

Gulliver's Tailgater

The security system at the William Mason Library is on, the lights turned off and we are officially closed. It's a touch past 9 and getting dark on this hot August night.

"Good night."

"See you tomorrow."

"Safe drive."

I check the front door one final time to ensure it's truly locked. OCD is a trait us library employees appear to possess. I cross the street to the William Mason Mall parking lot where I find my lonely car waiting patiently for me.

The key is turned, the MP3 player plugged in and Keiji Haino's electric guitar seeking unattainable resolutions through sheer chaos drills electricity into my 3rd eye. I'm sufficiently pumped for the 22-minute drive back to my nondescript 1-bedroom apartment. The chaotic music jolts my senses to the heightened state of awareness necessary to navigate home safely – fate willing.

My mindfulness is lost as a 20-year-old uni-cyclist, sitting backwards and looking over his shoulder, darts in and out of traffic, right in front of...my car! I slam the brakes to avoid killing him. I shake my head as I watch him continue on his dangerous journey. As I make my turn, I open my window and scream at his fading visage: "You're going to get killed! Idiot!" I close my window satisfied with myself and continue my drive.

Hold on. What just happened? Was a kid really riding a unicycle, sitting backwards while looking over his shoulder, and darting in and out of traffic like PAC-man desperately avoiding being caught by those damn ghosts? Then he darted in front of my car forcing me to slam the brakes so I didn't kill him, or at the very least, severely injure him??

Something always happens on these drives home.

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Five minutes after my adventure with the unicyclist, lights in my rear-view mirror become brighter and more blinding by the millisecond, filling my vision with white light. Does this guy see me? He's going to rear-end me!!

I prepare to start bumping from car to car, like a silver ball in a pinball machine. I focus my eyes on the road ahead...sweating...any second....any second now...my body tenses...I wait...where is it? The jolt doesn't come. I look in my rear-view. He's so close to my rear bumper, that I can't see his headlights. I only see the front window and this...blank face.

My attempt to keep him from distracting my attention from the traffic is middling at best. I sense him...feel him...centimetres, if not millimetres, from my bumper. One more millimetre, and my car will be spiralling out of control into the busy intersection, as a 16-wheeler approaches at 110 kilometres an hour...

I attempt to focus on the car in front. Don't let *him* distract you. Why are the other drivers not responding, or at least aware, of this dangerous lunatic? Where are the cops when you need them?

Staring at the car in front, I still sense him mere millimetres behind me. He's a hair's breadth from sending my car spinning out of control. I *know* he's still tailgating!

I look in the rear-view mirror and...and...and...a shiver goes down my spine as the driver's face comes into focus. There is no obvious deviation from your average dangerous driver...but...but, there *is* something "off". He's emotionless, he's exuding no emotion...he's empty...blank...dangerously blank.

I try in vain to get my attention back on the traffic, which was steady enough to require my senses to multitask. I'm shocked I'm not yet spiralling out of control into an approaching 36-wheeler...

Oh...this is too much!!! He's *still* millimetres away, and now...I can't believe it. He's flashing his brights! The reflection is blinding! I feel out of control. I can't focus. This has gone on long enough! I start braking far in advance of the approaching traffic light at Fanshawe & Adelaide. It will be red by the time I get there.

He's *still* only a few millimetres away from me. The hope that he would clue in and back off when I started braking has failed. I continue slowing down and come to a complete stop 20 feet behind the car in front, as we wait at the recently turned red light. I chuckle nervously. He hasn't hit me...yet. I'm still alive. Will he finally back off? I drive up to the car in front and wait for the light to change. I might as well look behind and see what he's doing.

What the...???

He didn't drive to the light with me. He's out of his car, walking towards me and he's...he's...he's getting...he's getting larger...7 feet tall? Are my eyes deceiving me? He's getting taller and filling out with every step he takes.

The traffic starts moving and I continue driving. My hands shake on the wheel. I vainly attempt to focus on the traffic. I glance in the rear-view to see if my eyes have been deceiving me.

No.

He's still walking towards me and getting larger with each stride. He's gaining ground! I look around desperately waiting for assistance. The police? The army? Anyone? Why does no one notice this modern day King Kong quickly catching up to me? The driver that was behind the Giant's car calmly went into the right lane and continued on, blithely ignoring the fact that a 12-foot giant is walking down the street getting larger with every step. Why is there no panic in the streets? Why am I not hearing sirens?

Oh fuck.

I'm approaching another red light. The Giant will catch up to me by the time I hit the light. He continues to grow and increase the length of his stride with every step. My body vibrates involuntarily and I misjudge braking and slam them hard to avoid sending the car in front spiralling into the semi-truck that's speeding past 30 km/h over the speed limit.

I slump behind the wheel and nervously look to my left.

A giant eyeball with red veins fills my driver's side window with venomous rage. The eyeball is fuming...the red veins float like worms. I close my eyes and anticipate the end...this is it...killed by a tailgating giant.

* honk honk *

The honking startles me into opening my eyes, and I notice the traffic moving. The light has turned green. The eyeball disappears as the giant uncoils and stretches to his full 50-foot frame. He lifts his right leg, and steps over two lanes of traffic, heading east on Fanshawe. I stare in shock as his 60-foot frame disappears over the horizon.

The honking increases in anger. I realize the anger is directed towards me...not the 65-foot raging giant storming down Fanshawe. My body vibrates from head to toe, as I take my foot off the brake and tentatively continue my journey.

The shaking of my body starts to ebb as I re-join the rhythm of the road. It had to be a dream. How could it be real? Was I awake, yet dreaming? I probe my brain for a logical explanation. How could it have been real? No one else noticed a 70 foot raging giant stomping down Fanshawe, 9:15 pm on a hot Thursday night? What about the uni-cyclist? Was he part of the dream? Am I still dreaming? What the hell is happening!?

I no longer see the 75-foot giant.

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I make it back to my 1-bedroom apartment, enter, grab my "special" pills, sit down in my favourite chair and close my eyes. No more fighting with tailgaters in my future. I need to chill out! I need to rise above! Relax. I need a holiday.

* breathe *

I wipe my brow and find that I am sweating profusely. A sense of uneasiness creeps into my emotional basket. I close my eyes and try to convince myself to relax.

* breathe *

Why are my eyes shut so tight? What's wrong with me? Something feels..."off"...ok...

* breathe *

My unease exponentially increases, as I shut my eyes tighter..and tighter.

* breathe *

*This uneasy feeling
will send me
to my grave,
when will
this uneasy soul
be saved?*

Hmmm...I'm not sure about the quality of that one. Wait! That's the right idea! Write some poetry to distract "this uneasy feeling".

The first thing I need to do is open my eyes. Why are my eyes not opening? I eventually manage to pry them open. My head turns towards the glass balcony door overlooking the backyard from my 2nd-floor apartment.

No.

It can't be.

No.

A red-veined, raging eyeball is filling my balcony door.

My body shakes violently. Is this reality? Is this a dream? Does it matter? My mind moves a million miles an hour as I wait to wake from this nightmare. Now! No. The bloodshot eyeball is still shooting daggers at me through my balcony door. The nightmare continues.

My mind comes to a conclusion: reality or dream, I need to confront the Giant and face the consequences. The thought of pleading for my life also flits through my mind. After all, we are talking about an 85-foot giant! He could pick me up by the scruff of my neck and squash me between his fingers as if I was an irritating insect to be extinguished.

I pull myself out of my favourite chair. The angry, raging, maniacal bloodshot eyeball follows me as I go to the door, put my shoes on and grab my keys. I don't want to lock myself out of my apartment when there's a pissed off 95-foot giant in my backyard! I don't look back at him. I don't need to. I know he's there.

I open the door and leave my apartment, feeling a little confused as to why I hear no sirens, no screaming, no panic in the streets...even though a 105-foot giant is in a London, Ontario backyard surrounded by 75 apartments? I have to be dreaming.

I exit the building. What the hell is going on? I look in all directions. I run a few steps this way...a few steps that way...that doesn't change anything.

There's no giant in my backyard.

I've lost my mind. There is truly something wrong with me. No. It's just a dream. Right?

I head back to my apartment and straight to the bedroom to grab some more pills. I need to sleep. A feeling of dread shoots through my body. I didn't look towards the balcony as I came to the bedroom for my pills. A cold chill shoots through every nerve...every cell...every pore of my body. I take a couple of steps to look out my balcony door...

...a bloodshot raging eyeball is staring at me! My soul falls to the floor. I start shaking and find myself prostrate on the ground. Am I praying? I don't believe in a "god". Do I? I don't know what to believe...except I hope I'm dreaming!

I suddenly realize I am an actor playing a role in a drama already written. I pick myself up from the ground, put my shoes back on, and head down to further discuss the situation with the giant.

I hold the script of the drama I am starring in, and can't help but peek a few pages ahead. I now know the next plot twist. There will be no giant in the backyard.

When I get to the backyard, I look in all directions; and as expected, there is no 120-foot giant to be seen. Anywhere. I return to my apartment and know what I will find. A raging eyeball staring at me through the balcony door, followed by a giant-free zone in the 25 seconds it takes me to get from apartment to backyard. I continue to follow the script (of my dream?) and travel from apartment to backyard 6 more times.

When will I awake from this dream? This play? It must be a dream. There are no sirens...no panic...nothing but the eerie silence at the conclusion of another day. How could I be the only person observing a 130-foot giant roaming the streets of London, Ontario (population: 383,825) 10 o'clock on a hot Thursday night? Therefore...it has to be a dream. I am anxiously waiting to wake up from this nightmare. It has to be wrapping up soon!

I start screaming to end the dream. I scream as loud as I possibly can. Then louder. The giant is opening the balcony door with the tip of his little finger. I scream louder. Why am I not awake yet???

The glass door is now open, and he is attempting to squeeze his finger through the door.

It's stuck. The giant's finger is stuck in the door. I stop screaming and stare at the finger as it tries unsuccessfully to wiggle free.

We appear to be at an impasse.

I take a step towards the finger. What am I doing? *Why haven't I called 911?!* This is crazy. I'm not thinking straight. If it's NOT a dream...call 911! If it's a dream...call 911!! Instead...

I take another step towards the now motionless finger. The finger is silently following my every move. I'm 4-5 feet from the finger.

I take another step.

One more small step and I'll be at the tip of his finger. What am I doing?! Call 911!

I lift my right foot to take the final step. All of a sudden...Oh My God!!!

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“That was quite the night,” the neighbour from 207 told the new arrival moving into 206. “He was a quiet sort. Hardly saw him, friendly, but didn’t say much. Anyway, I’m sitting there watching 'Crazy Rich Asians' - do you like that show? I love it. Anyhow...this screaming comes from 206....and it was...well, I never heard screaming like that before. It was like from a horror movie! I’m not afraid to tell you, I was scared...that screaming was...it was terrifying! I heard sirens and I knew they were coming to 206. I peeked out and saw them break into his apartment. He was screaming at them: 'go away go away...I'll be awake soon...don't you see the giant finger? It's right there - oh my god, how can you not see it? god help us all!' I couldn't help myself. I left my apartment and peeked into 206. I saw him shaking and pointing at his balcony door screaming: ‘it's only a dream, do you see it? The giant finger? There there...” he was pointing towards the door. It was crazy! Never seen anything like it. Don't want to ever again! I heard later he was hallucinating that a 150-foot giant was in our backyard and its finger was stuck in his door. The giant was also a unicyclist and a tailgater! Imagine that.”

The lady from 207 leaned in closer to her new neighbour, and whispered conspiratorially into her ear: "I knew he wasn't one of us."