

Stephen

Humanities 4X

May 21, 2020

Festivities

Seated in a lecture was Charles Gonnway. As much as he loved philosophy, he couldn't stand sitting in a room with 200 other people for 2 hours. It was excruciating, but he knew this was his only way to gain access to the higher echelons of society. He had arrived at Columbia University only two months prior, having never stepped in New York or any big city for that matter. The atmosphere of this "country" within a country drowned him. He was practically alone. He had no friends from home and no guidance.

Guidance was something that he needed desperately. Even before this, he needed advice on how to do anything. But here, he needed advice on how to survive the never sleeping city. He had met new friends here, Daniyal and Gish, who were also freshmen. The only difference was the fact that both of them knew how to survive in the city. Prior to their friendship, Charles was like a moth, attempting to find some sort of light in this congested environment.

While walking in the student center, Charles caught sight of a group. This group was a fraternity on campus, and they represented themselves as "adventurers of the city." Additionally, they loved journeying into museums of the area and exploring Manhattan. Above all this, they were a brotherhood who guided each other and stuck

by each other through thick and thin. These qualities attracted Charles, even though his friends argued not to get involved with them. He considered joining the fraternity in order to gain some status in this concrete jungle.

However the only ideas that Charles had of what a fraternity was like was that they were aggressive and committed the most ruthless acts towards new members. Those acts were something that he feared. Charles expressed his fears to the fraternity, which were quickly dissolved. The fraternity members explained that they were nothing of that sort.

“The actions of other fraternities in the past are hideous,” said James, a member of the organization. He added, “We try to move towards people viewing us in a better light.”

Charles was swayed by this argument. At that moment, he truly felt that the fraternity was the best fit for him. As the feeling of joining settled in, Charles was excited and determined to know a lot about this brotherhood and the city.

His first day in the fraternity was simple and exciting. Every Monday evening, the members would meet at the fraternity house to discuss matters. These matters included how to organize events and aid in bringing more attention to their fraternity. As this was Charles' first meeting, he didn't really have anything to add on. But nevertheless, the meeting was nice for him. As everyone was just relaxing, James had seen that Charles was quite tense. The members decided to help loosen him up by inviting him for a game of pool.

“Come over for a game of pool. It’ll be fun,” James said. “We should know who's joined our brotherhood,” added.

Although Charles was hesitant, he decided to play. His game with James had put him at ease, and he spoke more to the other members of the group. The other students spoke to him and told him of the fraternity's history. They also informed him of the traditions of the school. The traditions Charles learned of were fascinating to him.

Within the next two days, Charles began to loosen up and enjoy the life of the fraternity. They had multiple activities that Charles participated in, such as bonfires and chaotic parties. Though these events were fun, Charles felt that they were similar to the actions that he had always been warned of. Charles decided to ignore these worries, but these warnings kept appearing.

One such event involved the school's local, *The Union Theological Seminary*, which Charles had visited recently. The frat argued that the seminary aided the church in arguing against their respective “rights”. These rights, as Charles realized, were nothing but fiction. James offered Charles the opportunity to help them in spray painting the Seminary. Charles felt extremely hesitant in aiding, but he reminded himself that these actions would help him in his university life. He then proceeded to paint a huge eye on the wall. The cheers of the other boys helped him feel like he belonged even though his conscience was screaming at him to stop.

He would later come to question and even despise his decision. It was at this point that the fraternity asked him to help them in a long tradition they had. They argued that this is how the year truly starts.

“A Flame so bright, it could be seen from the highest of heights,” he was told. Though Charles was willing to aid in this endeavor, he truly hoped it wasn’t like the Seminary incident which left him with a heavy feeling of guilt in his gut.

In the middle of the night a few days later, the fraternity all met outside the frat house. Charles arrived to see that the group had matches and lighters. He had a feeling that he knew what was going to happen, but he knew quitting now wasn’t an option for fear of repercussions. Charles and the group ventured into a park nearby their dorms. The park was known to have a beautiful and blooming array of flowers. Since fall was approaching and the flowers would wilt soon, the boys decided to speed up this process. The flowers were located in a garden that James knew of.

The group decided to let Charles do the “honors”. For them, it was for Charles to prove his loyalty to them.

“Charles, we think you’d be the best fit to do this job”, James declared.

“Everyone here is all in agreement with you being chosen. You’re a true brother once this is over. Forever guided by us always.”, he added.

Charles was stunned at this declaration. He didn’t expect them to commit something like this- An act of arson. He wasn’t surprised at that, he was surprised that he was the one to do it. He looked at their faces, those were faces of pressure and expectations placed on him. At that moment, everything had hit him: that the fraternity wasn’t a guidance, it was chaos. With that realized, Charles accepted his fate. He lit the matches and began burning the flowers. Flowers turned to flames, and these flames grew. Unbeknownst to the group, a generator was nearby and caught fire. The engulfed

generator exploded, causing an explosion to be seen by many. Charles looked into the flames, finally like a moth that has found its light.

The Penthouse

Jane Anaski sat on her hazel-color rug. She looked quite perplexed. Across from her was her longtime client, Jim Hashan. Mr. Hashan had come to her penthouse to request a painting. Jane said that she could easily get that done within a day. But Mr. Hashan required the painting to be done unrushed.

“Listen to me, Jane. I’ve known you for 5 years,” Mr. Hashan said calmly.

“Your paintings have always been top of the line but repetitive,” he added.

Jane looked stunned at what Mr. Hashan had said. He explained that she wasn’t bad, but the themes in her painting were always about her personal life. This was interesting, but Mr. Hashan added that she always made it direct and blunt, never adding some form of abstraction.

“So you want me to create something that would be considered new for me?” She questioned.

“Yes. I’m hoping that it could be something that shows your range of abilities,” Mr. Hashan responded.

The two decided that Jane would take two days to produce the final product. Usually, Jane could finish within the night, but Mr. Hashan wanted the painting to be an extraordinary experience that wasn't obvious. Jane then spent the morning sketching out rough drafts.

In between, Jane would take a few breaks. She looked outside her penthouse window. The view she saw overlooked the park, and nearby was Columbia University. She had recently heard that the local seminary was vandalized. She hoped that the perpetrators were caught. As she looked on, her cat Gummy had made his appearance. Gummy had at points been a source of inspiration for Jane's work. She loved her cat and the calm mystique that he had.

The penthouse was something she obtained due to the fame and wealth she acquired from her art. She spent most of her time painting and drawing, thus multiple cans of paint and brushes laid all over her penthouse floor. On the walls were paintings and sketches that she made but never sold. For her, those held sentimental values. What Mr. Hashan remarked was that she was too direct, and that had bugged her. She felt that her art was engaging and diverse.

She continued to paint and sketch, but each time the outcome was similar to the last. The first one, she attempted to make a human head that contorted, concaved, exaggerated, and overall grand. But that sketch didn't bring anything. The next one was of a baby wrapped in the trees of the world, with birds and angels in the background. When finished, the painting reminded her of Michaelangelo's painting on the Sistine

Chapel. For as much as it was beautiful, it wasn't what she wanted. She realized that the day became night, and she went to sleep.

The next morning, she awoke. She looked at the calendar. It was August 9th. It marked 8 years since Jane spoke to her parents. She came from a loving family. Her family was famous in Manhattan for the banking business that they held, for which her family went into business degrees. When Jane had declared that she wasn't interested in the life of banking, it stunned her family. More so, it was looked as a dishonor to their heritage. They disregarded Jane, much to her disdain.

For Jane, even without the aid of her family, she was able to achieve a lot within those 8 years. Acquiring recognition by many of the artists in the world was not easy. But even with all this, she was still saddened by not having spoken to her family in years.

"You think I should call them?" she asked her feline friend.

"Meow," Gummy responded.

Jane decided to call her parents. She dialed their number and the phone rang. With each ring, her heartbeat went faster, but she calmed herself. She wondered what was the worst that could happen? The phone rang some more, then someone answered.

"Hello, Jane. It's been a while since you called," her mother stated.

"Hi, Mom. How's it been?" Jane responded. "I was calling to check in to see you all," she continued.

"Well, Jane. You've been gone for so long, I guess I should fill you. Your father recently had a heart attack, which left him hospitalized for a bit. Your brother

nearly went bankrupt. But that's what happened since you left us," her mother calmly explained.

Jane was shocked by the news. She couldn't believe these events occurred. She was hurt.

"Why didn't you contact me, mom? I understand we're not on best terms, but you could've at least informed, and I would've helped," she continued.

"Well, you left the family. For what? For some artistic dream? Please..." Her mother snapped angrily. "Please don't try to argue anything else."

"Tell Dad and Sean I send my best regards. Goodbye, mother," Jane said, hanging up the phone.

Jane spent the rest of the day sitting on her rug, the hazel colored rug which had little dots of browning red on it. She realized that her family was still angry with her. She understood that their ignorance could never be changed, and she accepted that. That acceptance inspired her. But at that same point, outside her window, an explosion occurred, emitting black smoke into the sky. Jane saw that a ball of fire engulfed the park garden. Alongside her conversation with her mother, the fire gave her the idea for the painting.

The next morning, Mr. Hashan came to the penthouse. He was surprised at the art that Jane made. A phoenix with flowers burning around it. Jane had proved her versatility in this piece.

Taxi

His taxi is a rusty yellow color with white stripes going across the side. The taxi also has a little lightning symbol on the trunk, something Ralph Demacio's daughter drew one day. Ralph's day always started with him getting up around 6:30 am, and telling his family he'll be back late. This lateness was a common thing for Ralph, though he didn't like being away from his family for a long time.

Ralph would then journey through New York driving his taxi. He picked up total strangers and took them to their destinations. Sometimes, he would strike up conversations with his passengers. Luckily, these talks would often lead to something interesting or sometimes nothing would come up. But it never mattered- as long as he got them from point A to be B, he was fine. Ralph usually worked in Mid- Manhattan. He believed the best clients were here, and he could make the most money.

One of his last clients was a man in a nice black suit. The man looked quite stressed, so Ralph decided to make conversation with him.

"You seem quite down! Mind I ask what's on your mind?" Ralph said while driving.

"Yeah, got an artist who's been doing the same old same old." The man said, sighing.

"You are an art person. Well, I'm sorry about ya' artist." Ralph responded.

"Who are you anyways?" he added

"My name is Jim Hashan. I'm an art collector and presenter," Jim replied.

The two spoke a bit during the drive. Ralph explained his school days studying to become a journalist. He revealed that he occasionally writes op-eds for the *New York Times* of his experience as a taxi driver. Jim was surprised that some of his favorite op-eds were written by Ralph. But while their talk was long, the drive was surprisingly short. Both parted ways, expressing gratitude for meeting each other and knowing their respective works.

Ralph was delighted to have a conversation such as that. He continued his drive until he got a call. A person was looking for a taxi, and Ralph was in the area. The client was located in front of the Rockefeller Center. Ralph decided this would be his last pickup; it was 11 pm and he decided to be home early for once. He hurried to Rockefeller Center. The client was standing next to the sidewalk and waived down Ralph. The client got into the car. Since the client's face was obscure due to his clothing and because of the card system, Ralph couldn't properly see his face, but he saw a brownish beard.

"So what's ya' location? And would ya' mind takin' ya' mask off?" Ralph asked.

"No, I'd like to keep it. I'm not trying to be mean. But I'd prefer it to stay,"
The man replied.

Ralph allowed it to pass, he was feeling good and didn't feel like getting into an argument. The mysterious man said he was going to the Seminary by the University. Ralph thought that to be a bit too broad, but he decided the man would tell him when

they arrived. The drive was extremely quiet, and nothing was said. Ralph knew trying to make any conversation would lead to more awkwardness.

“Hey, would you make a stop at the bank please?” the man quietly said.

“The Bank of America right there?” Ralph inquired.

The man affirmed. Ralph stopped in front of the bank. The man got out and told him to wait. Ralph thought nothing of it. It was common for passengers to ask for a stop on the way. Five minutes, and immediately the alarm sounded. The man came running out of the bank with a bag of money falling out in one hand, and a gun in the other. Ralph was scared at this sight. The man jumped into the car and ordered Ralph to drive. Ralph did his best to keep calm.

A few seconds later, there were police cars behind them. Ralph thought of his family, so he decided to try something.

“Fella, if I may ask, why ya’ doing this? What’s the worth?” Ralph questioned.

“Listen, buddy, you drive and don’t talk. You wanna live, you listen!” the man responded.

Ralph could now see the man’s face. A young man, probably in his early 20s Ralph thought. He decided he would try again.

“Listen, buddy. I know fellas like you. Going through some rough stuff right now. Trust me, I’ve been there. This isn’t gonna help you,” Ralph tried to plead to the young man.

“Shut your mouth. You know nothing of me. Nothing of me,” the man replied angrily.

He tried one last time to stop him. Ralph immediately stopped the car in the middle of the road. He told the young man that he'd listen to him. Not his orders, but of his troubles. The young man sighed and dropped the gun. He explained his story. His name was Anthony. He came from a strict home and always had anger. He decided he would rob the bank and leave the city, as he said, “to detach myself from the jungle.” Ralph was saddened by his story, and he told Anthony life is hectic and that the pain will pass.

Anthony decided to give up, and he surrendered to the police. He declared that Ralph was the hostage. After the officers took his statement, Ralph was free to go. As he drove off, he looked at his watch, it was midnight. As he arrived at a traffic light, he suddenly heard an explosion. The ball of fiery smoke came from the park. Ralph, unsurprised due to the recent actions, drove off. He thought to himself, “I'm quitting this job. Going back to *The Times*”.