

MAGNETS

By Tatiana de F. Massuno

WHY WE LIKE IT: *A quietly written vignette that reads like an internal monologue, the voice an updated Virginia Woolf grappling a problem that reflects a larger grappling with existential angst. The narrator feels herself drawn, magnetically, into what is surely a new reality: one in which chance encounters can both transform and transcend her world view. She discovers there is no resolution without risk, without change. Massuno's prose is so unassuming, so perfectly right and easy for this piece that you almost forget how beautiful it is. Quote: The day they met, she was just minding her own business, she was just being herself, detached from the world, avoiding interactions, just being the cold distant person she knew how to be. Just alone on a park bench, observing the kids come and go, play, run, throw balls, be silly, goofy and happy and unaware of the great danger it is to exist.'*

Magnets

Tatiana de F. Massuno¹

What does the future hold for us? She kept asking herself again and again and again and everyone else could see that it had become an obsession. *Is there a future for us?* Just harping on the same string before going to bed. Of course, there were variations. She could ask herself about happened, replay conversations in her mind. She would then stare at the ceiling, an answer from the sky. A miracle, she was hoping for. Something as fast and bright as a bolt of lightning that would make everything clear. Every day she was lost in thought. "Good morning!" someone would say and she would reply without even parting her lips, as if it was just too much effort, wasted effort, mumbling instead. Her days would go by as if controlled by a force other than hers. Just habit. Just going with the flow, without inhabiting her actions, her body, her words. As if telling the world: I accept your existence but please leave me alone for a

while, just let me be, here, lost in thoughts, just let me be, for today, tomorrow, as long as I need, I have, world, a mystery to solve, one of the utmost importance, please, world, my life depends on it, we'll play some other time, I promise, some other time, but now, I need to be alone with my thoughts.

How hard can it be to have some privacy from the world? From the whole world? Just two days ago a friend, the red-haired one, remember her? Just the other day she asked her if she was ok. She looked troubled, she said. Can you imagine the nerve? Who's she to determine if she was troubled or not? Who does she think she was to pass judgment on somebody else, especially her? Automatically she replied: never been better, dear! Up until now she recalls the delight she felt when pronouncing the word *dear*. *Dear* can be so many different things: it can be more formal, more personal, tender and soft and at the same time ambiguously critical and demeaning. She loved it! She used it whenever she could. Just this morning she told her life partner: I love you, *dear*. Did she really know what she meant? Did she grasp how *dear* should be understood? In this context? Of two lovers saying I love you to each other? Two women so entangled in their feminine world that context became irrelevant? But should it? Such a short, almost irrelevant word; consonants and vowels, vowels and consonants, nothing more. Just a word. And you know, words are deceiving. But what about actions?

The day they met, she was just minding her own business, she was just being herself, detached from the world, avoiding interactions, just being the cold distant person she knew how to be. Just alone on a park bench, observing the kids come and go, play, run, throw balls, be silly, goofy and happy and unaware of the great danger it is to exist. She was just there, thinking about never having kids, of not wanting the responsibility of screwing another person's life, about maybe not being able to bond, as she heard once, about growing apart from her life partner, about being a lesbian and

frigid and sad, about not fulfilling her life purpose, about being almost forty, closer and closer to her deathbed, when this man approached her. At first, she didn't even realize he was talking to her, she was not approachable, her arm covered in tattoos made sure people kept their distance, made sure they thought twice before saying even hi, but anyway, on that day she was wearing a jacket, he could not see her tattoos, could not judge her based on stereotypical preconceptions, on that day he was just being a man at a park talking to a woman who seemed so self-absorbed that she barely acknowledged his existence. On that day he was just being the kind and caring person he grew up to be, being raised on Christian beliefs, loving the other as he loved himself. He couldn't help noticing a troubled woman on a park bench, he couldn't help thinking that maybe, just maybe, she could make use of some helping ears. And maybe, just maybe, he thought she needed human interaction. It took her a while to understand that this man, the one looking at her, whose eyes were so black and deep and enormous, was addressing her. She looked at him and asked herself if she had ever seen eyes so dark in her life. Two big black magnet balls looking straight at her. It was as if she could not control her actions anymore, as if she had forgotten she was at a park surrounded by kids, she felt her body approach his and if it weren't for a dog barking, I swear, she would have kissed him. She came to her senses just in time and they talked for hours. That day and the weeks to come.

She was definitely troubled.

When she got home, her life partner was already there. She kissed her and imagined his big black eyes exploring all hidden parts of her body, his hands lightly touching her skin, softly and gently at first, until, as if longing for her, grabbed her around the waist, bringing her closer, caressing her face with the soft touch of his beard.

She then surrendered to her embrace and that night, for the very first time, in a long long time, forgot who she was.....

AUTHOR'S NOTE: *This is about encounters. Unexpected ones. Uncalled for encounters that re-order experiences, re-arrange expectations, re-organize our mundane views. It is then about our susceptibility to what is extraordinarily fleeting, to what is beyond rationalization. It is about how fallible our reasoning abilities are.*

This micro story is actually the third in a series of five, in which I investigated how Eros and epiphanies could combine. What light do erotic encounters shed on our lives? Can Eros open up new paths away from plain and simple conformity? Can Eros lead us to a more authentic existence?

My literary influences are as diverse as they are many. They range from John Milton to Virginia Woolf, from Emerson to Paul Auster, from Camões to Fernando Pessoa. One literary figure, however, seems to haunt every piece I write, whether in English or in Portuguese, the impetus behind it all, one could say, and that is Clarice Lispector.

BIO: *Tatiana is a teacher, an independent researcher, a wife and a stepmom and in her spare time, when life gives her a break, she writes fiction, just because.*