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Ellis Island

Jim Hayden

“N^{ext!}”

Here they come. The faces. In rows that span miles and miles. The faces that file forward, dragging their strides as if waist deep in a pit of clotted muck. The faces- they're all we want to see. We size up their clothes too, of course, but that's more a matter of entertainment. I mean, do they honestly expect us not to laugh when they resemble what the rough draft of the rainbow must have looked like? Their rainbow of tattered trench coats and skirts unraveling at the seams? Of breastfeeding mothers squished so tightly into their flower dresses that they resemble those cheap, overstuffed cigars? A rainbow overwhelmed with neon yellow, the glare of drooping old men in their plastic raincoats? Why, even the rainbow's peak fails to impress with its raven blues, coarse browns, and deep viridians- shades of the dim scarves wrapped around grandmothers so many times that they look like unfashionably plump mummies. And we can tell just by looking at them. There's no somewhere over *this* rainbow. But that joke gets stale after a while and isn't worth laughing at anymore. Then, all that's left are the faces. Twisted into knots. Glossy eyed. Wet, raw noses. Shriveled eyebrows over sinking eyelids. Greasy clumps of hair flaking away. Crusty lips dried and cracked. Wrinkled foreheads. Gristly skin. Looking down when they meet our eyes. Fidgeting in place til the line moves. The darkness of a foreign jungle pulsing in their pupils. This is what we want to see.

I denied it for a long time, each day pretending not to look. Sure, maybe I stole some glances while my coworkers weren't paying attention, but I told myself that it was coincidence. My gaze simply happened to veer towards the faces. That didn't make me like the gawkers I worked with. I wasn't like them. I was different. My father always said so. And who would know better than the man who raised me? Besides, everyone tells you: "You're different. You're special." And that made it true. To me, it was true. I believed in it. At least up until yesterday.

Yesterday started just like any other day. It was a fairly quiet morning. Nothing out of the ordinary. We were processing them pretty quickly all day. But come late afternoon, a haggard old woman was next in line. She had two grizzled, coiling wings of hair poking out to the side from underneath her babushka. And I was pretty sure those thick, grey cones could conduct electricity if they wanted to, what with the static strands branching off. I found myself wondering if she rubbed her feet on a carpet too much when she was little. Her goliath hands held two small children's heads against the enormous hips bulging against her heavy wool skirt and layers of brown coats. I'll admit, I took her for a loony when she started to ricochet her gaze between the two men sitting at the processing table before her and me, sta-

tioned on that rubble road just a ways down from the white administrative dome.

As our eyes locked, I took a step back. Struggling to catch my breath, I said to the processor sitting on my left, “Say something! Say something to her, Ayawamat!”

“Um, uh, please Miss,” Ayawamat said as he pointed to a line on a piece of paper, “if you’ll just sign here, we’ll get your physical underway and see if you can—” She interrupted him with babbling gibberish in a thick and musky voice deeper than any woman’s I had ever heard. To my right, the other processor, Choviohoya (who we just called Chovi), was just staring straight up at the lunatic, his jaw hanging wide open. Before too long, I think I saw some drool leak out of his mouth. I looked back over at Ayawamat and saw him shielding his face behind the paper he’d tried to get the woman to sign.

“Pomóc,” said the woman in an airy voice with glassy brown eyes. “Pomóc.” I tried to compose myself so I could somehow deal with this giant, but lost my nerve when those glass eyes hardened into rock and her eyebrows descended, piercing her soft face. She banged a nearly soccer ball sized fist on the table and with her bass voice boomed, “Wpu?? mnie! Wpu?? mnie!” My two colleagues sprang out of their seats and ran off, leaving her to approach me alone. She waved her rebuking sausage index finger through the air, bellowing her gibberish. But her eyes melted again and the gargantuan woman peered down at me softly, saying, “Prosz?...” I remember trembling viciously as I looked up at her, still not convinced I could trust her. She lifted her heavy hand and I ducked, covering my head with my arms. But as I crouched there, tremors worse than ever, she affectionately lifted my chin upward til my eyes met hers. I was dumbstruck. Those monster paws of hers were motherly, like silk to the touch. When she took her hand away, I felt somehow colder. But at least it snapped me back into the real world. I cautiously grabbed the sheet Ayawamat left behind. I needed to get *some* sort of information. Her name if nothing else. I didn’t have the constitution to risk letting someone in without a name.

I pointed to the signature line and said, “Name,” as slowly as I could. Incomprehension flooded her face. “Name,” I said, more forcefully. She grew frustrated again. I was about to repeat it even louder a third time, certain she’d understand if I yelled it assertively enough. But my throat closed as she clenched her fists, gritting her teeth. I frantically scurried, searching for some sort of idea. I saw the pen in my hand pressed against the signature line.

Imprinted on my brain was that image of my own hand ready to write. I shrugged, figuring I might as well give it a try. I pointed to myself, saying, “Matchitehew.” Pointing to myself again, I said, “Match-i-te-hew.” I then pointed to the old woman, trying my best to put a curious look on my face, but she only scrunched her eyebrows above lost eyes. Broadly, I swung my hands around and pressed them against my chest. “Matchitehew.” Once more I pointed at her.

Her sunken chest pounced as her eyebrows raised sky high. Touching her sternum with the tips of her fingers, she said, “Józia Zar?bina,” and smiled at me.

We both burst out laughing and I gave her giant nods of approbation. “Józia Zar?bina!” She said it again trying to ride this sanguine wave that she probably hadn’t felt in a very long time. I nodded faintly, rolling my eyes. Tapping the pen against the signature line, I handed her the paper. I pinched my thumb and forefinger together and brushed them up and down my palm to show her what I wanted. Her face, however, only fell flat. With the pen in one hand, paper in the other, her praying eyes took hold of me and refused to let go. Well now what was I supposed to do? I couldn’t spell a name like hers. I always got my worst marks in spelling when I was in school. I mean, I’ve worked on it since, but this lady truly *was* a loony if she thought I was going to be able to spell her name. So of course, she handed the paper back, pointing the signature spot out to me with the pen. I started thinking it’d be best to simply send her to the rejection line. She wouldn’t last here anyway.

Then there was the flicker. One on each side of those Greek columns that this woman called legs. Four big, brown dull eyes flickered at me in front of ruffled hair, dirt smeared faces, and arid skin. Something tightened on the inside of my chest as I kept trying to gulp down the fat lump in my neck. My shoulders fell with a sigh. I pointed at the woman again, in the fashion I used before, and she said, “Józia Zar?bina.” I scrawled some impromptu name down, matching her words as closely as I could. Then I stood up and pointed to the white dome building, smiling. She looked back at me with a yawp and started bouncing heavily off of her feet. Kneeling down, she went back to prattling those nonsense syllables to her kids. The foreigner stood once more, jutting out her chin and puffing up her chest. It made me smile. I knew that feeling; that pride. Pride that she was now a resident of our great country. I held out a palm to shake her hand with welcome into citizenship. But she shook her head, instead wrapping her vast, firm arms all the way around my torso until the life was nearly crushed out of me. I don’t know how she failed to notice the table that stood between us, but her masculine pelvis pushed so powerfully against it that my body gave way. It slid right underneath my legs until I was kneeling on the table while I hugged her. Or while she hugged me, I should say, since I was incapable of moving at all during the embrace. Finally she let go of me, patting my head like as if I was a pet parrot. She grabbed her rosy cheeked son and daughter under one arm, all of their luggage under the other, and ran off bounding towards the white dome. The sun setting behind me bathed my back with snug warmth, making me sleepy after this demanding ordeal. Falling into position, the sun hit its perfect angle. It was the time of day when the sunlight swarms over the white dome’s face, turning it into a solid gold color, even if for only a minute or two. But something was different yesterday. I don’t know if it was the Great Spirit, I don’t know if it was the beauty of unprecedented coincidence, but watching her colossal figure turn to shadow against that perfect tone of gold reminded me of why my family came here in the first place. My smirk bent into a wide grin. Using my hand as a visor, I screened my eyes to watch the immigrant bound for that enviable land; that lost metropolis; the city of gold. She had found her El Dorado.

At the end of my shift, I managed to get a lift from some coworkers I never saw before on the back of their rickety automobile. Lots of us snag rides like that since only a scarce few have cars. They're still new around here, like everything else, and the supply is sparse. It wasn't the smoothest ride I've ever been on. For most of the trip I was clinging for dear life to the back bumper as the vehicle bucked like a horse on the bumpy gravel road. Only when we neared our municipality did our path finally smooth out.

I've always loved the sight of our great city from that distance, where the single road into town is swallowed whole by the great monolithic edifices. Those behemoths of steel gray all in the shape of triangles. With windows thin and tinted, growing fewer as the triangle narrows towards the top. They just seem like the perfect symbol for our people. Still, they always leave me wondering how anyone could ever get to the apex of the building, like if the two antennas up there ever needed to be fixed. They just emerge from the building's sloped walls to form an X, so how would a maintenance guy ever get up there? But eventually, I always remember to just trust the people running things. They know what they're doing better than I do and it's like they tell you: questions only get you into trouble.

So after that rickety bumper had carried me easily for a while through our city streets, we reached a corner not too far from my house. Banging twice on the back of the auto, I yelled, "Thanks," jumping off as they slowed to turn left. I reached my building in little time and, inside, the elevator whisked me to my floor, three-hundred and ninety-two, in mere seconds. Approaching my room with hands in my pockets, I stopped dead in my tracks. Pulling the insides of my pockets out assured my concern: I'd forgotten my key. Slamming a loose fist against the hallway wall, I begged the Great Spirit to sail Ayawamat home swift as the eagle, cursing my coworker for running off in the first place. Ayawamat and I have been roommates for a long time and he was the only one who could help me if I got locked out.

The door was unlocked, to my relief. I walked in to find Ayawamat lying there on the couch, immobile. "What's the matter with you?" I said.

"Ran. All the way here," he said between sharp gasps.

"What- the giant lady?" I said, laughing. She wasn't *that* bad."

"She. Was. A. Monster," huffed Ayawamat.

"Whatever you say. I just don't know how you're ever gonna live this one down from all the guys on the floor." Right then there was a knock on the door. "That'd be them," I said with a grin, grabbing a soda from the fridge.

"I'm taking a shower," said Ayawamat, fleeing to the bathroom. The knock sounded again, more persistently. Of the countless apartments up and down these streets, Ayawamat and I had the privilege of living on the one floor that housed the biggest pest in all of Ellis. I answered the door sipping on my cool drink. In the hallway, surrounded by seven or eight of his giggling buddies, was Ahanu, renowned jokester, prankster, and all around wise-guy. He was dressed up like a vaguely familiar, fat old lady.

“What do you want Ahanu?” I said, crossing my arms and rapping my foot on the floor.

“Is—” he snorted, and then held his hand over his mouth, trying to gag his laughter back. “Is Ayawamat here?”

“No,” I said as water from the bathroom shower faucet spurted noisily on.

“Then who’s in your shower?” he asked, trying to look over me into my room.

“Your wife,” I said, shutting the door in his face. Ahanu’s a good guy, all in all. He just doesn’t know when to quit, or when to take things seriously. And I was too worn out from the morning’s incident to deal with his shenanigans. I looked at the clock. It was only a quarter to six. If I stayed in my apartment and watched TV or something, I’d fall asleep for sure. Then I’d be up all night. I figured I’d stop by Father’s for a bit and see how he was doing.

I flew up the elevator in my father’s building roughly a half an hour’s walk later. After knocking on his door, I stepped inside his domicile immediately, not waiting for an answer. He and I had a casual relationship, you could say.

“Hello, Father,” I said, bowing my head. He was seated at the kitchen table, leaning against the wall, facing the doorway.

Straining his neck, he looked up at me with eyes like vapor shrouds trying to hold back silt. A limp rag for a hand reached for me as he said, “My son,” in a whisper that pressed against his throat. With closed eyes, he leaned back over and started sucking on a transparent plastic tube sticking out of the wall, a lumpy yellow liquid siphoning through it. *Dinner time*, I thought as I grimaced at the gunk. It’s what they give all of the timeworn. None of them are any different. And it’s nice to know, if nothing else, that Father is being treated equally.

Falling comfortably onto a couch, I clicked on the TV. “So what’s new,” I asked him. He didn’t say anything so I turned around to see what he was doing. Placid on his chair, he gazed at me with sudden alien eyes. Again I asked what was new. Looking at me out of the quivering corner of his eye, he merely shook his head as he sliced his flat hand through the air from left to right.

“That’s interesting,” I said, turning back to the TV for some mildly interesting commercials. “So they’re taking good care of...” I trailed off when I saw a dog fight flash on the screen. My pulse pounded as those two planes whizzed through the air towards each other, away from each other, pelting each other with bullets. I was so riveted that I didn’t even hear the banging on Father’s door until the program’s advertising respite. “Father,” I said, jumping off the couch, “there’s someone at the door! Don’t just sit there!” He grimaced, twisting his neck to look at me. I walked by him, mumbling, “...rude...” but forgot all about it with the surprise of Kawacatoose, my company’s soft-spoken old messenger, standing at the door.

“Allo, sir. Rate sorry to be a bother this ‘umble evenin’.” I hated his accent; it was so hard to follow. The only reason he had a real job was that he was one of the few immigrants who arrived before the rest. He got the messenger job

since none of my people wanted to do it.

“Right, yeah, I already did, Toosie,” I said to the squat, silver-haired messenger.

“Beg your pardon, sir?”

“Right, I told you, I already did my shift at work today.”

“Oh, no sir! This is nufin’ of dat nature. I’ve a cabbie downstairs being ‘eld for us. You see, sir, you ‘ave been—”

“No, no, not tonight, Toosie,” I said, trying to wave him off. “I’ll get a drink with you some other time. I’m with my father right now.” But I just wasn’t getting through to the bumbling courier. He looked at his feet as if they were whining puppies. Finally, he thrust a manila envelope into my hands and stood there with his arms crossed.

“Is that what you were trying to say?” I said with a laugh as I slipped open the envelope with my fingers. “Well why didn’t you just say so?” But my cheer faded into dread as I read the short letter inside the yellow envelope. I was being summoned by the elders of my company. No word as to why. Toosie was here to make sure I came, I knew, even if the summons didn’t say that. So I sighed disgustedly and said, “Fine. Let’s go.” We walked out of Father’s residence and I shut the door behind me. “Ah!” I said, frustrated that I forgot something so important. I ran back inside, past my father at the table, and grabbed a soda for the road. I get terrible dry mouth when I’m nervous. Stalking back out, those disgusting sucking noises of Father’s thankfully vanished when I shut the door for good this time.

Walking up the stairs into the building, my veins throbbed with every step I took as unwieldy anvils barraged my muscles. Toosie opened the door to the dome for me and said with a sly grin, “ere we are. ‘ope you ‘ave the best of luck, sir.” I didn’t really respond. Not only because I was preoccupied with what loomed ahead of me, but also because he’d already asked me if I’d go out boozing with him that night, and I refused to dignify his reiteration with a reply after I’d already said no.

Walking into their council room, I stood right before the elders’ seven-paneled semicircle as they sifted through some papers. At exactly eight o’ clock they all stopped what they were doing and folded their hands nicely on their big, curving desk. The elder in the middle wore a wide necklace with differently colored tail feathers around it. At the very bottom of the ring, below his chin, was an eagle’s white tail feather indicating he was the oldest, wisest, and the one in charge. They all had necklaces of this fashion to denote their age. From red, green, purple and blue all the way down to black, the color that denoted the youngest. However, even the black feathered elder looked old enough to be me great, great grandfather.

“Young One, who goes by Matchitehew,” said the Chief Elder, “do you know why you’ve been summoned here?”

Looking around nervously I said, “No Elder, I don’t, but it’s the messenger’s fault because I couldn’t understand him. If he’d only get rid of his silly dialect, he—” The elder held up his right hand and closed his eyes. “But I swear, I didn’t

do it!”

“Do what?” the white-feathered elder asked me.

“I, uh...”

“I thought so,” he said. “Now then, are you familiar with she who is called Jolie Angelina?”

“I thought very hard, my brow scuffling about. Yet, try as I might, I couldn’t recall hearing such an inflated name in all of my life. I was sure that only someone searching for fame out of vanity would take such a label, but no one I knew would fit that description. So I decided the only thing I could do was reply honestly. “It might ring a bell elders...”

“Does it?” said the woman elder all the way on the left, tersely. I wanted to remember. Even if I had never heard of it, I prayed to all spirit beings to inspire my mind about who this person was that would have such a name. But even the great spirits seemed to be afraid of the elders.

“No, elders,” I said, “I have never known one of this label.” They sat in silence for a few minutes, shooting glances at one another. Finally, the Chief Elder said, “Then, recognize you the name Józia Zar?bina?”

Józia Zar?bina? I knew I had heard it somewhere, but where? Where? Józia Zar?bina, I tried to hear it in my head. Józia Zar?bina. Józia Zar?bina. The name began to be spoken in a low, flowing voice of effeminate rasp. My jaw slowly sank.

“No! See, I— well, what happened was,” I stuttered, “I couldn’t even understand her! She doesn’t even speak our language! When she said, ‘Józia Zar?bina,’ I knew I’d never be able to spell it, so I wrote down the first thing that sounded most like it! ‘Józia’ sounds better as ‘Jolie,’ just knock off the ‘a.’ ‘Zar?bina’ can be easily turned into ‘Angelina.’ It’s the truth, I swear it to you! I didn’t think what I did was that bad! Believe me, taking the name ‘Józia Zar?bina’ away is the biggest favor anyone has ever done for her!”

We sat in still silence until the woman all the way to the left of the Chief Elder said, “Matchitehew, do you know why we chose you for this job?”

“Well, my— uh, qualities... good... and... uh... my credentials?”

“No. No credentials can prepare you for a job that requires you to scrutinize which intruders you sanction, and to which you deprive, the land you love and own.”

“Well, no one really *owns* the land, do they?” I said. “I mean, even *we* came here only a short time ago, and you have to figure, if the land was here before *us*, then... well... no one can really ‘own’ it concretely, right? We just, sort of... ‘borrow’ it. From our children.” There was an impenetrable silence which I tried to break by muttering, “At least that’s what I was taught...” Every elder sat there like a bubbling teapot, ready to explode. Simultaneously, reproachful yelling and hollering accompanied the elders’ indignantly waving hands. The Chief Elder slammed his fist on his desk and they all silenced, leaning forward with loathing scowls.

The elder on the Chief’s right, said, “It is true, the Great Spirit is the only

being with a claim to the land.”

Another picked up where the last left off, “But the world is not self-regulating. The land needs *us* to take the necessary precautions to ensure its survival,” he said, scribbling himself a note on a blank piece of paper. Tearing the small strip of his chicken scratch off of the big note pad, he threw the rest of the blank sheet into the refuse bin below his desk.

The woman all the way on the Chief’s left said, “We are the only ones capable of caring for the land since all spirits transcend the physical realm. The Great Spirit needs us as much as we need him.”

“It is in this sense,” said the Chief Elder, “that *we* own the land.” They all nodded and smiled at each other with exclusive-looking pride. “You see, Matchitehew, what matters is not where a man is, but where he is going. We hired you because of your potential, because you show promise. You did well this morning in flexing your muscles of leadership. You quickly analyzed and reacted to the situation. Your only error was that you made the wrong decision. You have the Spirit of the Moose in ferocity, now you need the Spirit of the Owl in your wisdom. We are reassigning you to two new processors. If you watch how they work and handle the—” the chief was disrupted by a loud crash of clanging metal down the hall. The elders stood up concurrently and walked out in slow leisure. I looked around, not sure of what to do. At the last second, I ran out of the room to follow them, hoping the Spirit of the Owl was watching over my decision.

We went down the hall to the medical examination room. There was no doctor inside, only two children shuddering behind the examination table. There was a frightened looking man in casual clothing. He had a knife held to his throat, but as one of the elders stepped right in front of me, I couldn’t see who the perpetrator was.

“P- Please,” the man stammered. The dagger wielding criminal began spitting out words in a strange tongue. I identified the gibberish immediately. Stretching my neck, I could make out fat fingers, a furry skirt, and broad, manly legs. The spirit of the Owl was mocking me. My Jolie was trying to kill someone.

“P- Please,” said the squeaky wire of a man, seeing all of us standing outside of the room. “Please, you have to help me...” The Chief Elder watched intently for a few minutes. After some silence, besides the hostage’s whimpers, the Chief started shifting his weight, looking from here to there, randomly it appeared. Before long, though, he bluntly turned and left with a long sigh, walking back down the hall. The rest of the elders followed. I glimpsed the wise ones in their weaving row, departing. I glimpsed the pleading man squirming as much as Jolie would allow him. Then, I gazed towards the elders once more. Swallowing gulping slurps, I tried to get some saliva past my mouth of cotton pillows and tongue of grooved leather. I threw my hands up in the air and turned to follow the elders. But the man’s sobs made me look back. My heavy head sunk into a groan. I turned around towards the medical examination room. The children lit up a bit as I walked inside slowly, not wanting to instigate anything.

When she saw someone coming, their mother began to spew words again, threateningly. I pointed to myself and said, “Matchitehew. Mat-chi-te-hew.” I smiled with a plea. “Matchitehew,” I said. She glared at first, but then I could see her realize why I was saying such strange words to her. Her eyes swelled from blunt to focus and she eased her pressure against the man’s throat.

“Matchitehew,” she said. “Pomóc... Wpu?? mnie.” I didn’t know what to do or say to keep her appeased. I looked at the man for help, but all he could seem to do was keep on sniveling, eyes clamped. I placed my index finger across my throat, then shook my head and took it away. I repeated this action several times. When Jolie saw what I wanted her to do, her red face mutated into coarse bark.

“Nie! Nie! Wpu?? mnie,” she said. To my relief, the elders returned with several security guards. They were muscular warriors almost as big as she was. Two of them ran at her. She elbowed the one on her left with the arm in which she held the knife. She easily backhanded the one leaping towards her right side, sending him flying across the room, landing by her kids. She spat at him.

“Nie! Odejd? ode mnie,” she babbled. Three more guards ran at her. She took two out again with ease, but the third one grabbed her right arm. She was trying to shake him off when the first two held her left arm. The two who had just been walloped stumbled over to her holding their heads dizzily. They seized her legs and lifted them up so that she had no leverage. She flailed violently in a frantic attempt to break free, dropping the man and her knife, which fell right beside his head.

“Nie! Nie! Nidgy,” she said. She looked over at me, damp globs oozing out of her eyes. “Matchitehew... pomóc... Matchitehew... dlaczego...?” Her fat face thinned, taking on the look of a child who didn’t understand why its mother would put it up for adoption. The guards were carrying her away, but the Chief stopped them, commanding one of the other elders to the fallen victim. One woman with a pink center feather went to the wounded man’s side to console him. She sat him up and calmed him down.

The Chief Elder asked, “Why has she done this to you?”

Still shaking violently, the man said with a quaver in his voice, “After her meeting with you and your rejection of her case, I explained it all to her. I was as diplomatic as possible, and she seemed to take our dismissal rather well, as if she expected it. But when she found out that the children had to stay, she went crazy. Throwing books and chairs around my office. She even tried to stab me with my letter opener. I fled the room, but she chased me in here. She was going to hold me hostage until I would tell her that she could stay.” His voice wobbled through tears as he continued, “I didn’t know what to do... it’s not my decision. I’m not the one who could let her stay. I- I... I don’t think I want this job anymore.” The Chief just stood there dourly, stroking his small goatee. His forefinger extended stoically in the direction of the door. Jolie, my Jolie, screamed and thrashed and cried like a mental patient as the security warriors dragged her away.

The Chief ordered the elders back to their council. He pulled me aside and

we walked together at a pace disconcertingly gradual. “I talked to Choviohoya minutes before you arrived, Matchitehew. He said he fled because the immigrant seemed dangerous. He said she seemed unstable,” the Chief Elder said. “Hmm.” He tapped his chin, so much darker than the rest of our people. “I applaud your bravery, Young One, but you have much to learn in the way of knowledge.” I looked down as my face burned. I had let everyone down. “Do you know why your job is so important, Matchitehew?”

I thought for a second and said, “Well, because without us, no immigrants would get into our country.”

“No. The other elders and myself are the ones who decide who stays in or out. We evaluate the immigrants and judge them. You could send us the same wayfarer ninety-nine times and you still would have no influence over the decision.”

“Well then... then what *is* the point of my job? Why keep us around if you don't need us?”

“Ah, but we do need you. We needed you today and you failed us. You have guards not far from your post. But that poor man- the immigration counselor- he must go in a tiny room with these mongrels and explain why they did or did not get into our country. That innocent, hard-working man almost lost his life today. By an objective stroke of judgment, you could have prevented all of this from happening. If you let pity get the best of you, people's lives are at stake.”

“But did she really have to be separated from her own children? It seems like *that* would have been the way to avoid the affair. How could you separate a family like that?”

“Our city is yet new. We are still trying to populate it, not to mention the rest of the planet. With the influx of aged immigrants, many who leave their children behind, the young ones are just another valuable resource gone scarce. If we keep taking in all of these older immigrants, we will be shortchanging our younger generation, nay- our future. That woman with the knife- she had nothing to offer. She doesn't speak our language, is oblivious to our society's ways, is clearly slow to adapt. She would just take up space and money here. Her children, however, have a chance. They are clean slates. *Our* slates.

“We must take all children we see, even the dirty blood of foreign younglings, if only to preserve our culture. It is for the land, as we explained you earlier.” I nodded, thinking deeply. “The pale-face is a demon, Matchitehew. Don't doubt it for a second. They destroyed our home. They ravaged our land. They took advantage of our people. Then they laughed when we try to combat our losses through what meager means we could. Yet in spite of all that, while they laughed, while they defiled Mother Earth, we prepared. We were ready for what was coming, even if it came sooner than expected. We were forced to find a new home. And now that their prosperity stalemates, pale-face wants what is ours for himself so he can lay waste to it again. They are demons, Matchitehew. Savages. You must never forget this when your time comes to become the elder, the wise one. It will be up to you to protect our heritage and our land.”

I looked at him as he stopped walking right outside of the elders' chambers. "Now you must go, Matchitehew. Check the employee bulletin board for your new schedule tomorrow."

As I was about to leave, I realized I forgot to get my "Completion of Summons" form to make my visit official. I rapped gently on the elder's chambers. Within, an elder said she possibly dropped it in the medical room, having been taken aback by the occurrence. I ran down there to see if I could find it. Sure enough, there it was lying on the floor across the room. When I bent down to pick it up, I heard a snuffle. I glanced to my left and nearly fell over. Inside the empty room, sitting on the cold, grungy floor, were the foreigner's two little children. I stepped back in horror, not sure of what to do. When they recognized me, the young girl and boy came up to me and hugged my legs. I looked down at them as they cried with their cackling, high-pitched squeals. They sounded like hyenas. I pushed them off of me violently and gaped at them, only able to hear the chief elder's words in my ear: "The pale face is a demon..." They started to follow me but I raced out of the room. Their tiny legs wobbled towards me. I slammed the door shut and locked it. Someone would find them in the morning and sort it all out. I realized I forgot my form but didn't dare go back in. The thunder battering my chest was only just starting to slow when the soft scraping of tiny fingernails grew louder and louder against the barred metal door. I turned around, sprinting for the exit, never once looking back. Chief was right. The pale face is a demon.

It was nothing more than a single day, but a day can mean a lifetime in a pioneering age like this one. Behind my new administering table, I watch, in awe, the two processors I've been reassigned to. They are Rembrandts. They are Mendelssohns. They are Gates. They are geniuses named Megadogik and Oktaktay. Oktaktay is squat and stout. Trim graying hair covers his head and stubble covers his cheeks and chin. Megadogik is a tall, lanky man. He has this thin comb- his bald head.