

2016

A Common Occurrence

Michael Masinter

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/toyon>



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Masinter, Michael (2016) "A Common Occurrence," *Toyon Literary Magazine*: Vol. 62 : Iss. 1 , Article 5.

Available at: <https://digitalcommons.humboldt.edu/toyon/vol62/iss1/5>

This Fiction is brought to you for free and open access by the Journals at Digital Commons @ Humboldt State University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Toyon Literary Magazine by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ Humboldt State University. For more information, please contact kyle.morgan@humboldt.edu.

A Common Occurrence

by Michael Masinter

I was tired and disenchanted by the drudgery of the day, and rain had begun to fall. It was late in the year so the entire town had gone dark at five-thirty. Every streetlamp and headlight was mirrored in the black pavement. I took a final glance, as I always did, at the picture of my wife on my desk before locking the office door. It was quiet outside, and cold; I could barely see the keys in my hand through the clouds of fog streaming from my mouth. There was a silence, broken only by the rain and the splashing of passing cars.

Standing beneath the green awning, I put my briefcase over my head and walked quickly across the empty lot to my car. Inside, I listened to the rain pitter-patter against the metal roof while the engine warmed up. I could still see my breath as it moved through the dim green light emitting from the radio dial. The seat was cold and coarse, my clothes were damp and dirty; I felt uncomfortable in my itchy skin. This feeling of restlessness had been plaguing my body all throughout the day. The sensation was like wearing an outfit that was too small, making every movement an uncomfortable task. I felt confined and I couldn't find an explanation.

I had recapped the days of my week in search of a reason to be worried or something that I had forgotten, but there was nothing. I reminded myself of that now as the anxiety came to the foreground of my mind and

filled the cavities of my chest and stomach. My heart beat began to match the rapid rhythm of the rain, and the windows of my car were now translucent from the heat of my anxious breathing.

My eyes shifted over to the temperature gauge. The engine was warm so I turned on the defoggers and shifted into reverse. Tensely, I backed out of the space, impatiently trying to allow time for the windows to clear. At the bottom of the exit driveway I peaked in between the scattered drops of water on my window. I pulled into the road. The lanes were indistinguishable beyond the reflecting lights of oncoming cars, so I drove slowly. The noisy chatter of the intensifying rain and the low visibility created a sense of isolation, which added to my already increasing feeling of claustrophobia.

Suddenly, the image of my wife's face came into my mind, and I became extremely anxious to arrive home. I began to drive faster. I turned on the radio to calm myself down but could not settle on a station. I kept shifting my attention from the road ahead of me to my frantic finger—seemingly operating on its own. When my hand returned to the wheel, it had settled on the retro station. I turned the volume up just loud enough so I could hear the music over the pounding rain. I focused my eyes on the double yellow lines in order to keep certain of where I was. In the distance, I could see that the road was coming to a curve so I began to slow down again.

Halfway into it, I realized that the turn was much sharper than I had anticipated, but this realization came

too late. My tires began to lose traction and I could feel that I was no longer in control of my car. The screaming of my tires became loud and drowned out the sound of my music and the rain. I knew that I would crash.

My mind quickened, time slowed, and I wondered in that moment what I would hit and hoped there would be no one else hurt. I could see nothing outside—green and red traffic lights streaked across every window of my car, enveloping my small world. I told myself to relax my body and prepare for impact when I remembered that I was not wearing my seatbelt. Too late: impact.

I felt gravity lose its grip as I was lifted from my seat and projected toward the windshield. I felt nothing as I went through, watching the shattered glass form a wave-like tube around my body. The last thing I heard was the sound of Louis Armstrong's voice singing "What a Wonderful World." *Yes, it is*, I thought to myself. The surrounding trees, lights, and black sky became visible to me again. I watched calmly as the blacktop neared, my body now drenched in water. Relax, I told myself, you won't feel it, shock will set in, just lie still and someone will call for help. I was calm. The only movement I made was to cradle my face in my arms as my body violently collided with the cold, uncompassionate concrete. I felt nothing; only heard the sound of my flesh tearing and my limbs smacking repeatedly against matter denser than my own while tumbling and sliding down the road.

Time quickened. The rain became louder. I could feel the biting cold in contrast with the warmth of the blood

that freely flowed from my battered body. My mouth filled with the taste of salt and minerals from the blood and concrete. My tongue flipped around in a panic trying to gather the shards of shattered teeth. I moved nothing else but my eyes in search of the onlookers, there were none. I lay, breathing slowly, listening to my heartbeat through the puddle of liquid I was in. It was then that I noticed the feeling of restlessness had gone out of me. I was calm. I closed my eyes and tried to rest. I tried to ignore the thought of shattered bones and torn flesh. I tried to ignore any thoughts of regret or wishes for anything different. I tried to ignore these things to avoid any onset of pain. I was calm. The image of my wife's face came into my mind again. She was smiling at me. Golden sunlight framed her beautiful face. It was the day of the picnic.

“I love you,” I whispered aloud, “I’m sorry...”