

## *The Blueprint by Ieva Lākute*

It's morning. You're usually in a hurry. But not today. Today your head feels heavy. You hit snooze three times before you finally pull yourself out of bed. There are things that need doing. Even if it doesn't matter. Even if there's no hope.

But here you are, dressed and ready to meet someone, even though you're working from home. You look like someone who's about to do something proper, at least from the waist up. You leave the camera off though, so that they can't detect your sunken cheeks. If they knew, they'd probably talk you into leaving your job. And without work, it would just be you and your thoughts.

You remember college; how you loved to invade the unsuspecting canvas with bold splashes of paint during the Fine Art lessons. You thought you were being rebellious, daring, different and cool. Whenever you showed your experiments to your mum, excited, she just smiled.

‘You’ll grow out of it soon,’ she said.

‘Not everyone can do that,’ she said.

‘Someone has to have a ‘proper job’, or the world will fall apart.’

That was twenty years ago, and the world has fallen apart. You've adopted her words like your own. If you knew where you'd be today (still single, still dissatisfied), you may have argued with her back then; tried to push it harder.

But you liked stability. Enjoyed a nice paycheck. She said you should be saving up for a mortgage, so you don't end up like her. Well, you haven't started yet, but you did manage to pay for her carers when the time came. There had only ever been the two of you, and you're glad that she was the first one to go. That she won't have to watch you suffer and wonder whether her life had amounted to anything proper.

You spend today just like all the other days – with your back bent over your laptop in hard labour. You're breathing, but not really. You can almost feel your lungs reminisce of the day you caught your first breath. Longing to feel the first movement of your limbs; the first beat of your heart that wasn't smothered by water.

You escaped the water and got relatively lucky. You were born in a free country – or as free as they come, anyway. And you've made the most of it, given the circumstances. You're definitely not an idiot. You absorbed enough information from books, movies, television series and crusty university lecturers to know that your dream of becoming an artist was flawed from the start, anyway. So, what does it matter that you didn't pursue it?

You've forgotten how to paint by now; or even how to stand up straight. All you want these days is sleep. You wonder whether you manifested your own illness – you've been longing to sleep for years.

You did allow yourself a fortnight each year, three weeks at most, to do all the things that weren't 'proper' for the remaining forty-nine. On your last holiday, you sipped liquids from coconut shells, went swimming in shark-infested waters, and danced until sunrise. You probably wouldn't have the energy for it now.

You close your laptop. You're finished with work for the day, and you need to find another way to sedate your fear. You ring up some friends; you haven't told them of your condition yet. You meet them, an hour later, at a pub. You fake laughter, pay for their shots, and, after several rounds, move onto a club. As you descend the stairs to the night club's entrance, you decide to take one last chance at being a dancer.

You hit the dance floor, gesturing for your friends to follow you. But your limbs have grown tone deaf. They take no pleasure in the act, weighed down by your mind. You've trained it to pick up on social cues at the expense of everything else. And you're not drunk enough yet to forget your own training.

You sit down and let your friends carry on. The room is spinning. The diamanté lights on the black ceiling of the club remind you of a starry sky. And you're not even high. Not this time, anyway. Maybe you're dying. Or maybe you're just seeing it for the first time... There's you and there's your ancestors, with a blueprint of you embossed on their hunter-gatherer limbs. They're naked but unashamed; with no language, simpler. They start to run, and you follow them, into a dark ancient forest where spirits roam free. Drops of rain feel cool against your skin. You look down. You've no clothes to keep you warm, and you can hear the wolves howling.

Someone is pointing. There's a fire in the distance; a cave with a fire. You race with deer and night butterflies; you want to get there before anyone else does. As you enter the cave, someone gets up, dips their hand in a pot and smears your face red. Without thinking about it, you dip your hand in the same pot, and plant a red handprint on the wall. You take a step back to contemplate your own creation, while the fire spits, and the grass clears its lungs after a rainfall.

The next day the newspapers will report the mysterious death of a man in a night-club. Someone will roll their eyes. Someone will cry. And someone else, a complete stranger, will set out to restore you, bit by bit, from the cosmic dust.