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Cenotaph to Newton by Etienne-Louis Boulée, 1992

One cannot imagine the fragility of human life until she has caught a glimpse of Death's fragrance.

We couldn't shake the faintest moment when the Black Boned Angel sent a spine-tingling sensation that could condense 60 years of life into a 6-second-long flash of memory. It's a sudden glitch in our head, a cold sweat on our pounding chest. Our body knows, even when our head said she's got nothing to worry about.

Those greetings from Azrael came to each person in their own unique way. It cannot be replicated, nor multiplied; one could extract the pattern, but the exact moment couldn't be reproduced. So Death, in all its might, is that friend that no one else had. Maybe he sent those greetings in your travels, when you had to hit the brakes to avoid a giant truck. Maybe he came to whisper a few words when you ate that last piece of meat. Maybe he manifested into a fatal combination of liver, lung, and heart failure when your kids have all grown up. Or maybe he came every day, creeping behind your shadows, and chipping away at your lifespan like an old paint job.

Nowadays the cold tide of Death has swept our families, friends, colleagues, neighbors, comrades, in a much more subtle and grueling signal. We see them struggle just to keep their heads quiet and their feet idle. We help them to wake up and welcome the sun each day. We sit by their side when they've been awake for too long. We come running when they try to tear up their veins. We try and try, and yet Death welcomes them like an old friend, or a nice warm bath.

One has to imagine that there are better days than this; the ones when our Future doesn't seem like the inertia inside the belly of a rotting beast. When the car is on fire and there's no driver at the wheel, would you give in to Death? Or would you rather build another Future, the one where the paving stones end at the Beach?

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The death of a friend is the end of a world. This realization, metallic and serrated, lodged itself inside me when I held my childhood chum, Murni, in my arms for the last time. Warm blood gushed from his back onto my shaking body; three bullets opened up his flesh like little fish-mouths agape and choking. I was shaking from my crumbling sense of place and purpose, but also from the rough dirt road and even rougher suspension of the beat-up Toyota Kijang we were fleeing in. Ramli, an oil palm plantation worker, kept his wits about him and floored the pedal, never looking back from behind the wheel, but from the rearview mirror I glimpsed the tears on his anguished face whimpering in the moonlight. I hugged Murni from behind and kept repeating, "*Lu gak boleh mati*," but he took my hand and with his last breath replied, "*Udah, tenang aja, lu udah gede*," and died. In the morning I buried my best friend and unearthed my own private apocalypse.

Murni was the type of friend who'd road-trip with you with no money at all: stowing away on freight trains to feel at home among stowaway smiles, hitchhiking on trucks, offering to till fields and water crops for the chance to bunk a night in sharecroppers' lodges—the list is improvisational. He was also the friend you'd trade terrible but honest homemade poetry with; the friend who'd bring a boombox to the BMX park equipped with *goceng*-priced NOFX tapes; who'd make slightly overlarge hemp bracelets for the whole gang, just for the fun of it; whose arsenal of verbs stemmed from *to love* and *to fight*. Last but not least, whenever we went on a trek or expedition Murni would volunteer as the party's rearguard. The role appealed to his good heart, because he always wanted to protect everyone else. In the end he died as he had lived: making sure he was running behind me and soaking up the shots.

The world has since forgotten about: (1) a small school building in the middle of a Sumatran oil palm plantation; (2) the souls of plantation workers who once gathered there to fan the fires of resistance and rest in the last cradle of warmth they had left; (3) the kernel of human dignity that they fought and died for; (4) the first reports on an imminent thug-led incursion; (5) the unwitting conceit and romanticism of two men, who took it upon themselves to dismiss the reports and hold their ground in an attempt to uphold what they saw as the mantle of societal responsibility (the Leftist's burden); (6) the school's errand boy that I'd spoken to earlier, how he crumpled to the ground with the first shot of the night; (7) the panic and confusion as screams and souls and gunfire filled the air; (8) our escape through a back door and the final sprint to the car; (9) the sickening thud of nearby bullets and the horror that filled me when I turned around and saw my best friend fall; (10) the whiz of a bullet that barely missed my ear as I ran back to drag Murni's limp form; (11) warm blood that flowed from Murni's wounds onto my shaking body; (12) the dirt road and the car's fucking suspension; (13) Ramli's tears whimpering in the moonlight; (14) six final words; (15) the death of a friend and the end of a world; (16) the burial, the unearthing.

I wonder where Murni is now. Sometimes you cherish a person so much, you refuse to acknowledge that they are gone. Sometimes, just when you think you've finally put the past behind you, you wake up screaming and drenched in sweat, and your flatmates will testify that you'd been calling out for someone irretrievably lost.

I see
office workers frozen by
central air conditioning;
a fraction of the condition
of the ultimate cursed
ism with a capital
C

for a second I forgot that
this planet is overheating

for a second I forgot that
it doesn't matter how cold
or hot it is because
we're knee-deep in Kacke

I'm tired of being angry
I just want to sleep
and dream of a society
that's so utopian the word
utopia wouldn't do it justice

but sleep has become impossible
and I'm on my phone again
scrolling and scrolling until
- attractive men
- memes
- melancholy
start to become one and the same
and suddenly I remember

we're as fragile as the
latest iPhone
as easily drained
as replaceable
even if we prefer Samsung

아, 씨발…

someone once told me:
pessimism breeds optimism
which would be nice to
believe
if that person wasn't a realist
who says things just to fill
the air

it's hard to live with reality
but here we are, in bed together,
fighting over the duvet
and my phone's out of juice

YOU CAUGHT ME ON A BAD DAY (AGAIN)



Car Park at Shopping Mall, Gueorgui Pinkhassov, 1996

All stopped / I guess that's ours to blame
We have lost our lives / that's also ours to blame
We have lost in the quietest
compromise / I don't know
what it means
anymore
It's not that we don't want to live
but it always stopped &
it is always sadder than it seems
—sadder than before

They know how to use our hunger against us
They told us it was nothing serious
But they always dream of us being dead
I try to remember what it was first
made me hate what I still like to call
the 'straight world' / this divine wind
that doesn't heal but rather
makes everything sicker
Yes, I'm in a bad mood as well
& I'm sick of it as well

I wish we could do something to
help each other / But we don't want
any help / We are separated by so
many tedious enemies / it makes us feel helpless
Fiction is our smile
Have a seat
Think it over
In the long & narrow alley
If only we could whisper
to each other
the language needed
to describe that devastation

II

Have you experienced
keeping your eyes focused on
something / only to see it
disappear
quietly?
That is happening now

I was sitting by the pavement /
around McDonald's
There were lots of hungry mosquitos
hovering around my damped body;
& my face already reached dusk
I split two different methods in reading
our realities / What implies in our realities
are not *utop*ian: "The 'straight world' never
touches anything, its victims never do
anything else. None!" I thought to myself

as I walked around / feeding my mouth
with Fish Burger & coke
& my dirty hands / accustomed
to arranging great affairs
All these
while I shamelessly complained
about my stupid prostate



Brazil (1985), Dir. Terry Gilliam

We are cursed
by the ones who controls history
and steal our time

We're nothing but leftovers
for rodents
inside the mosque of justice

but they left it untouched, never really get to the bottom of it

FAQ: Who do you actually represent?

Whistlin' the ballad of lost souls
Injecting poison through our eyes and ears
While our anger's being muffled

Hello?
Is the weather nice there?
It's been raining fire here
for months

Goddamn you, weatherman!
We demand answers, not advertisings!

Meanwhile, chants fill the air:
"OUR LOVE FOR YOU IS EVERLASTING!"

They forget that nothing lasts forever.
They forget that they're also part of the problem.