

miniMAG

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grandeur



A, as in Apocalypse

Howie Good

I was born without a capacity for small talk. What's there to say, anyway? When I see someone walking down the street toward me, I try to be invisible. You never know what kind of disease or weapon they might be carrying. The Watusi longhorn, the cattle of kings, is already extinct.

&

A young farmer who graduated from agricultural college sings on a tractor to his favorite crop. The sunflowers lean forward as if entranced. One has to wonder, So what good is a liberal arts degree?

&

The black dog lying on the kitchen floor stares at me as I carry the dinner dishes to the sink. Behind his dark, unfathomable eyes, he might very well be plotting my downfall. I begin sponging off a plate. Neatly framed by the window over the sink, the one-armed man is waving.



On Assistance

Damon Pham

catalysts are not consumed
phantom images are less stable but
a friend in blood makes two
the wiser the fool the less bitter the mistake

saying can just say itself
is something I never thought
I had the proper chance to relegate
"On *assisting*"
to you the difference being losing is
plainly losing
an action and not a fixed concept
while I still try to make up for lost
I don't know, I just try
being the one
losing
more!

SEVERANCE COVENANT

S. C. F. C.

Working-class municipality, — night-time city, — bustling, — wet, though mild. It was evidently a city in the Japanese islands, for the girl who was approached was oriental in face-shape, appearance and complexion. And she was beautiful, clad in a black tweed coat with a school outfit underneath it and carrying in her right hand a collapsed umbrella. The girl was nearing the end of the age of 15, but easily pulled off the look of a lady closer to 17. She was waiting underneath an alcove of a closed store to protect herself from any potential future down-pour for her boy-sweetheart, high-school aged Tomio, whom she had been passively observing for over a year, every other morning while on transit to school, and who, finally, one week prior had quite naturally made moves towards her. They had been sparsely and robotically exchanging messages between each other over this hitherto week, coordinating a time and place when and where they could both meet each other. They both agreed on this side of the avenue; the hiding was purely circumstantial, however.

It was still spitting. The schoolgirl had a habit of vacantly staring at nothing whilst waiting or bored, and after she had walked into that alcove, she faced westward and stood still for several minutes, thinking of things not from any point in time in particular. Then, at the end of the block, on the other side of the avenue, she spied Tomio's figure, coming closer, wearing an oversized jacket, a cross body, brown corduroy trousers, and black-and-white basketball shoes. He escaped the drizzle and stepped onto the stone-tiled floor of the alcove. They

both emitted a mutual 'Hey-y-y!' and embraced each other. And while still in each other's arms they distanced their heads and spoke of their still yet unspired nightly intentions. The boy, Tomio, made mentions of activities that were more idle and static in character, whereas the girl, Laura, — 'Bit Western sounding?' 'I suppose. My parents did used to have a fondness of it in the past,' — made mentions of activities more dynamic, yet relaxed. One of drinks, the other of walks. So they compromised and at a methodical pace journeyed down to the river. Once there, they slowed down their pace, and, walking along, Tomio handed Laura a five-hundred-mil can of cider of which he produced two from his cross body: one for him, and one for her, obviously. He had one more thing in his fun little bag, and that was a bottle of flavoured vodka, for later, when they eventually retire from the pavement and pop their rears onto something sittable.

After the numerous superficial and short-lived undertakings of discourse and banter they had, Tomio asked Laura about her future academic plans after high-school. She said, 'You know, it's a difficult question. It's not one I think about really often. Maybe I'm just too used to living in the present. And the past. I think a lot about what goes on in the present, and what went on in the past. Perhaps I should become a historian?' She took a sip. Tomio did the same, and said, 'Well, what interests you? If, perchance, history is your calling, what about it? The history of our nation? the Pacific War? of prehistory?' 'I was just joking!' They both had another sip, and they kept taking sips and speaking like this for some duration.

The couple, now flushed and giggling, but still with reasonable minds, decided to take a break from wandering along the river-side pavement and crossed a bridge to an islet in the middle of the rushing water. While sitting on their outer-wear that it had been warm enough to take off and lay on the grass so as not to get their behinds wet, Tomio produced from his cross body the clandestine bottle of flavoured vodka, from which he took a sip and then handed it to Laura. The whole time she had her mouth open in a mild shock caused by its unexpected appearance. She then smiled and took a swig.

'So, what about you? What will your future look like?' and with a mild, innocent frown she tilted her head. He replied, 'After this semester ends my parents and I are flying to America, and I'll be spending the summer there and I'll be studying there afterwards too. My mum grew up in America and my dad wants to move to a different country, says there's nothing for him here now, anymore.' '... Oh.' 'I

know.’ ‘But I only just got to know you.’

They lay there for a time none of them cared to admit may have been longer than how long they had planned.

‘You mentioned your mum is from America—’ ‘Grew up in America.’ ‘Is that why you have a slight European countenance?’ ‘Countenance!’ They both giggled, the two cans of cider and one glass of flavoured vodka all empty by their side. They were only just beginning to feel a mild sensation in their bladders.

‘I’ll tell you how it is! I’ll tell you how it is:’ he said, ‘my mum grew up biracial in America, born to an American father and Japanese immigrant mother, in Japan still, mind you, and my dad grew up biracial here, born to a Japanese father and White mother. The fact that they both happen to be half-White-half-Japanese is completely coincidental ... do you follow?’

She didn’t reply, probably fell asleep. And he soon dozed off as well.

‘I have a brother...’ she said in a half-sleep, ‘psychopath... jealous... I hate him.’

Tomio had short dreams consisting of vignettes of this very night, namely: of trying his luck at purchasing alcoholic goods from convenient stores where the inattentive boys, probably the same age as Tomio, worked, and wherein they would languidly take his cash in exchange for the momentarily illicit beverages without bothering to ID him; and of his locating and identifying the dot in the distance as lovely Laura; and of walking along the river and bonding with her like he never did with anyone before. After some hours he got woken up. ‘Tomio!’ ‘What?’ ‘Tomio. I need to pee.’ Tomio was also in a desperate need to urinate. It was, what? four in the morning? He checked his Casio and then lifted himself up from his prostrate position in a mild daze, with Laura already sitting upright, cross-legged. ‘I really have to pee.’ ‘Too modest to just go in those bushes over there?’ ‘Aw-w,’ she interjected with a cute sort of distress. They divorced from each other towards two separate and quiet parts of the islet to relieve themselves, and then came back to each other at the same spot. They both made an agreement that he would walk her back to her home and then he would go home himself.

Drawing near to the avenue where they had met, they were walking through a block with well-known, newly-renovated but completely vacant residential buildings. They looked at each other and for one reason or another were both struck with the same internal



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proposition: that is to climb the metal arrangement that wrapped around the facade and jump over into one of the small vacant balconies of the building right behind it. The actual street was empty, save for a sleeping bum further up. The couple boosted themselves up the scaffolding, and climbing up the steel ladders, triumphantly pulled themselves onto the roof of the building. On the other side was a much taller building with, for the lower storeys at least, inconveniently designed balconies facing the building below it; but, conveniently for the couple, ones close enough to carefully climb into. Giggling and excited, Tomio opened the door for them to be met with a landing; so they went up several flights of stairs and smacked the door out onto another balcony, probably now about nine or ten storeys high. How high. Tomio locked the door. Panting, slowly calming down, barely taking account of the view, standing in the middle of the balcony, they both mutually leaned into each other and kissed. Made out. Laura took off her coat and then helped Tomio in taking off his jacket. They got naked, and started intensely loving each other.

At once, Laura was lying, front-down, in a melancholic manner. Tomio was up, and, with the moist summer atmosphere persisting on and around his body, looked upon the sad, night-time scene of a working-class district. He saw people, probably too preoccupied and too far away to see anything phallic of his. And the episode ends there.

Hollowed Steps

Sieun Paark

Oak trees bloom around the gate
of Seonjeongneung Park.
A dirt path soon laces around an empty field,
and along thin patches of grass,
stands a lone stone,
thinned with an epitaph.
“May his memory be eternal.”
Rose petals coat the footboards
of the headstone while mould rusts its craters.
The shoes lean against the stone,
laces left untied,
dusted with scrapings of soil. Each toe cap
curdles, reflecting the debris that lay
underneath the surface. The outsoles now
appear grey like ashen wood, ribboning
the bygone colour. I imagine the wearer
Whose hair faded the colour of ebony,
And eyes reflected blackened pearls.
Everynight, she sauntered across the
flower fields,
As far as her shoes took her.
picking her favourite colours
Of roses and tulips.
These same shoes walked
in sync with her young brother’s footsteps,
Hand in hand as they
crossed the street every morning.
Amidst the rows of scattered
flowers, the pair of shoes yellows
against the grass, left to shrivel.



VOTE FOR ME by Phoenix Ning

Ignorance is Power

Sahil Gandhi

True ignorance is power.

Whoever, *whoever* it may be, that implanted the belief in my mind that knowledge is power in my mind should be charged. Prosecuted. On the charge of indoctrinating a young soul to try to become something, achieve a feat which no man has ever achieved. Trying to know everything. All it does is turn your heart into a wrestling ring where no passion, no ambition in any field wins a champion belt.

There may be a universe where I'm not shackled by the eternal pursuit of material knowledge. It may be a world where I was taught to strive to just be *something*, not everywhere, not everything, especially not all at once. If the world was taught how to commit instead of how to become a knowledge-sucking sponge, we would have enough societal contentment to pass on to the next generation instead of passing on the problems we enjoy creating for them.

If I was taught how to find my passions, I wouldn't need to soul search during the time I should be honing my skills. If I could take up a sport, in this fictional universe where I learned how to commit and be motivated, I would have no hesitation in taking up the art of surfing. One day I'd hope to be on the unforgiving shores of Jones Beach, looking for waves that'll whisper to me with each undulation - the waves of obscurantism.

I contend that there is no obstruction of democracy. It is a divine gift to be able to breathe the same fresh air as the rest, without bearing the weight of the burden of trying to know everything there is to know. And this burden weighs on us like demons resting their hands upon our shoulders.

THE DISTRACTION

Shaurya Arya-Kanojia

How many times, in the face of a tragedy you in all probability caused, have you tried to extricate yourself from the accountability?

It isn't my fault. Ever found yourself saying that, repeatedly so, to escape from the guilt that now clogs your thoughts?

Let us back up. Give you a little context, because that will clear the mist a little.

The boy thinking these thoughts is the 15-year-old Shadar Asra. Constantly disgruntled, as most teenagers his age are. Overenthusiastic, maybe, as he finds himself on the cusp of the wonderful life that awaits beyond the edge of turning 18.

Adulthood. And the glorious things that it brings.

He couldn't understand why his elder sister, who turned 20 this September, kept repeating how "adulthood is a trap."

"You go into it with your guns blazing, Shadar," she told him over an out-of-state call last year (she went away for college). "But all you're doing is walking into a minefield. You haven't the faintest of ideas how dreadful it is. Career, bills... and don't even get me started with laundry..." following which she spoke for fifteen minutes about how ridiculous the laundry system at her dorm was.

He would be honest about one thing, though. There is a part of him

that, in the last year, has started feeling a strange fear. A fear of what lies beyond the horizon. He has always been up for leaving the steering of this vehicle we call life and just enjoying the ride; that is exactly how he has lived all his childhood. To be fair, though, you don't really have a lot of planning to do as a kid, do you? He would love to remain a child, like the six-year-old Calvin who never grew up.

But people around you keep... talking. About all forms and shapes of horribleness – he realises the word sounds drastic, but he can't come up with a better way of describing how adults talk about their lives – that accompany growing up. About how the independence that adulthood tempts you with is actually a demon in disguise. About, most importantly, the harsh realities of life.

“You're young, Shadar,” his teacher at school had once remarked. It was at his school's annual winter fete. She had set up a stall where she was selling what she proudly called her “works of art” – coasters, fridge magnets, bookmarks. He made the mistake (because it wasn't anything but) of saying how the celebrations and merriment in the fete were pathetic, a poor excuse for people to hide their genuine feelings behind all the glitz.

The thing is, he had a fight with his parents that morning. He had returned home late the previous evening. Mompy, one of the three neighbourhood friends he has (“quartet of mayhem” is how everyone in the neighbourhood calls them), and he were smoking in the little tree house his dad (The Cool Dad, as the rest of the quartet called him) had constructed for him. Shadar's parents didn't say anything when he returned, perhaps saving the scolding for the next day. He thought they had smelled the reek on him, for he forgot to chew gum after the two cigarettes he had, but the scolding was principally about not returning home on time. They accused him of being “careless” and “immature” and a whole lot of other things he wants to choose to forget.

“And too smart for your age,” the teacher continued. “But you have a lot to learn. Cynicism will only take you so far in life.”

No one had ever accused him of being cynical. He is much more optimistic than the adults in his life; they who become “depressed” at the drop of a hat.

Had a tough day at work? They're depressed. The shirt they so dearly

wanted to buy got sold out? They're depressed. Their favourite team crashed out in the world cup?

Yes, they're depressed.

The last one was actually pretty recent. One of his neighbours, a 25-year-old "man," wouldn't leave his room because he was upset Brazil was ousted by Croatia in the quarter finals. Shadar learned about him



through the grapevine, sure, but he was positive it wasn't untrue. Grownups may believe they are mature, but it doesn't take much for them to start behaving like juveniles.

Whoever said adulthood was tough couldn't be farther from the truth. Being a 15-year-old... that is the definition of adversity.

Which brings Shadar back to the present. He maintains that it wasn't his fault. One can argue here that, had he not been distracted by the overwhelming pressure he has found himself experiencing the last few

days, he would have noticed the man walking towards him by the side of the road.

The pavement Shadar should have been walking on was getting some tile work done. So, maybe you can put the accountability for what happened on the crew. Or perhaps the man himself was to blame; for he was speaking into his phone (Shadar had heard a snatch of something about taxes and inflation, all adult stuff), not mindful of the traffic the man was walking dangerously close to.

Of course, it won't take much to prove either of these in a court of law. Shadar had seen plenty of courtroom dramas to know this.

And, yet, if he was ever asked to present his defense, he would put the blame on the people – the mature, wise grownups – who have been making his life incredibly difficult.

“Move!” someone shouts close to Shadar. He feels a hand push him aside. Brought back from his frenzy, Shadar has a moment to see the person the hand belongs to rush towards the man who was walking in the opposite direction from Shadar, now sprawled on the floor. His face was turned to the side, his eyes closed. The car he had run into (or, more accurately, the one that had run into him), from the push Shadar accidentally gave him – again, he wants to blame his distraction – has apparently fled.

“It's not my fault,” Shadar keeps muttering, but no one listens.



Unbound

Alex Murphy

will I see you in the bardo?
a demon catching the bus,
and what will you have on
will I hear you

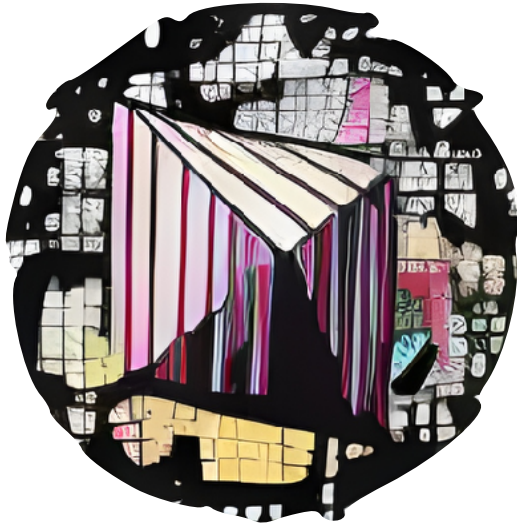
like a life on tape
every morning?
again and again
this voice on silicon fibres

love undo this –
lives between us
forever unchanged,
once removed

sped up a bit
perfect pitch
a memory to touch

love undo this –
unfuck us so I can breathe
and become a new kind of
breathless

like radiators that bleed, us
that love unbound
when it's removed



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<https://tinyurl.com/33n6vp26>
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