

Fortunate Child

by H. W. Moss

“You have big day in school today, yhes?”

The child looked up from his breakfast cereal, fist firmly wrapped around a spoon handle, the business end of the utensil inches from his open mouth. He peered up at his father through thick glasses which made his eyes appear large as hen’s eggs.

“Teacher says I have an important examination,” the boy said with a faint lisp.

The wife and mother slid another rasher of bacon onto her husband’s plate. The father said, “This is good, good. You get education. This is good.”

The child was pleased his father approved. It was such a simple task, this test taking, not like how hard adults labored which was so much more important. The spoon made its way into his mouth and he happily crunched the milk drenched rice puffs. The child swallowed.

“Can I come to work with you tonight?” he asked tentatively.

“Daddy must work late,” the mother interjected. She rarely approved the child being out after sunset.

Her husband, however, wore a wide smile and was not to be put off: “As big reward, yes. Do good on exam, you come with me tonight and work late shift.”

The child was ecstatic with the prospect and promised himself he would excel just so he could meet his father’s expectations. He loved joining Papa as he made his rounds and hoped to emulate him when he grew up.

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A man and woman stood side by side with pens poised over clipboards.

“For heaven’s sake, can you believe that?” The woman said. “He’s already completed the math section, now he’s half way through the vocabulary. What is he, ten?”

They wore long white laboratory coats and their faces bore intent expressions. The boy filled in answers on his test sheet while they watched behind a one-way mirror. The specially designed room allowed children to work without being aware of their observers.

“You were right, Claire, he is a candidate. You see what he’s working on right now? That’s a graduate school statistical model. Obviously, he understands it intuitively. I’m just glad we spotted him in time. Immigrant children so often fall through the cracks.”

Claire’s reply was firm. “Well, that’s not going to happen here. I’ll see to that.”

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Both father and son wore latex gloves. Each held in their hands a long poking tool and a garbage sack. The father pointed at two trash containers on opposite sides of the fast food parking lot indicating which was his, which his son’s. He counted down three, two, one -- Go! The child gleefully ran toward one garbage can as the father charged the other in a game of parent/child competition.

The boy was nearly swallowed up as he reached far inside the trash receptacle and began poking and digging furiously around its interior. In seconds, he retrieved a prize, a discarded plastic water bottle. His search completed, the boy ran over to his father who was still poking a stick inside his trash bin.

“I win, I win,” the boy chanted as he danced up and down. His father good naturedly rubbed the top of his son’s head and pointed toward another trash bin on the sidewalk in front of the liquor store next door. The boy gleefully took off at a run, his father making it a point to stay a few paces behind.

From the interior of the vehicle where they regularly ate dinner, Martha turned toward her husband and said: “My god, Henry. Will ya lookit that? The kid’s learning how to root through garbage cans. What kind of a father is that anyway? I mean, that’s disgusting, teaching a child to use a stick to pick glass and plastic out of a garbage bin to sell at the recycling center.”

“Dumbass foreigners,” was all Henry could manage between bites on his burger.

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