

The Coming Flood

by Zackery D. Fitzpatrick

Jen's basement floor reaches two inches of water, but I make sure there's nothing valuable near the ground. After trying everything, we can't find the source, but I bring towels over from my apartment to stop it rising. She tells me, "Put everything else in boxes, in case it gets worse. Bring it upstairs." I do. Two at a time, collections of mine and her things sitting upstairs on the table and counters and couch. Like ships confusedly lost. Jen's house an ark while the sea rises to meet it. I see a picture strip we took in a photobooth on our first date, 3 years ago. I see my shaving cream I left here that has long since expired. Jen tells me, "What are you doing, there's more down there and its still raining?" I put the pictures down and notice the unfurnished walls as I descend again. When I open the door, the water is only past my ankles, but I fear I may drown.

11:00 p.m.

by Zackery D. Fitzpatrick

"I... I never... Have you seen this, Ferris?"

"Talk about gruesome. Who watches the news anyway?" But Ferris did watch the news, and he wasn't sure, in any capacity, why he had said that.

Lin was sat a few feet away from him, both of them dispassionately listening to the television in the background. It wasn't until the cameraman panned over the murder scene that they had really started paying attention. Not that paying attention required much. Their energy wasn't being put to any other worthwhile use.

It was in their half-distant repulsion, that unimportant news station, broadcasting on some unimportant channel, cut back to the anchor. A photo still-image of the body was pasted in the top-right corner of the screen. It was contorted in all manner of ways, the torso and inner cavities seemingly collapsed and battered inward, with each appendage uniquely pulled and stretched out of their sockets. Elongated in a grotesque way, as if all pulled slowly in opposite directions.

Ferris watched as the other boy shut the TV off.

"Yeah, I've learned my lesson," Lin conceded, not too adamant that he could really be blamed for at least trying at a distraction.

Ferris didn't say anything. It was like prolonging the pause for a second. There were a few textbooks spread out, all cornucopia atop the table. Intro to such and such pre-requisite course, and, next to it, a lab book that Ferris was loathe to touch, because apparently 'scientific literacy' was also a must for an arts degree. That was fine. Everything was fine. Who was he to say what should or shouldn't be the case? It was only his first year, after all.

It all took some getting used to, he thought. An entirely new atmosphere. To be thrust so remorselessly unto a new location and be expected to thrive and comport himself all the same.

That being said, maybe he'd get used to the change of pace. The two of them were only a month or so into the semester.

In truth, Ferris didn't actually know Lin that well, but after a few lectures sitting next to each other, they had become partners for a presentation. Lin was a tall, lithe Korean guy, who seemed cool enough, and that was fine. He was one of two people Ferris had actually talked to, neither of which were people he'd normally associate with. That was fine, too, he thought, because 'it's a new city, I can reinvent myself', and 'at least he was putting himself out there'. And that part took some getting used to too. He knew the reality of it though. Because Ferris did watch the news, and he wasn't sure, in any capacity, why he thought otherwise.

They had over a month to work on the presentation. Now it was due for the beginning of that same 9:00 a.m. class, Monday morning. Well it was Sunday night, and they had gotten as far as a title. Actually, no, that wasn't right. They'd gotten as far as a title discussion and had stopped at their names.

At least he and Lin had that crippling existentialism in common.

Along with the couch they procrastinated in, the mug-ringed coffee table before them and the TV, now off, but imprinted in their memory for the next minute or so, the room held little décor or additional furnishings, unless you counted the two cans that were toppled and rolled over a good few paces away from them. There was a floating shelf, also empty, save for a reputable layer of dust. If not for that, the room would look and feel just as out of place as it's tenant. Ferris found comfort in that, a little bit of normalcy to suit him among the cacophony of everything else.

"We should get started then, yeah?"

Ferris flinched up at Lin's remark, "Oh, yeah. What'd you have in mind?" Another dazed reverie. *It's a new city, I can reinvent myself.*

"It's getting kind of late, so I figure we stick to textbook stuff. I mean creativity isn't the big part, right?"

"Couldn't hurt." Ferris was right. It couldn't hurt.

"Would be nice, though. Man, we should have started this sooner." Neither of them sat up. Neither of them shifted to look at the few papers sprawled before them or unfold Lin's laptop or even cite the various sources they hadn't researched.

A few more seconds of that, Lin did sit up, grabbing his phone off the table and checking it absentmindedly. Not actually looking for anything or taking any course of action, but because it was habit and that was what you did when you were putting off the inevitable.

"So..." Ferris trailed, "you hungry?"

"I'm starving, man!" Lin threw his head back and dropped his cell into his lap as he said so, something about the banal human trait had seemed thrilling to him, "What are you feeling?"

He finally worked his rusty joints as he placed his hands on his knees to stand. Slowly and a mild case of headrush settling, he walked to the other room. Ferris called, "I've got milk and half an onion, so..."

"Hell, what do you normally eat?"

"Out."

"Ah, fair. Who has time to cook?" Lin didn't seem particularly invested in an answer and Ferris labeled the inquiry as rhetorical and moved on.

The two of them didn't speak for a good minute or two, Lin absentmindedly shifting back and forth between various fiddling and fidgeting behaviours. Ferris on the other hand, checked a cupboard or two, knowing that even if he wanted to eat the knock-off Cheerios, there was not a worldly thing in all of its majestic power that half an onion could do to unspoil a quarter-litre of milk.

He took it upon himself to stand in the kitchen, leaning against the back countertop, light still off. Ferris breathed in sharply through his nose and found the air neither stuffy nor pungent, but distinctly and resoundingly not fresh. Before making his way through the door-less arch between the kitchen and living room, he stretched a bit and rubbed at his eyes.

Ferris stepped into view from the other room, into the space that was probably supposed to act as a pseudo-dining room, had he owned a table. Lin appeared to actually be going for his laptop, whether or not it was for useful purposes, no one would ever know, but upon closer inspection, Ferris saw the phone in Lin's outstretched hand and quickly suppressed the barely existent fraction of hope he had held for that instance.

It wasn't as if he could blame Lin. Ferris hadn't taken initiative either. There was that crippling existentialism again. Rearing its ugly, old head.

Lin looked up, surprised, toward Ferris, "Hm?" He queried.

Ferris, though, aware of that he hadn't said anything, didn't care enough to make that aspect of conversation. "Pizza?"

"Oh, sure! I'll order." And he did, retaking his phone and tapping determinedly at an app.

That was fitting, Ferris thought, why talk to someone if you didn't need to? *At least he was putting himself out there.* Ferris walked into the washroom, through the kitchen, while Lin dealt with the tasking clerical work.

He splashed water on his face. Looked in the mirror. Stood a minute. His hair needed washing. The brown mop was becoming greasy from the day before. Bags sat comfortably, like heavy weights barely being supported by his eyelids. He splashed his face again.

Not even the visage looking back at him felt fitting. But that, in itself, did fit. In a way. Right? It did, didn't it? It was those little, happy truths that Ferris held so tightly to himself. Necessitating the reminder of something, anything that would succinctly push him towards feeling at home again and to having an idea, in any capacity, as to why he felt the way he did.

For a moment he considered that he hadn't made an input on what kind of pizza he wanted, then he remembered that he didn't care.

"Alright, it should be here in twenty, what time is it now?"

Ferris saw the room differently when he got back, as Lin finished the question. It looked alien. And for a while, that would be fine, but he wasn't quite sure he would fully reinvent himself. Maybe, however, he could shift just slightly, and that filtered, melancholy hue he perceived the world through might be normalized. Everyone changes, but nothing would ever be right again. Who watches the news anyway?

Ferris looked down at his watch.