

An Unaware Bird
A Play by Kanishk “Kap” Pandey
kanishk.pandey@gmail.com

Blackout. A bird tweets alone in the darkness. It tweets multiple times, each time reducing the gap between the last. The sudden noise of a group of birds erupting from trees rings out into the audience. The lights go up slowly, revealing the stage. It is bare, except for a desk big enough to fit a laptop and a lamp, a chair (both of which are at center stage), and hundreds of spare papers spread about the space on the floor. In the chair sits K, a young boy. To the side is BEO, a tall masculine figure in a grey suit. Instead of a head, BEO has a white cube with small black markings on it; not enough to gather immediate attention. The cube should be mainly white. The laptop is open and turned on. K is typing on it rapidly.

K: What do you think of “The Redwoods”? It’s a fascinating name, I think. “Blanket Beauty”. That’s good too.

BEO: Matters what you’re asking.

K: Essay title.

BEO: It always smells so awful here.

K: I think it fits, but neither are actually a part of the essay.

BEO: Always smells so bad.

K: I don’t think they got anything to do with the essay, but the best titles don’t...you know? I dunno how to rephrase that. Do you?

BEO: We were always so damn small.

K: You not listening. That’s fair, I rarely listen to you either; it’s probably how we were supposed to operate; where’d Camus state that we were supposed to be- Ah, never mind. No one’s going to get it.

BEO: (*snapping to attention*) Now you’re getting it.

K: Thoughts on the title?

BEO: “A Pursuit Lost by Devils and Dogs” (*pauses*) “and Drugs” (*pause*)

K: Why?

BEO: Has a beauteous ring to it. Do you need another reason?

K: I feel like...it is meant for something else.

BEO: Such as?

K: I dunno, something I haven't written yet, something I may never write, I can't write that well, not something from me, but not these essays, well I wrote these three, so nothing I've written. It's a nice title, Beo, I like it.

BEO: Rank.

K: Well, we don't actually rank but... (*clicks at the laptop*) My GPA is at 3.33 right now...I'm definitely not at the top, that's for sure. But some people are way worse. But those people weren't gonna get anywhere anyway. Always sort of stuck... That'd be a good story, I- (*pauses*) No, I gotta finish the next essay.

BEO: Smells rank.

K: You and your...

BEO: I gotta find something to mask this fucking scent, fuck me, I fucking hate it.

K: Wait, can you hand me that paper? And that one too, I think it's the prompt. I think, just grab it would you?

BEO: (*considers*)

K: Just get it, it's just one second.

BEO: Nah. Where's the spray?

K: Dammit.

K collapses out of his seat and drags himself towards the papers he was pointing at. After grabbing one, he drags himself over to the other. Then he crawls back over to his chair, grunting and moaning, then pulls himself up slowly onto his chair. When he sits down, BEO should pace around the stage, saying the following.

BEO: New York's finest. All climbing a ladder. Ladders don't ever go anywhere in particular. On their own, that is. A ladder is a ladder, and it has its purpose, but it has no purpose when it has no lean. Not lean as in the slang. I wonder why I thought of New York. You haven't been there in a while. I think it's a line to some song. New York's finest. Yeah, it has got that sort of swift clean ring that most lyrics have. You know who titles well? George Who Writes Like Hemingway. I mean, that guy, he just hits the title on the head. "Fish Blot." That's a damn fine one. I never read that novel it was named with, but it still hit it well. I totally got it, instantly! Instantly. New York's finest. Yeah, I really dig that ring, it rings perfect. Sort of sweet, too. I can't stand most lyrics. It's as if only rappers and a couple indie bands can write. George Who Writes Like Hemingway should write lyrics, you know that?

K: (*panting*) Huh?

BEO: George Who Writes Like Hemingway. He should write lyrics.

K: (*takes breath, shakes head*) Wha? Never mind. Actually no, why are you talking about that prick?

BEO: His titles are like lyrics.

K: (*turning back towards laptop*) Well, his stories are shit.

BEO: (*genuine curiosity*) Why do you say that?

K: (*says nothing*)

BEO: Have you read any of his stories?

K: (*says nothing*)

BEO: You ever talk to him?

K: Yeah, but shut up, okay?

BEO: His titles are nice, that's all I'm saying.

K: (*looking at and reading paper*) "In a time of concordance to fascistic laws, humans often turn towards more harsh methods of receiving food and water. How, in your experience, have people turned towards others turning to those aforementioned methods? How do you believe these tendencies are ingrained into normal society? Do you believe that you could fall to these sorts of actions? Answer in a formal manner."

BEO: I never grabbed that spray.

K: Does formal mean no first person? I suppose it does... Wait, how do I answer this then? I need to use- Ah, dammit. Maybe I should just start another prompt.

BEO: Be right back. (*runs offstage [to get spray]*)

K: (*ignoring*) Wait, what methods? I don't get this... Have I ever seen these uh...methods? Ugh. Also, fascistic or fascist?

(*A bird sings offstage*)

K: Thought I shut the damn window. Fuck. (*strains to move, then gives up*) Damn birds. (*sighs, yawns, then looks at laptop*) I mean, I've always been in suburbia. So, I guess I dunno how to answer this. It doesn't make

sense, anyway. Can I skip this one? (*looks around at the fallen papers*)
Probably shouldn't risk it.

BEO *sprints in with a spray can. He begins to run about the stage spraying.*

K: Goddammit! (*coughs, choking at the scent*) That's deodorant, you asshole.

BEO: Shhh

K: Agh (*chokes, coughs*)

BEO: (*stops, looks around satisfied*) There we go. I think it smells nice now.

K: Fuck off. (*wipes tears off his eyes*) God.

A bird sings again. A shadow of one swings through the stage quickly. BEO follows it with his head, moving so that he can see it the entire time. K merely looks back towards his laptop.

K: Damn birds.

BEO: Wonder if that was a hawk.

K: Just bring disease.

BEO: Was too small to be a hawk. It was kinda dainty.

K: And I hate eggs, so it isn't like they produce anything worthwhile.

BEO: God, I love birds.

K: Smells a little better.

BEO: (*turning to K*) You know, "Birds" may be a nice title.

K: (*annoyed*) To what.

BEO: "To what" is also good, I like that. But to anything, you know?

K: (*turning back to laptop, begins typing*) No, I don't "know" but shut up.

BEO: (*humming*)

A bird sings outside. Another joins in. A loud knock comes from offstage. The bird song breaks into a series of surprised tweets then silence.

BEO: Someone's here.

K: "Methods"... I wonder if I could... I guess the grocery store could act like a fascist government.

BEO: Should I get it?

K: I mean, that isn't true at all... Dammit, that's all I got though. Okay, I can stretch it out.

BEO: I'm gonna go get it.

K: (*turning*) Well, obviously. It's probably food. Go on, then. Come on. Shit, go go go go go go-

BEO *goes offstage and returns with* GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY.

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: Hi K.

K: Oh. Hey.

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: Beo let me in.

K: Yeah, I know.

BEO: George Who Writes Like Hemingway, do you want anything? We have...(*picks up a piece of paper*) prompts, essays, short stories, a play, two half novellas, and one thousand nine hundred ninety eight poems.

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: When'd you count them?

K: Yeah, Beo, when?

BEO: (*shrugs*) These things happen. So, you want anything?

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: No, I'll be fine, I just wanted to say hi. (*changes mind*) Actually, could I have a short story? I've been stumped lately.

K: (*facing laptop*) Have you considered reading a novel? Usually spikes my inspiration.

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: Well, Hemingway hasn't been writing any novels lately.

K: (*uninterested*) Oh really?

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: (*slightly sad*) No. All he's been doing is drinking. He's got this shotgun, I think he bought it at the new shooting range.

BEO: The one built next to Korematsu's place?

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: (*turning to BEO*) You know, I could never spell his name. It always perplexed me. And I don't know (*turning back to K*) Anyways, he just sort of sits on his porch. (*turning to BEO*) I don't know where he bought the porch. (*turning back to K*) And he just shines the gun with this little rag. (*turning back to BEO*) I don't know where he bought the rag. (*turning back to K*) Then he sort of holds it in his old hand and just rubs it a little more. (*turning to BEO*) I don't know where he bought the hand. (*turning back to K*) So he hasn't been writing anything. No poetry, no stories, no novels, nothing. It's been kinda frustrating.

K: (*still looking at his laptop*) Oh, I'm sure.

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: I'm kind of nervous.

K: (*uninterested*) Oh really.

BEO: (*caring*) Why is that?

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: (*turns to BEO, whiny*) Well, what if my writing style changes from reading someone else? It's been successful up until now. It bought my house. It bought my car. It let me be the executive producer and editor. It's been nice. (*sighs*) Oh well. Can I have a short story?

BEO: Of course. (*goes on knees and roots around the papers. Finally grabs one and hands it to GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY*) There ya go! Written by our very own, K.

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: Ok. (*begins to read*)

K: Um... (*turns from laptop, then back, then once more away, then back again.*) Ah, tell me what you think. No one wants to publish it.

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: Ok... (*looks closely at paper*) What's it called?

K: Oh...I don't know. Which one is that?

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: Um...

K: Just read it aloud.

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: “ A torrent pursues, never mind, I think there’s a battle out there, never mind, we can’t smell as much as we used to. I think I still see it out the window, the window’s getting more lost, where is it, where is that, the car’s here, the car’s here. The here is car. No, a pursuit can’t matter now, I didn’t buy the door last week , was too weak, last week, I was weak. “

K: Oh yeah, that one.

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: What’s it called?

K: I don’t know.

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: Um... Okay, I’m gonna go. Can I take it?

K: Yeah, sure, (*receding*) who gives shit, I don’t care, go on then...

BEO: Bye George Who Writes Like Hemingway!

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY: Uh... See ya

GEORGE WHO WRITES LIKE HEMINGWAY *moves offstage*. BEO and K *sit in silence*. *Finally*, BEO *begins to pick up papers*. *Meanwhile*, K *begins back at the laptop*.

K: If I say the Grocery Store is a fascist society, who’s the fascist? (*looks up at the ceiling*) I guess the cashiers.

Bird tweets.

K: I guess the cleaners too.

Two birds tweet, one then the other. Each should be a distinct tweet.

K: I guess the baker.

Three birds tweet in a manner akin to the prior tweets.

K: I guess the manager.

Four birds tweet.

K: I guess the baggers.

Five birds tweet.

K: I guess that disabled kid who brings the milk carton back to the dairy section for twenty-two cents an hour but not on weekends cause he wasn’t supposed to show up at all. (*pause*) He’s probably the most

fascistic...yeah, fascistic...fascistic of them all. He probably is the one that made the fascist dogma that the store follows. Probably.

A long bird song begins to play in the background. Shadows of multiple birds begin to swim throughout the stage, slowly then faster and faster. A whirring noise begins to come to the song.

K: I bet he issues something cruel in the laws as well. The rules of the grocery store. Controls how the Starbucks set up is run. Probably has a room where he brings the guy who refreshes the Wells Fargo ATM and beats him over the head with a cricket bat. Cricket bat that came from India.

BEO looks up at the birds with a bundle of papers in his hands. He circles around for a few seconds, then drops the papers down, allowing them to fall all around stage.

K: I guess he'd have to hold his cricket bat in his non-lame hand. (*looks around*) Beo, you drop the papers again?

The bird song grows louder and louder, increasing in pitch as well. Then it drops completely, disappearing. The bird shadows grow larger and larger until the stage is completely black. With a click, K clicks his desk light on. The stage is lit again, but is darker than before to give the effect of the lamp.

BEO: Where'd we get that lamp.

K: It's always there, man. (*glances at laptop*) I think I got a title.

BEO: Where'd the birds go?

K: Fits and everything.

BEO: What was that song they were singing?

K: Beo.

BEO: You know, George Who Writes Like Hemingway isn't that bad. He's a little stubborn-

K: That's probably the wrong word.

BEO: (*immediately giving up*) Maybe it was multiple songs all sort of mushed together in a weird amalgamation of...weird.

K: Beo.

BEO: (*fake exaggerated Hispanic accent*) Si, senior?

K: Don't do that.

BEO: What.

K: What you shouldn't do?

BEO: What did you want?

K: Beo.

BEO: What.

K: Ask me what the title is.

BEO: No. I don't care. (*walks away to the edge of the stage. Bends down into a crouching position to either [on a stage level with the audience or has an seating that is level with the stage then rises up] look at an audience member straight in the face or [if the stage is risen] sit on the edge of the stage and look out into the audience*) You know, title has tit in it.

K: It's "The Grocery Outlet"

BEO: Isn't that kind of obvious?

K: Well, what're you looking for, then?

BEO: (*not looking back*) K, I am not looking for anything. You're the writer. You're supposed to figure this shit out. I got other stuff to think about. Like how I'm going to pick up those papers.

K: I wonder if George Who Writes Like Hemingway will like my story.

BEO: I doubt it.

K: Yeah, so do I. But I titled an essay. And I think I can start it also.

BEO: Well, that's good.

K: I wanna go outside, first, though.

BEO: Ok.

Both look around the room for a second, expectantly. Then BEO comes back over to where K is sitting. K closes the laptop. BEO goes offstage quickly then comes back with a charging cord for the laptop. He attaches it to the laptop.

K: It's a weird prompt.

BEO: Have you got it printed out?

K: Yeah, but you don't need to see it. No one needs to see it, it's kind of obvious when you just don't look at it. Prompt is just meant to distract you, you know? You can just turn it upside down and close your eyes and type as fast as you can until something comes out. That's how most people like it. That's the style people like.

BEO: Two questions.

K: That's nice. What are they?

BEO: Is that how you do it?

K: Going to. I don't really have a choice. No one's accepting my stuff and the food never did end up coming today.

BEO: I wonder what Hemingway'd think of it.

K: You phrased it like a statement but I'll answer it nonetheless. I couldn't give a flying fuck what George Who Writes Like Hemingway thinks cause that motherfucker just writes what he sees on his curvy flat-screen and doesn't have any anything. So fuck him. I don't care what he'd think of it.

BEO: I said Hemingway.

K: Huh?

BEO: Not George Who Writes Like Hemingway. Just Hemingway.

K: (*shrugs*) Oh, I don't know. Probably would just sigh and drink.

BEO grabs K by the shoulders and hoists him up to his feet. K cracks his neck, yawns, then begins to walk offstage. BEO follows him, stops, grabs one of the papers.

BEO: What're you going to title this one?

The lights begin to dim, slowly, as this final back and forth goes on, going completely black on BEO's last word.

K: (*offstage*) Prompt Twelve Point Five.

BEO: (*grabbing another one, beginning to speak louder*) And this one?

K: (*offstage, getting quieter*) Prompt Fourteen Minus Twenty Five.

BEO: (*grabbing, louder*) And this one?

K: *(offstage, quieter)* Prompt Negative Fifteen Divided By Eight Times Sixteen.

BEO: *(grabbing, louder)* And this one?

K: *(offstage, quieter)* Prompt Seven Plus Eighteen To The Power Of Five.

BEO: *(grabbing, louder)* And this one?

Blackout. Curtain closes.