smell of freshly baked pastries. Suddenly, I was aware of everything around me, hollow, low-frequency sounds, cars going so fast their wheels seem to be going backwards, loud honks of drivers stuck in the traffic jam, drills and other heavy machinery building more blocks of cement... Everything was so overwhelming I couldn't hide my frustration once I arrived at the office, “Hold it, please!” as I entered the elevator, I said to my colleague there was something odd in the atmosphere, she looked at me with a straight expression, before turning back to face the elevator door as she answered me: “Everything looks normal to me.”

For the rest of the day, time dragged by and working on the toothpaste advertising strategy sucked out the last remaining drops of my already so low energy. As if it wasn’t already hard enough today, it was very difficult to communicate with others, everybody gave shallow talks and answers and was annoyed just by a simple question such as: “Where’s the stapler?”

At home, I cleaned everything and it was a torture, I swore to myself I’ll never make a mess like this ever again. I was so exhausted after that I went straight to bed. I had a hard time falling asleep, I just couldn’t stop thinking about the day before, it was so different, so weird and yet it felt like a new experience, I was excited. Something that sadly faded away the moment I woke up this morning, leaving just a plain flavour of what life could taste like.

For the next few days I was drowning in work, so I barely spoke to anybody or thought about anything else besides the projects I was dealing with. After my boss recognised the charity in me, she quickly took advantage of that and the person as I am, I can’t turn down people, especially if they’re in desperate need of help. Then I find myself taking on so much work I can barely keep up with deadlines.

I was driving, trough endless streets, without knowing where I was going, racing, the vehcle had no breaks, I couldn’t even recognise the surroundings, everything was blurry and foggy. There was only me on the road, not even a shadow or a slight figure of a person or car. Finally, I spotted a roundabout. I found myself looping, the more I tried to follow an exit, the faster I was spinning around. I even tried turning on the pointing signal, nothing worked. Suddenly I saw a sunbeam indicating the right exit, I followed it… The next thing I knew, I was all sweaty lying in my bed, breathing heavily and most of all, I was confused. I stared at the ceiling for some time, to process what I had just dreamed of.

It was the day, the day of the meeting with the outdoor lights company, I was so thrilled to finally have a chance to present something new. The presentation went silky smooth. “Light your path.” Everybody applauded directly after I proudly finished with the slogan. Those words were echoing in my head for the last few days and I couldn’t get rid of them or make any sense out of. Suddenly I knew. I grabbed my stuff and made my way through the labyrinth of squared work stations, deftly trying not to hit anybody. A colleague asked me surprised, where I was going. I remember saying: “To buy my outdoor light.”