

Unnamed Journal

Volume 1, Issue 4

May 2016

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How to Tell us How Amazing We Are

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We actually paid someone for this.

Letters to the Editor

Dear Exploiters,

I should like to remind you that it's not nice to let people write mean screeds about their sisters when they're off their meds. People, I mean. Not the sisters. I mean...dammit, never mind.

-Not Someone Related To Your Writers

Madam, this is rank calumny. Every single one of our writers is required, under pain of termination, to submit urinalysis to indicate that they are taking their prescribed medications. We even go so far as to have a house physician regulate the dosage. Some may complain that our house physician is actually a pharmaceutical sales rep and that our urinalysis is actually a pissing contest into the dumpster behind Nico's Bar, but it has yet to come up in a staff meeting.

Hi Unnamed Journal,

I like to read such good magazinging as you make. I am happiness with the quality of your publish? I make \$8756 per month with a few hours work online, you can too also! click fern.co.to/1119111

-Mike

Hi, "Mike". We were pleased to read your letter. It reassured us that the technological achievement that enabled a counting machine to beat a Russian Grand Master still can't produce a

spambot who can write a pitch human enough to fool a seventh-grader blasted out of his mind on Carbona. That learning curve just ain't bending like everyone thought, huh? Not today, Skynet. Not today.

Dear "Gentlemen"

No one who's actually spent any time in Japan could fail to take offense at the dull cliché you presented in your two-part story about the geisha in the bathtub. Try actually travelling to expand your horizons!

-Traveling Pants

Congratulations, you win our Crank Efficiency Award, given to the twerp who crams the most amount of arrant nonsense in 25 words or less.

First of all, referring to us as "gentlemen" in quotes is the kind of insult that our moms stopped using about fifteen years ago. Up your insult game, grasshopper.

Second, there was no geisha in that story. She was clearly a being not of this plane of existence. That's what the entire plot revolved around. The hauteur with which you make that error leads us to believe that you maybe got to cross the Pacific in a school trip, have been insufferable about it ever since, but otherwise draw your knowledge about the nuances of Asian culture from old episodes of Dragonball Z. Translated, at that.

From the Editor

Our magazine has held together for yet another issue. As a result, the publisher has been more bullish lately. So much so that he's cut back to just half a bottle of scotch each day, which is great news for everyone here at the Unnamed Journal. However, it looks like bad news for the liquor wholesaler down the street whom had been eyeing early retirement.

I admit I'm feeling a touch more bullish myself these days. The prior and current issues came together far easier than the first two. Perhaps it's just practice, or perhaps we've learned to work together more cohesively as a magazine. Whatever the reason, my job has gotten easier, and I'm not complaining.

All of our material for this issue was submitted ahead of schedule, which made me apprehensive. I suspected the writing staff of just submitting the first page of articles and then filling in the rest of the body by typing, "words, words, words, words". Fortunately for me, and our readers, all of the stories I received were complete.

This issue, we have an interview with the Staten Island Fairy [to be honest, I thought the author tried interviewing a boat until I read his piece]. We also have a short piece by a guy with a long name, Montgomery Finneus Beaumont IV, about quips, quotables, and other things beginning with 'Q'. Our second feature is vaguely Gothic, in that Bauhaus kind of way.

-Alfred Underhill

Editor-In-Chief

Quips, Queries, and a Quintillion Quixotic Quotable Quackeries

By Montgomery Finneus Beaumont IV

In the recondite stylings of such tumescent personages as Ayn Rand, Kayne West, H.L. Menchen, and basically any hipster that ever ate his soup before it was cool; I present to you pretentiously gospel truths concerning our sphere of being.

So often in life we lose sight of the true importance of

the infinitudes of possibility in our own existence as human being. We misjudge the ability of the human body and the scope of our abilities. Take, for instance, the human digestive track. Did you know, if we were to remove the intestines from an average healthy male and lay them out and stretch them that that average healthy male would die?

We simplify what we take to be the mundane for ease of understanding. The simplification of seemingly inert objects belie the notion that they are not truly fallow, but full of a secret complexity which reveals itself to those with the erudition to discern it. Take, for instance, the custard pie; it is a favorite of those who love all that is saccharine as well as those Larry, Moe, and Curly slapstick artists. I tell you with verity, that

the custard pie is not in fact a real object. It is merely an illusionary object in this world and it exists truly in a world where objects behave differently. The word slapstick derives from a Commedia dell'arte prop, a flat paddle with two wooden slats whose loud smack would fabricate the notion that the actor had been struck with real force. This then was appropriated by the English (as things

“I tell you with verity, that the custard pie is not in fact a real object.”

so oft are appropriated by the tea swilling twits) Harlequinade tradition. Here the Harlequin would gesticulate wildly with the slapstick as sword, magic wand, and etcetera all with the ability to wondrously transform droll scenery to poignant poetic picturesque perfection. This idea is the true key to understanding the custard pie and its inherent double identity; an entirely ordinary

object imbued with magical theatrical properties of transformation.

I leave you with a piece of optimistic assurance. In the animal kingdom, the source of much pride and envy is elicited from the male genitalia. If we are to believe Freud (though he did snort enough cocaine to kill a small horse, or even possibly a few medium

even a Gorilla (genus and species is Gorilla gorilla, did you know that? I mean how lazy can these scientists get?) you are the picture of virility and endowment. For you ladies who might be reading this, firstly I apologize. Secondly, if your man might get too cocky (pun definitely intended) at this news you may remind him that though humans have the largest penis to body size ratio of mammals, in the entirety of the animal kingdom it is the measly barnacle (genus and species Chthamalus stellatus) which has the largest penis to body size ratio, 40:1 in case you were wondering.

With that news I bid you adieu until next time you may be graced by the tumescent prowess of the master of the recondite with more quips, queries, and a quintillion quixotic quotable quackeries.

You're still trying to imagine a barnacle penis now, aren't you? Pervert...

sized horses) then the penis could be the envy of both other males as well as females. In the animal kingdom, however, did you know that the mammal with the largest penis to body size ratio is the human? That's right, though you shy away in the gym and be slightly queasy as the rotund older gentleman go about towel-less, in front of

The Staten Island Fairy

by Connie Maicitt

It's a warm spring day in early June. The windows are down as I drive south on the West Shores Express Way. My radio is loud as I drive through the least populace of the five boroughs toward Freshkills Park. This is the largest park project ever undertaken by New York City. Once complete, Freshkills will be almost three times larger than Central Park, and it will be the second largest park in NYC. For the non-New Yorkers reading this, the park is a land reclamation project that was once the site of the world's largest landfill: Freshkills Landfill.

Opened in 1947 on a rural section of salt marsh, the landfill would later become the largest man-made structure on Earth's surface. At the height of its operation, the landfill absorbed approximately 13,000 tons of garbage every day. Thanks to federal and local pressure, Freshkills closed in March, 2001 before it could become the highest point of elevation on the East Coast. It was temporarily reopened later that year to receive

debris from the World Trade Centers. With the terrible relics of history interred, the landfill was shuttered permanently.

None of that dark municipal history is apparent today. The reclamation efforts made by the NYC Parks and Freshkills Park Teams have made staggering progress. To the uninitiated, it would come as quite a surprise that this park was once the site of an active landfill. Though visitors may only use certain areas of the parkland due to ongoing development, Freshkills transformation into a pastoral, family destination seems assured.

I park in one of the few remaining visitor spaces. It's a great day to be outside. Families walk by with bikes and strollers. A father helps his daughter learn how to keep her kite aloft on the swirling breeze. It's a picture-perfect scene. I smile reflexively as I grab my notepad and

recorder.

Today, I will be moving out of the designated visitors' areas, well off the developed path, and into a liminal space between the past and present. I do so to conduct an interview with the park's rumored full-time resident: The Old Man of Freshkills, AKA The Staten Island Fairy.

I chanced upon the purported existence of the Staten Island Fairy while doing research for another article on the shifting age demographics in urban areas of New Jersey. Within the Times' micro-fiche archive was a lone tabloid-style article from the mid-1980's ominously titled, The Old Man of Freshkills. The article read like a story one would find in The National Enquirer. There were few specific details about "the old man", other than the fact that he was "strangely bulbous" and "seemed to lack any body hair" sic. That description seemed like it could describe many older gentlemen in the tri-state area!

Nonetheless, the article had a kind of creeping veracity to it due to a terse eyewitness account from an anonymous NYC sanitation worker. He had encountered the Old Man by trying to move a door propped up on the side of a trash heap. The angry resident of the mound rushed out to confront the worker, who fled upon seeing the Old Man. He was so frightened by the encounter, that he refused to return to work after that day.

So I began to wonder, what if there really was someone living in the landfill turned park? A call to the NYC Department of Sanitation neither confirmed nor denied either termination or disciplinary action of any of the departments employees that year. In fact, they weren't even sure they still had records for that decade. Searches for other articles detailing the Old Man yielded no results. A few urban myth websites made mention of him, but the details of each account were too variable to be

useful. The areas around the park are so sparsely populated that additional eyewitness accounts seemed unlikely without a survey. So I decided to have a look around myself.

Picking my way along a barely visible deer trail, I eventually come to a dilapidated door set in the side of a mound. The door itself looks like a relic from the park's prior life, all rough wood and chipped paint. The mound in which the door is set likewise betrays the past: I can spot a cornucopia of refuse peaking out of dirt and grass covering the mound. For a moment, I lose my resolve and pause, staring at the door. This is absurd. After a deep breath, I give the door a solid knock.

Twenty seconds, no response. I knock again. A minute goes by. Nothing. I raise my hand to knock a third time, when the door suddenly swings inward.

"Yeah, yeah, I heard you. I was coming," says what appears to be a squat, bald, middle-aged man with hirsute transparent wings. His voice has the aural qualities of a throttled sheep. The Old Man's wardrobe is less than fresh. He's wearing

a heavily stained undershirt, which fails to contain a protruding belly; jeans checkered with holes, paint, and dirt; over-sized sunglasses that look comical on his already rounded face. Several chains of gold droop from his neck. A Camel cigarette dangles from his lips.

"Are you the Old Man of Freshkills? The Staten Island Fairy?" I say, as I push the button on my recorder.

He scoffs, and half-mutters, "Staten Island Fairy? You must think you're pretty clever,

"we fey - that's what we call ourselves - we used to have lots of nice places to live."

huh?" He shakes his head. "Yeah, I guess I'm the, uh, one and only, Mac," he replies.

I introduce myself and let him know that I am a journalist, while he picks his nose and emits a cacophony of flatulence.

"May I come in?"

"Nah, you don't really want to come in here, 'specially now", he says. What little I can see of the interior looks

like the inside of a trash heap. I can't tell if the aromas I smell are generated by the heap or by the Old Man, but they are alien and horrible. "The sun's too bright out there, though, so I'm not coming out either."

We compromise and conduct the interview in the doorway to his residence.

"So, Mr., uh, Fairy—"

"Just call me Frank."

"Okay, Frank. So, how long have you been living here?"

"Well, basically, since the last Old Man retired."

"And how long would that be?"

"Thirty-seven years," he says.

"And you said that the prior Old Man retired. What does it mean for a...fairy to retire?"

"What it means to retire, is it means you go back under, Under Hill that is.

It's where we all come from, us fairies."

"Ah, so there are more of your kind," I say.

"Yeah, but we only hang out in crappy places anymore. We don't make houses in nice places like the good old days". He spits over my shoulder at a field mouse, which emits a shriek and darts away. I remain focused, despite being thoroughly grossed out.

"What do you mean by the good old days?"

"Back in the old days, when there weren't many humans, we fey — that's what we call ourselves — we used to have lots of nice places to live." Frank exhales a long plume of smoke in my face. "Little houses in groves of trees, nice clean caves in the side of mountains- plenty of room for a pet bear or three. And them types into water sports used to live in little underwater caves with the fishies and seals and stuff. It was pretty good, in all." He sighs, looking at me and shaking his head. "Yeah, but then you humans fucked all that up for us. You people started thinking you were pretty clever, thinking maybe you knew better than all the other critters on the

planet. Like, maybe you could find a better way to live not in trees, throwing shit at each other. You spread out, had lots of kids, and then there weren't nowhere for us to live up here no more. Kinda sucks for us. A lot."

"O h , u h , m y condolences," I say, not really knowing how else to comment.

"Nah, you should be sorry, not consoling, but whatever. Not like I give a shit." Frank spits at pigeon, which turns completely black and then flies away. It seems like a strangely natural reaction, yet my pulse rises. He takes a long drag.

"I'm sorry."

"Yeah, you should be. You and the other six-billion, eight- hundred million, nine-hundred sixteen-thousand, fifty-six human assholes on this planet."

"You're right, Frank. I am sorry," I say. "Wait: was that an exact count of how many humans there are on the planet?"

He snorts and chuckles. "Not anymore. Your species just added about thirty new screaming, poop-factories since I said that."

"That's remarkable."

"I sure as shit don't think so. You people need to learn not to rut so damn much, or at least how to do it without having kids. I thought you humans were supposed to be so clever with all your tools and science."

"Oh no, I'm sorry. I meant your ability to accurately report how many people there are on the planet. If your talent matches up with the real number of people on the planet, then that's quite extraordinary."

"Nah, you're wrong."

"What do you mean? You just told me how many humans there are on the planet, just now."

"Yeah, I told you how many humans there

are, but not how many people. There's a difference between being a human and being a person. They ain't always the same thing. Keep it straight, kid." His glare isn't blunted by his sunglasses. And I become aware of just how vulnerable I am at this exact moment.

"I'm sorry. I stand corrected. So you know how many humans there are on the planet, but not how many people?"

"Yeah." He swallows his finished cigarette.

"So, there are other people on this planet that aren't human? There are more of you fey?"

"Yeah, there's more of us," he says. Frank is rubbing his stubbly

cheek, and lets out a loud belch of smoke. He scratches his crotch and lights another cigarette.

"Well, if you don't mind me asking, where are they?"

"I do mind you asking! That's a personal fucking question, Mac. Those are my people! Didn't you listen when I said life was pretty shitty for us these days? Don't need no hairless apes poking around trying to steal what's left of our shit."

"I-I'm sorry."

Frank grins. "Ah, I'm just fucking with you, kid." He snorts a chuckle. "You shoulda seen the look on your face. Looked like you about shit your pants." He looks me over once as if to check to see if I have in fact



“I’m confused, offended. I am tired of the interview and want to go home.”

lost control of my bodily functions. He laughs some more, and then browbeats me about my cowardice for several minutes before I manage to steer the interview back on track.

Myth and folklore were the only sources I could find about Under Hill as a location. Some sources allude to it being an otherworldly plane of existence, only connected to our world by hidden portals. Others posit a more literal definition of Under Hill as a very real place deep below the surface of the earth. Whatever the actual nature of the mythic home of the fairies, a trait consistently mentioned is that the entrance is hidden from human eyes, and that admittance is only granted to those who

are welcome.

Dr. Suzette Kimball, Director of the U.S. Geological survey, says that a subterranean dwelling large enough to house a population comparable to a mid-size city seemed highly unlikely. She said that assuming there was sufficient food, water, and oxygen for such a population to survive, the likelihood of it remaining concealed from instruments like lidar and seismometers seemed highly improbable.

However, the possible existence of a different dimension or plane of existence is somewhat supported by contemporary physics. Brian Greene, a Physics professor at Columbia University, says that quantum mechanics, the theory of relativity, and string theory potentially point toward the existence of parallel universes. If entire parallel universes could

exist, then it seems plausible that Under Hill could also exist. But even if contemporary physics could confirm the existence of Under Hill it wouldn't necessarily uncover a way to travel there.

Perhaps an invitation really is critical, just as the folklore says.

“Where are some of the other fairies?”

“Ah, let’s see...well, we got Bobby out on Three Mile Island. And Harry is in Centralia. Cletus lives in Dundalk. And Ralph is in West Chester, somewhere.

“Westchester, New York?”

“Fuck no,” he says with a snort, “That place it too ritzy for us to live. Nah, I’m talking about West Chester, PA. ‘Place is a real shit-hole.”

“I see. Well, I’m at least familiar with Centralia and Three Mile Island. So, do all of your kind live in dangerous, uninhabitable, and presumably, stinky places?”

“When we’re up here on the face of the Earth we do.”

“Why is that?”

“Well, there are two reasons,” he says. “First, it keeps you people away.

We don’t usually get bothered by no one when we live in places like this.” Frank gestures to the visible garbage on the inside of his hovel. “Second, we prefer the smell of crap like this to the smell of people like you.”

“What?” My incredulity is reflexive.

“I think you heard me just fine, kid.”

I’m confused, offended. I am already tired of the interview and want to go home.

“See,” he says, “it’s a known fact to all the other creatures on this planet that nothing stinks like a human. Even dogs know that. But they’re kinda dumb, and they like stinky things, so I guess it works out.”

“Then why are you here? Why not just pack up and go back under hill, or something?” I slip, letting my fear and exasperation show.

“You don’t listen too good do you, kid? I told you, we used to have nice places to live and hang out, but we haven’t had that for a long-ass time because of you people. So we hang out in places you don’t like, because you crapped them up, and we keep an eye on you.”

“Why?”

"So if you ever find a way Under Hill, we can strike first. It's pretty much the last of our spaces we got left. Even though we don't have kids the same way you people do, we're running out of space there; it's crowded."

I'm stunned. I just stare at Frank for a minute. He smiles at me with his needle-like teeth, smoking. He laughs. I look around to either side and see that we're alone.

"What do you mean by striking first?"

"Oh-ho! We got a plan for you guys. See our king made a deal with all the animals and other critters living in places you people don't go, like all around the world. They'll all come after you, turn against you. It'll be like nature finally woke up and realized what you been doing to it all these years. It'll be a bad day for you people if you ever find Under Hill." Frank laughs again. His eyes glow neon yellow beneath his giant sunglasses.

"So you mean..."

"Yeah, we'll come

and get you. Not just you, all of you. All the humans."

My mouth is dry. I choke a little, when I try to ask my follow up question.

"I see. But as long as we stay away from your uh, homeland, you'll leave us alone."

"Hey, you're not as slow as I thought kid. That's right. We'll leave you alone as long as you guys don't try to visit us none. See, we figure you people don't have long before you start dropping like flies, so we'll just wait until then. "

"Why would we start dropping like flies?"



"Pick a reason kid. There's lots of reasons. One of them will happen soon enough."

I pause and try to calm myself. There are many reasons the human race could experience a sudden population decline: disease, famine, climate change, thermonuclear war, an asteroid strike.

"So you're saying that either random chance, or more likely, our own self-destructive nature will do us in soon?"

"Aww hey, give that kid a shiny gold star," he says.

"I see." It's all I can say.

Frank begins laughing and calling me names. This continues for a minute or two before he tells me to get the hell off his lawn. He slams the door to the mound shut behind him, but I can still hear his manic guffaws. My interview with The Old Man of Freshkills, AKA the Staten Island Fairy has abruptly ended. I jot down a few notes, then trudge back along the deer path toward the visitor-friendly area of the park.

It's still a picture-perfect day in Fresh Kills Park. Young couples walk along arm in arm; parents are playing and riding bikes with their kids. Many people have laid down blankets on the grass, some are having picnics. But for me, the day has lost its shine. I get in my car and head toward home.

On the ride home Frank's words replay themselves with ferocious intensity. At times I can only recall his hideous laughter, and it takes concentrated effort to think of anything else. For this reason, I haven't been able to play-back the recording of my interview with Frank; just listening to him once in-person exacted a heavy toll. And while the affects of his laughter seem to have lessened somewhat since our interview, for some reason, I still have a hard time dislodging the sound of it from my mind. Even as I prepare this interview for publication the echo of his laughter refuses to fade.

Community Development

By Tom Ancheri

Ethan awoke to the sound of his phone. He'd barely slept the night before – meetings of the all-Gendered Cross-Campus Take Back the Night Committee did not end on time, ever – and somewhere in REM he'd had a vaguely unpleasant dream about his brain being devoured by a worm he could not see. All of which was unfortunate: he needed his rest. His interview was today. So as his phone continued to play the plaintive chords of Pink Floyd's "Mother", making it very clear who was calling him, Ethan rolled over and let it go to voicemail.

But he couldn't go back to sleep. His mind, annoyed by his mother's thoughtlessness, would not restore itself to repose. She knew what today was. She knew he needed rest. Yet here she was, interrupting his much-needed sleep with some piece of inconsequence that he would have no

response to. He tossed and turned a few more times before sighing deeply, and with an evocative swear, heading to the shower.

He walked outside into a cold March Morning, showered and in his best hip parody of a suit. He'd had no appetite, had not even felt like brewing coffee. But it was fine. The grey skies looming over the squat apartment buildings brought a strange peace over his mind. He felt more awake as he breathed the fresh air, walking to the shuttle pickup.

Within a few moments the burgundy university shuttle lumbered carefully up the street. This caution stemmed from the excess of student vehicles parked along the streets, even in no-park spots, even on a weekday. The University never solved the parking problem no matter

how many times it was mentioned in the Strategic Plan or the Editorial section of the student newspaper. So the van always had to gently glide up a street well below the posted speed limit. Ethan barely noticed it anymore.

The shuttle stopped in front of his building, and the door pushed open with the faint hiss of lubricated hydraulics. Behind the wheel Ethan saw old-timer George. George had been a shuttle driver and the friend to drunken freshmen since long before Ethan had ever arrived here, wide-eyed and full of dreams. As he returned the smile, Ethan wondered just how old George was. His face had a strange agelessness – he perpetually seemed old enough to be someone's father, but only just. It was as though he had hit a point of maturity and been frozen, like a mosquito in amber.

"Good morning, George," said Ethan.

"Good morning, Ethan," said George.

Empty but for Ethan, the shuttle gently glided to the end of the street and turned right to the main end of campus. They drove past the wasteland of construction – blocks of no-man's land that would one day be new academic buildings and housing – wet in the morning fog. Ethan had heard many of the grumbles from those in his own class, who had never seen the construction sites as anything but construction sites and would graduate without seeing them completed. The project had been going on for years. Estimates of completion changed regularly. Ethan understood the grumbles – was this what the Uni had spent their hard-borrowed tuition dollars on? But at the same time, he liked seeing them, especially bleak and hard on a chill morning like this. Something in the image hit a nerve of aesthetic pleasure. As though the bare grey ugliness of it held a stark truth, a dissolution of illusion. Anyway, it was

something to think about while he rode to his interview.

Ethan wasn't worried. His resume spoke for itself. In addition to the work put in on the Take Back the Night Committee since his sophomore year, he'd already shown himself a good worker at the Library. He was active with the LGBTQ Alliance of Allies, a secretary of the College Independent Committee of Freshman Cultural Re-Education, and also chaired the Pan-Honor Society Dietary Awareness Cookout. The University was lucky to have him. The Dean of his college said so.

So Ethan regarded a job at the Office of Community Development as his for the asking. In fact, he'd practically been begged to apply by one of his professors. Dr. Grufovsky had always seemed like an Eastern European hardass to him, but he'd visibly softened after one spring class and asked him about his post-graduation plans. Ethan had been up in the air a bit – AmeriCorps was a possibility, if only to stave off his father pushing him into law

school – but Grufovsky had been adamant that the OCD was in need of focused, committed students like him. "You can do more good there than digging latrines for the unwashed," the professor had said, which struck Ethan as being remarkably classist and exclusionary. Still, he looked into it.

OCD jobs paid decently, and threw in room, board, and at least one free graduate class a semester. Plus, OCD dealt with a wide range of campus and non-campus issues. He could be on the inside, doing good, instead of amid the mere students, swimming against the tide. He applied and got an interview.

"Don't worry," George said, as they pulled up to the hub shuttle stop, "You're gonna knock 'em dead."

Ethan started at this. Why would George know his business? *How* did George know his business? Ethan had never told George about his interview. In point of fact, Ethan couldn't remember the last time he had exchanged two words with George beyond salutations. But he must have, because George knew his

"OCD jobs paid decently, and threw in room and board, and at least one free graduate class a semester."

name.

How *did* George know his name?

George laughed at the young man's obvious confusion. "You may not know this, kid," George said, "But you're a rock star as far as the up-and-up's are concerned."

Ethan accepted that. He did know a lot of people. "George," he said after a moment, "Did you drive to the other end of campus just to pick me up?"

George answered this with a smile and a wink and opened the door. Ethan got off with a wave.

The shuttle stop was the main hub of the main campus, within a stones throw of the quad, the bookstore, the library, and, towering above all these, the ivy-covered brick of Corvinus Hall.

A significant part of the University's administration had their office in that building. However, it had no classrooms or lecture halls, so few students ventured into it. Ethan had been in once, to file a continuance for his scholarship after an excess of partying freshman year yielded unsatisfactory grades. The process was so unpleasant to him that he had practically abandoned a social life for much of the next year.

Ethan walked up towards Corvinus Hall, past the police tape that cordoned off the entrance to the Dining Hall. The Police tape only meant ongoing repairs to the concrete stairwell that led up to the dining hall entrance landing. The Security Office had discovered within the last few years that if you put up "repair" signs, kids took their chances, but police

*“So lost was he in his
musing that he nearly
crashed into a young
woman standing by the
door.”*

tape had a sacrality that only the inebriated dared disrespect. That seemed wisely pragmatic to Ethan, but it annoyed him that the stairs were always in disrepair. It meant everyone used the handicap-accessible ramp, and that was for the differently-abled. The needed spaces of the few were not supposed to be for mass utility.

Corvinus Hall suffered no such issue. It was always in good repair, or seemed so. The ivy growing up the brick concealed any issues that existed. The thought of spending every day in the nicest building on campus, and being paid for it, thrilled Ethan. Four years of very diligent labor had led up to this. Four years of working when others partied. Four years of studying behind the desk while helping fellow students with questions, forms, activity submissions, grievances. Four years of busting his hump,

while his father kept asking how a Cultural Studies degree was going to lead to a *real job*. Well, here was a real job, at the university, where his degree would be valued. He couldn't wait to tell everyone, but especially his parents. We'd see who was doing better after his brother got done being the detritus of the next Wall Street crash.

So lost was he in his musings that he nearly crashed into a young woman standing by the door.

“I'm terribly sorry,” he said, running through the list of appropriate apologies before settling on that one. The microaggression would require more than that, he knew. It was a commonplace for dudebros to “accidentally” bump into females, literally forcing their bodies onto them. But Ethan was known. And after a moment's reflection,

so was the young woman in question.

He had known Eliza briefly, last year. She was in his class, and part of the more extreme wing of the Women's Student Union – there had been a schism last year, resulting in a month's worth of op-eds to the student newspaper – and they had come through the Take Back the Night Committee as “safe ground” for reconciling. Eliza had given no more to Ethan during that time than basic cordiality required. Which was fine – he never asked for more.

Which is why the sight of her in a black business jacket, skirt, and heels was something of a surprise. As was the fact that she responded to his apology with a wide smile.

The outfit was simply out of the ordinary. Normally Eliza rocked brown cordies, sandals, Rosie-the-Riveter kerchief holding back her shock of auburn hair. But Ethan knew better than to assume that just because a woman dressed to please herself and show solidarity with the sisterhood most days didn't mean she couldn't Play the Game when called upon. So that was okay. Really, it was.

But Eliza was looking at him as though they were friends, intimates. He felt uncomfortable, and said nothing for a moment. She continued to look at him as though they had a shared truth. Finally he broke the silence. “I'm sorry,” he said.

“Don't be sorry,” Eliza said. “Whatever you do, don't be sorry.”

“Okay,” said Ethan. He suddenly remembered his dream, about the worm eating his brain. His heart rate climbed.

“You have a choice. Whatever they say, you have a choice. Take this.” She handed him a small object. It felt in his hands like cold smooth glass. It was round.

“What is this?”

“If you don't know what else to do, throw it.”

“I don't understand.” Eliza turned and walked away. She turned the corner of Corvinus Hall and stepped out of sight. When she was gone, Ethan felt as though he had been standing in the rain for a few minutes and then come inside. His skin felt cold, but his eyes were thick and heavy. He waited a moment, gathered himself, and went inside. He put the tiny glass orb in his pocket.

Beneath the brick façade, Corvinus was a remarkably modern building, employing skylights and open-spaces. Indeed, it hardly seemed possible that so much space could fit in so thin and basic a structure. Campus legend had it that Corvinus had been designed by a WWI veteran who'd suffered severe shell-shock on the Western Front and came home a neurotic wreck. On the day the building finished, he took his pay and ran off to the South Pacific.

Ethan looked up at a skylight and his eyes hurt. For the sun being hidden behind clouds, somehow the light coming in was dazzling bright. It took him a few minutes to recover his eyesight, and when he did, he saw a pale young man standing in front of him.

"Ethan Jacobs," said the young man. It wasn't a question.

"Yes," said Ethan.

"You're early."

"Better to be early than late, right?" Ethan said with a smile. The smile was not returned.

"Come with me," said the young man. "You

can wait until the right time." He turned, and Ethan followed him.

They walked for a long time, down a hall with skylights every twenty steps. Ethan knew that because he began to count them after a while. The offices on either side of the hall had windows on their doors, but when Ethan looked inside he could not see anyone. No one came in or out of the offices. No one seemed to be there at all.

*"She defied a quick
assessment of her age.
Anywhere from the late 20's
to the mid 40's was possible."*

Finally the pale young man stopped, and beckoned to an open office door. Ethan went in. The décor was plain but tasteful, with none of the collegiate whimsy that one expected in the newspaper offices or College Democrats or places where students played dress-up with responsibility. A dark wood desk sat in the middle, with two curved chairs in front of it and a desk-chair behind. Ethan walked in and sat down in the

curved chair furthest from the door.

The pale young man had not come in. When Ethan turned to look back at the door, he was gone.

Ethan stood up again, and went to the door. He heard footsteps in the hallway and turned in their direction. He saw the pale young man walking away, briskly. In a few moments, he was out of sight. He looked to either end of the hall

and wondered if he knew how to find his way back. They hadn't taken any turns, had they?

He felt cold. He went back into the room and sat down, in the same seat as before. He went into his satchel and fished out a portfolio containing a legal pad and a few copies of his resume. He prepared himself to wait. No doubt he'd hear someone come in.

Settled, Ethan looked

at the artwork behind the desk. It was a stark, almost Mondrian style, but with lurid shades of red and black instead of the cooler, more cheerful colors one expected with Mondrian. Also, the shapes were triangles instead of squares. The paint, especially the red, had been thickly painted on. It still looked wet, in fact. Almost like some of the triangles had drips of paint. Almost like it was still dripping.

"Ethan. Thank you for coming," said a voice behind him. Ethan turned with a slight start and saw a woman standing at the door. She had short black hair and wore a pantsuit with pinstripes. She defied a quick assessment of her age. Anywhere from the late 20's to the mid 40's was possible.

Ethan stood up. The woman came to him and offered her hand. He took it, and shook it politely. It was warm. Her eyes were a very light blue, almost pale.

"I'm Ms. Constance," said the woman. "Please, have a seat."

Ethan sat back down and waited for her to round the desk and sit. She did so, crossed her fingers, and looked at Ethan for a few moments before she

began to speak.

She talked a bit about the mission of the Office of Community Development, its various sub-organizations, and its projects going forward. It was a lot to take in, and Ethan did his best. Her voice had a resonance both authoritative and soothing, which gave the impression that what it spoke of was fully understood and easy to accept.

"Before we proceed, Ethan," she said at last, "There is something that we must address."

"Okay," said Ethan, realizing that he could not recall what she had just been talking of.

"There was an incident earlier this year, in which you threatened a student with expulsion."

Ethan blinked. How had they known of that? No one could know of that.

Someone on his floor had been drunk. Some freshman rugby player, enjoying his first taste of freedom from mommy and daddy, blasted on Rumpelints and

wandering the hall singing merry songs about his privates. At two a.m. on a Wednesday, as Ethan recalled.

It wasn't a big deal. Ethan went out into the hall and had words with him. The words had gotten heated. Insults had been exchanged. Finally, Ethan told him that he was with the Student Life Office, and he'd have his ass expelled. That gave the kid a moment's pause, and within a few minutes, a couple of his

"Ethan went out into the hall and had words with him. The words had gotten heated. Insults had been exchanged."

buddies had come and taken him away.

There had been no official report filed, because Ethan had been lying. He'd been an RA sophomore year, but it was a lot of time that Ethan had other uses for. He had no connection with Student Life. He had forgotten about it.

But somehow, Ms. Constance knew.

"I may have

overstepped my bounds there."

Constance smiled. "Yes, it would seem so." She then pulled a file from a black portfolio sitting on the desk and read a report of the incident. It was thorough and complete. It had the names of everyone involved, including the drunk kid's friends. It had everyone's name except that of the person who'd filed the report.

"Would you consider that an accurate version of events?" Constance said.

"I...Yes."

Constance put the report back in the portfolio.

"I know I shouldn't have done that..." Ethan said, but Constance raised a hand, and he fell to silence.

"Don't apologize. You are not being punished, or dis-considered for the position, on the basis of this incident. Just the opposite."

"What?"

Constance stood up, and began to walk around the desk. "Obviously it is better to go through proper channels whenever possible," said Constance. "Procedure is essential to the understanding of mission, to say nothing of its completion. An RA would have been better suited to handle that young man."

She stood in front of him. Ethan looked up at her very dark eyes, trying to figure out just how old she really was.

"However," she said, "you demonstrated something better than procedure. You demonstrated initiative and determination. You saw a situation in need of handling, and you handled it, even when it got difficult. And you did so by yourself. That young man was in need of control. You supplied that control."

Ethan swallowed. Her tone suggested that an offer was just a moment away.

"To say nothing of the numerous volunteer acts you've performed with the Take Back the Night Committee. Do you know how many of your fellow students you've arranged to be taken away from dangerous

situations? Situations where, due to intoxication, they may have come to harm?"

Ethan shrugged. It was something he'd started doing in the second half of freshman year. A girl he'd known from his Asian History class, whom he'd gotten sort of friendly with, was dating a short asshole who liked to threaten people that talked to her. Ethan had been wary around him, but one night, at one dorm party or another, he'd seen her, fall-down drunk, sitting in a doorway while the asshole sat around the keg singing "American Pie" with some exchange student from Venezuela. He'd picked the girl up, walked her out of the residence, and called her a shuttle. The following week the girl had no memory of the incident, and the boyfriend never came after him. Both of them dropped out soon after.

He'd joined the Take Back the Night Committee not long after. Under his leadership, shuttle service had expanded, and he'd

overseen lots of girls, and a few boys, getting taken away from parties before someone got to them.

"A few," he said.

"158," said Constance. "You've been a boon to our community, Ethan. You've shown that you're the kind of person this University needs."

"Thank you," Ethan said. "I was glad to do it."

"We know," Constance said. "I think, under the circumstances, only a small amount of blood will be required."

Ethan thought he heard the words that way, but for some reason his mind rejected it. He remembered his dream again. "I'm sorry, but did you say 'blood'?"

"Yes," Constance said, "I'm afraid so. Procedure. A necessary buy-in, you might say."

"Buy-in? For a job?"

"Ethan, don't be dense. We are offering you far more than a job. To work for the OCD is to

have a career. Opportunity, advancement, stability, regular feedings..."

"Feedings?"

"Feedings. Of blood."

She said that with such lack of emphasis, such complete disinterest, that Ethan looked around the room to see if there was anyone else there who might have heard it. But there was none. "Why would we feed on blood?" he asked at last.

"Procedure."

"I don't understand."

"This part of the interview can be very confusing. I apologize for that. But there is no solution for it. Your blood must be screened."

"Screened?"

"Yes, screened. For

weakness."

"I had a medical check-up before I came to school. My health records..."

"Not relevant to our purposes. This isn't that kind of screening. This is to determine how well your blood will absorb once transformation is complete."

"Transformation."

"When you become one of us, Ethan," said Constance, and she smiled at Ethan, and showed big long canine teeth.

Ethan stood up, and Constance grabbed him by the throat and lifted him into the air. He struggled against her grip, but her fingers were immovable as stone. He felt his feet kicking uselessly under him. Black circles swirled at the edge of his vision.

"...Ethan looked around the room to see if there was anyone else there who might have heard it. But there was none."

He thought of the orb that Eliza had given him. With his brain screaming for oxygen, he made his hand reach into his pocket, and with an ounce of strength, threw it away from him. Bright white light like fire surged through the room and he left the stone grip of Ms. Constance and he fell to the floor and soon after was running down the hall.

He saw no one. He did not look for familiar points. He just kept running until he thought he saw the lobby ahead. No one stopped him. He slowed down as he approached the lobby.

Then he heard it. It sounded like a cry and sounded like a scream and could have been a young girl or a baby. It was faint and very close. Ethan stopped.

No one was around him. No one was following him. He waited, hoping he would not hear the sound again. He almost didn't, but then he did. This time he located it. It was coming from somewhere a few rooms down on the right.

As he walked his way back, Ethan felt certain he was being tricked. Even if he wasn't, what could he do? But to leave someone in this place...he just couldn't do it. Eliza said he had a choice, which was the same as having a chance. Everyone deserved a chance.

Three rooms down and to the right, he looked in the room, and saw a naked young woman lying on the floor, face down.

He saw no one else. He went in. When he put both feet into the room, the door shut behind him and everything went black.

And then he was laying on a couch, at the back of the office, his hands draped over his chest, his neck bandaged.

"Your sample was satisfactory," said Ms. Constance, standing over him.

Ethan looked at her. "You're....you're a...." He could not finish. The word would not come out of him. It was absurd. It could not be real. His hand went to his neck.

"We are what we are," said Constance, "And you have served us well."

Ethan's head hurt. "What?" he said.

"Listen to what I say," Constance said, in a voice with iron behind it. Ethan sat bold upright, despite the pain on his neck, as if it were a reflex.

"Good," she said. "You'll find that the proper voice of authority will have a tonic effect on you from now on."

"Authority," he said, as though he had never heard the word before.

Ms. Constance folded her long fingers together. Her nails were short, but deep red with strange sparkles on it. He had not noticed that before. How had he not noticed it?

"Office of Community Development. That is who we are. Do you know what that means, Ethan?"

"It means...whatever develops the community?"

"It means...whatever we need it to mean. It means anything that could be of use to us will be brought under our control. Anything that protects us can be made ours."

"Us?"

"We have been here longer than anyone dares speculate. We were few in number at first, and we kept our operations quiet. But we have grown."

Ethan's neck hurt. "Vampires," he said. "You're vampires."

She smiled indulgently. "An archaic term, and not very inclusive. We have walked among you at all times and in all places. British mishearings of

"As he walked his way back, Ethan felt certain he was being tricked. Even if he wasn't, what could he do?"

Transylvanian folk legends do not begin to encompass our culture."

"Culture," said Ethan, hating the word for the first time in his life, and not sure why.

"Culture, species, call it what you will. We are permanent, Ethan. We do not decompose and die. We persist. But this persistence depends on feeding on the very stuff of life. Our permanence is a product of persistent renewal. This fact creates the structure of our institution here."

"At a university?"

"Of course. Tell me, Ethan, what is the nature of education?"

"Um, the acquisition of knowledge, the training of the mind in how to learn on its own..."

"Guided reading, Ethan. That's all this is. Guided reading. You put a book in front of a student, tell him to read it, and ensure that he grasps it. Does anyone need to pay a middle-class salary every year to engage in guided reading?"

"But the research facilities..."

"A useful cover, we admit. But who needs research? Hard science is done according to goals: build a rocket, construct a genome. Those that have use for such would pay for it if we did not exist."

"But..."

"Our purpose is you, Ethan. You, and millions of fresh young men and women like you, with fresh, strong, young blood. Your presence here gives us the opportunity to feed. To renew ourselves."

"That's not possible," Ethan said. "People would know if they were getting their blood drained on a nightly basis."

"Not a nightly basis. It's very rare we feed on

the same student twice in the same month. We are patient, Ethan. We keep ourselves well-protected."

"People would remember. They would notice the wounds."

"What wounds?"

Ethan reached up to his neck. It no longer hurt. He pulled the bandage off. There was nothing on his neck. "How?" he said.

"Mosquitos inject saliva into their prey as an anti-coagulant. We inject a healing agent."

"So no one gets permanently hurt?"

"It is only the undisciplined among us who kill their prey. An archaic practice rooted in fear and superstition. A belief grew up among us that we were wicked, punished by divine powers for an ancient crime. So many of us

acted the part. That is very uncommon nowadays. Now we act carefully, ensuring the good of all. That is why we have chosen you."

"Me?"

"158 times, Ethan. That's how often you brought us exactly what we needed. Students too intoxicated to remember anything, handed over in the name of their own safety to proper authority. Every single one of them woke up the next morning aware of nothing, attributing any physical discomfort to alcohol withdrawal. I said you have served us well, Ethan. I meant it. Now it is your opportunity to be served."

She talked more after that, about the selection process and the final interview. She made it sound like a formality. When she was done, he shook her hand in a

"We persist. But this persistence depends on feeding on the very stuff of life. Our permanence is a product of persistent renewal. This fact creates the structure of our institution here."

daze, and walked out.

Then he was sitting in the cafeteria with a plate in front of him. On the plate was a salad. His fellow students milled around him, happy and sad at things Ethan did not know.

He tried to remember a pain in his neck, but could not. His neck felt fine. He looked down at the salad in front of him. It was exactly the kind of salad that he normally enjoyed at lunchtime: kale and chickpeas in a carrot dressing. But he had no appetite.

Absent-mindedly, he

pulled out his phone. There were a few texts from those on the Take Back the Night Committee, rehashing points of discussion from the previous evening. He deleted them, sight unseen. Then he remembered his mother had called him. Suddenly his mother's voice sounded like the best possible thing to listen to. With nervous fingers he tapped the voicemail app.

His mother's cheerful voice wished him well on his interview and reminded him to get a good breakfast. He smiled at that. Then

she told him the good news: Kelly had been accepted to the university and was registering in the fall. If he got the job, he would stay there when she started as a student. Wasn't that exciting?

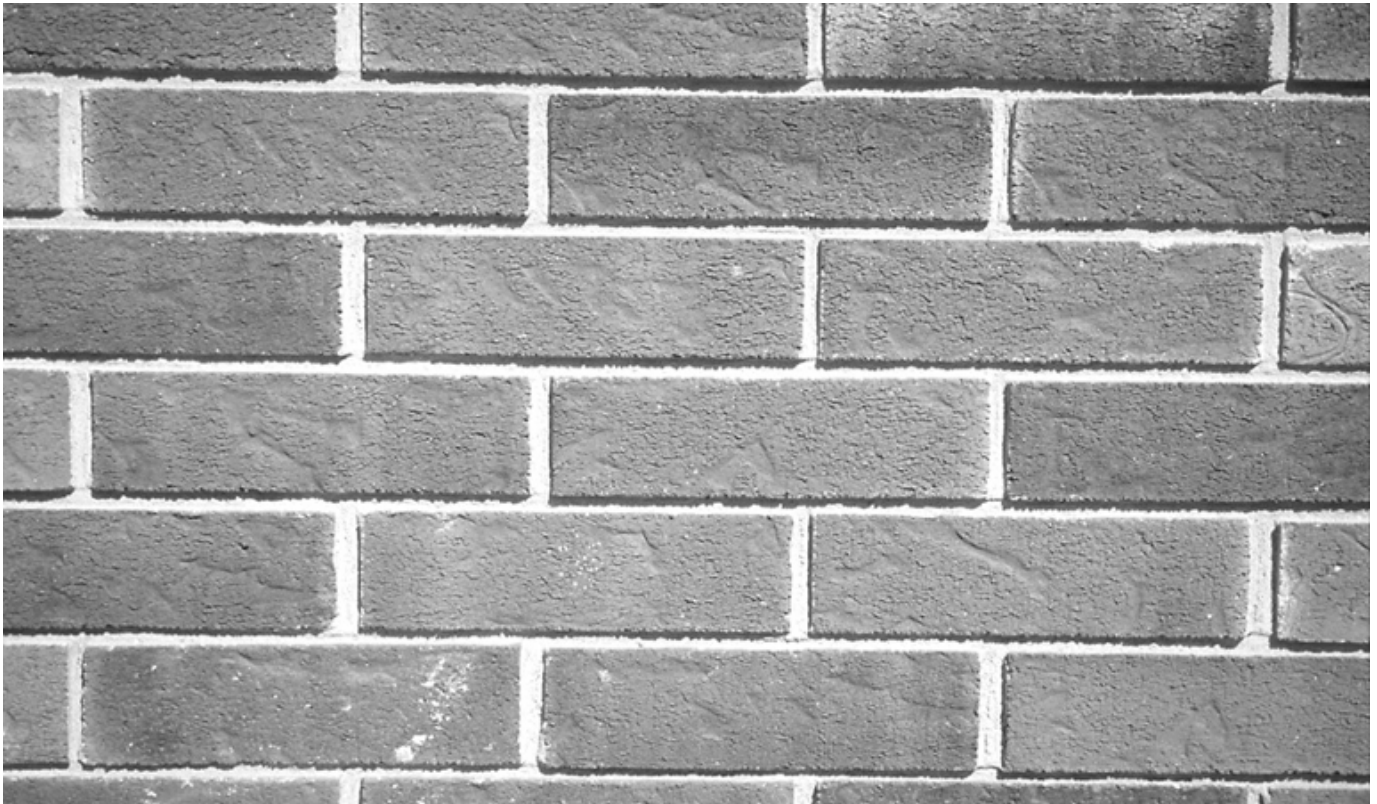
Kelly was his younger sister's friend. She'd been a fixture at his house when he was in high school. The last time he remembered seeing her, she was a 10th-grader in a cheerleader's uniform with merry eyes and trim ankles. Although he'd never been able to explain it, still less to act on it, something had always drawn him to her. He never had

process this desire as an erectile regression – something low and carnal. Rather, he had come to see her, without ever saying it even to himself, as a creature rare and exquisite, something to be treasured and protected from the monsters of the world.

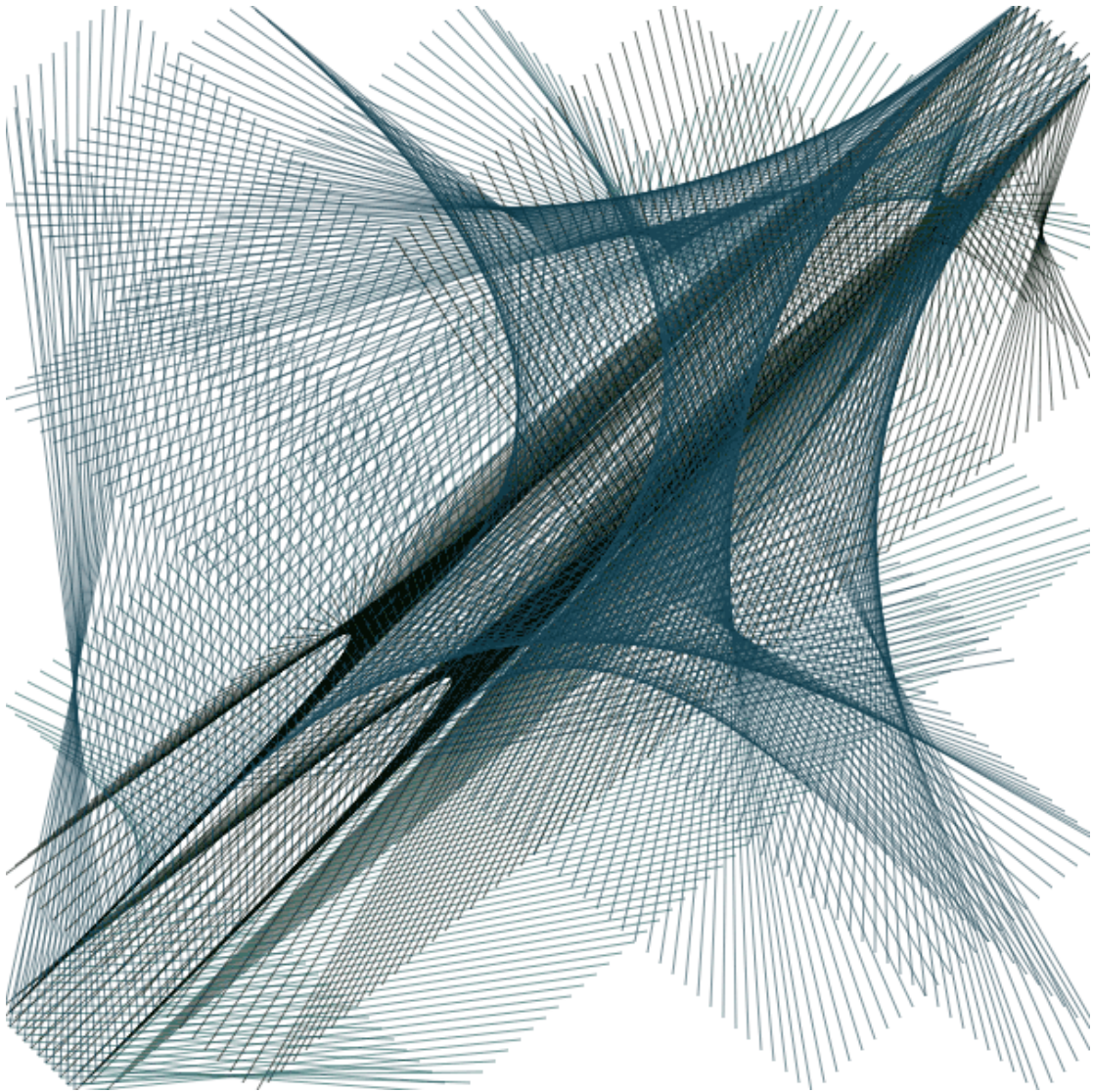
And now she was coming here.

Ethan closed his eyes and made a choice. Suddenly he was very hungry.

He threw his salad away and left the cafeteria. Outside, the shuttle was waiting. George welcomed him as he got on board.



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