

A NEON WORLD

NEON MOBTD

The road is swallowed as you push forward, as you pass from service station to station, trying to comprehend why it is Charlotte has gone from you. Rubber belts over asphalt as the neon images appear again and again, sidelining gums in their bitumen beds. As dusk sets in, the transmissions begin to amplify. Bright. Brighter. Lunging, flaunting. You are northward bound and the greenery is disappearing into the artificial glow. This evening you feel aimless, you could take this ride a little longer than you first thought. You don't know how much time is needed to find what you are looking for.

Between stopping and starting the machine, between red and green, a shadow is following you. It paces itself to its own uncertain beat – yesterday you were fine, today things are different. You buy a Coke. Inside the hunger grows. You punch text into your phone and send it into the oblivion; the hunger still grows as you continue on your way, travelling over surfaces you push-biked as a kid. You have forgotten what you should know by now, it is somewhere beyond you at the bottom of a well. Somewhere there with Charlotte.

You drive by Tabula Street to see the block they have built. Nine stories high, shiny and new. You recall those days when you and the boys from your street would play in the gravel pits that were once there. Elliott, his cheeky face emerging between the granite missile strikes, unleashing his green men on to you; 'march soldiers!' You were children, fragile and occupied by imagination and those war games were just entertainment. You understood the inside of each other. You wonder about those friends you had; if they are alive, where they are now and if they think at all like you. When they moved in on your street, things changed forever for you.

You find distraction. You turn on the radio and it gives you answers. The diversion tells you to diverge. Tune into Pay TV and watch the next episode of the life of an aging rock star. You give way to the thought that you may be entertained, that there could be some morsels of substance for you. Like the saccharine you are drinking or the next drive-through meal you will buy. You don't question it, you're so busy with those other thoughts, the ones that never go away.

You park beside a Pizzeria and brisk by the window. Geno is working in his kitchen, burning through midnight all week, every week. Every spare dollar for his daughter's wedding – she wants extravagance...so love must wait. Geno is smiling but wearied. As you pull out into the traffic, you take it all with you. You can see his face in figures by the roadside, faces touched by grey. Some are closing up their shops for the night, others in their own different worlds. There are even traces in the eyes of your own rear-vision mirror. You veer left and right to avoid other bumpers, and kerbs...and people. The night is lit by neon and you can almost hear Charlotte.

You press down with heel and foot, toying with annihilating the pain; a fractional motion, a fraction of time. The window whistles in your ear, a rising voice like a kettle boiling. Now you're over the limit and it's time to stop. You can't do this anymore. As you pull up to park, headlights blaze-up a billboard. Primary yellow exclaims; 'There are things in life we regret, don't let your mortgage be one of them'. You cut the lights and then meet with the chilly air; what is your regret?

You walk towards the freeway lights, a symmetry that weaves with the road line. Beneath the criss-cross of buzz-wires you spy a small, triangular grass patch. Cars rush by overhead, as something stirs in the grass. You can make out the solitary image, a wild bird picking about for food. Its plumage

gleams under the neon, with two button mirrors, intent on studying you with the same curious magnetism you have for this moment. You ask yourself, 'What is a bird like that doing here?' Disturbed, you mull over it. It has to adapt, and the world it now knows is the world that was created for you. But the answers aren't out there and the world as you know it, offers nothing.

Then Charlotte comes to you again, you can't block her out anymore. You must face what you have been holding back, what's been with you all along.

'Do you love me, David?'

'...I'm fond of you, Charlotte.'

'Where are we with this?'

'I'm flying to Qatar tonight, we can talk about this when I get back?'

'I haven't seen you for three weeks David.'

'I know, I need to finalise this deal. I don't know how long it will take.'

Last words that held fate to a corner. And in the aisle of a Boeing 747 return flight, a revelation gripped you to a shiver – you were a foreigner to love. Refraining from it, skirting around it, afraid, distanced. Busy working high-rise, inside financial reports and indexes, never really knowing who sat next to you...living in a castle of ice, as someone beautiful passed by your door.

You returned to an empty home – where was she? You tried calling her again and again, but she was gone. In her place an answering machine broke the silence and other sketches of her remained; perfume on your sheets and a note that said 'goodbye'. You couldn't blame her. It was then you realised you wanted nothing more from this senseless, cold world, than the woman who had always been more than just a friend to you. Charlotte. Complex, irreplaceable and eight years of your life. The girl you met by chance one night, stranded on a dark road and lost without you. Now you're lost without her.

You redial, but the line is busy, so you sit and wonder where you will go from here. A glittering sheath expands across the heart of metropolis tonight, but your own heart is caving in like it never has before. It's cold out here beneath this Neon world. It's time to go home.

Then the phone beeps. The digital display has brought you a gift you never thought could bring such joy. It reads;

call me D, we need to talk, C

(End)

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