

Her Day

Shira Hanovich

PROSE, HONORABLE MENTION (Grades 10-12)

12:03 AM

It's a few minutes after midnight when Stephanie finally returns home, her feet aching from work and her clothes reeking of smoke. But that's usually how it goes. She peels off the offending attire and steps into the shower. The hot water is relaxing, but no amount of citrus soap can get the smoky smell off her skin. Still, Stephanie stays under the stream a little longer, unwilling to step out into the cold of her barely heated studio. It's only when the water starts to run cold that she finally rinses off and dries herself. The rest of her nightly routine is embedded into her muscle memory and requires very little thought--face cleanser, toner, brush teeth, lock the door, floss, check the door, into bed. Then check the door once more, just for good measure.

1:18 - 6:45 AM

Stephanie sleeps. Not soundly, not in the slightest, but she never fully slips out of slumber. The only sign of her nightmares is her breath, occasionally speeding up and catching in her throat only to slow once more. Over and over and over again until the clock on her phone flicks to a quarter to seven and her alarm rings out. Stephanie doesn't wake up gasping and clammy, she hardly moves at all. Her eyes peel open and she stares dolefully at the popcorned ceiling, remaining still a few seconds more until her alarm strikes again with ringing insistence. She smacks it off and rolls out of bed, unwillingly ready to start the day.

7:03 AM

Stephanie always walks to the gym, and she always walks there in her pajamas. It saves her time. She has nowhere to spend those extra minutes, but it makes her feel in control. The gym is empty; she's the first one there, beaten only by the lady working the opening shift. She finally changes out of her pajamas in the locker room, stuffing the fluffy clothing into a locker along with most of the contents of her gym bag. Her sneakers squeak against the tiles as she leaves, but the locker room returns to silence once the door falls shut.

7:23 AM

There's no pattern to Stephanie's gym routine—the only consistent exercise is a twenty-minute run. Stephanie is not an athlete, never has been, but she's sure that it's a good skill to have. Sometimes she tests her strength on the rowing machines, other days she chooses to lift weights. She used to do squats and stretches every

day, but there were a few people in the gym that were a bit *too* interested in her hamstring stretches, so she stopped. There are times when she still gets looks from the other gym-goers, but they are easier to ignore. Usually. Today, the man slowly moving his yoga mat closer to her treadmill is starting to get on her nerves. Not even the tinny, ear-bursting pop music flowing through her earbuds can drown out his innuendos. There is no point in trying to ignore the man any longer; he isn't getting the message. She opens her mouth, ready to unleash a vile string of insults against him, but quickly regains a grasp on her impulse control. Stephanie shuts off her treadmill and heads towards the locker room, *accidentally* stepping on the man's toes as she leaves. How could she avoid it? He was just standing so close to her.

8:11 AM

Stephanie cannot cook. Anything involving more heat than a microwave can provide is far too intense for her. There's a coffee shop a few blocks away from her apartment, and she finds breakfast there instead. Breakfast consists of a sesame seed bagel and a small espresso, with little variation from day to day. Stephanie always uses the leftover change to buy a newspaper. Print journalism is dying, but she's a stickler for her routines. The block letters at the top of the page spell out today's interesting news; **'The Pattern Continues: Sixth Fire in Salem in Under Two Weeks.'** Stephanie skims the rest of the article, only mildly interested in the details. Victim was city council member Francis DeSanto. Police believe arson to be a likely answer, especially after controversial vote that took place last Sunday...et cetera. Stephanie has never been particularly interested in politics. She leaves the newspaper spread open on the table, the headline on display to the rest of the coffee shop.

9:01 AM - 5:30 PM

Being a hotel receptionist is just about the least interesting day job one can have. That's what Stephanie thinks, anyways. It's even worse when one is an overqualified architect with absolutely no job prospects in any nearby locations and little aptitude for small talk. The hours drag by slowly. Much, much too slowly. Stephanie fills her hours by clicking around on the computer; sifting through more local news and loading up random websites. A good half hour is spent on google earth, zooming in on random towns near Salem. There's a list of the most notable spots in a notepad on her desk. It's a list of all the places that might have better career prospects, she says. She doesn't care if her manager finds out that she's actively looking to relocate. He knows the drudgery of average life just as well as Stephanie does. He'd probably support her efforts. Only if he finds out, of course.

6:27 PM

Stephanie doesn't have a car. This doesn't stop her from frequenting the local Safeway. Gas station hot dogs are disgusting, but she doesn't have enough money saved up for anything else. There's a sale going on. Buy one item, get the second for a quarter of the price. The place is probably going out of business. That's bound to mess up her routine. Stephanie counts up the cash in her wallet and buys two 5-gallon cans of gas, saving quite a bundle on the second unit. She has to walk the cartons back home, but she doesn't mind. It's good practice.

9:45 PM

It's dark when Stephanie leaves her apartment again. She's changed out of her work uniform, now wearing an old black t-shirt and a pair of running pants. The winter gloves on her hands make it difficult to carry the gasoline, but she manages. The lighter in her pocket clinks accusingly against her keys, but she pays the objects little mind. She's too focused on not getting lost. She had the route all planned out this morning, but that was hours ago, and she left the map in her desk.

10:37 PM

Her sneakers crunch against the gravel driveway leading up to the house. It took her far too long to find it, but she's here now. Stephanie uncaps the first carton of gasoline and methodically walks around the house, leaving a trail of flammable liquid behind her as she goes. There's enough to spread some up the trees in the yard too, so she does. The second carton is used to fill the inside of the single-story house. The whole place is made of wood, so she doesn't need to worry about it catching; that's been an issue in the past. She empties out the last of the can on the shag rug in the center of the entryway and takes a deep breath, reveling in the scent of imminent destruction. Stephanie flicks the lighter on with practiced ease and sets the carpet alight, running out of the house as the fire trickles across the floor and up the walls. She'd love to stay and watch as the house gets consumed by the blaze, it's such a gorgeous sight, but she has to get back home. It's a long trek back. Good thing she went running this morning.

12:04 AM

It's a few minutes after midnight when Stephanie finally returns home, her feet aching from work and her clothes reeking of smoke. But that's usually how it goes.

Shira Hanovich is a sophomore at St. Louis Park High School. She is an avid reader and writer and also enjoys theater. This is her fourth year participating in Keren Or.