

Block-"The Party"

I stopped answering my phone unless I knew the number or I was expecting a call. My parents thought I was being paranoid, but they came around to my way of thinking after my grandmother came uncomfortably close to giving twenty thousand dollars in Google Play gift cards to scammers when she was convinced she had a debt to settle. What these people do with the gift cards, I have no idea. But I do know that after this, phone calls became something that no one in the family really looked forward to anymore. Why then, with all my supposed reluctance to phone calls and my own experience trying to assure my grandmother that she didn't owe anyone nearly that much money, did I answer the phone on May 10th, 2016? Why did I invite into my life a change no amount of therapy could manage or medication could quash? Truthfully, I was just bored.

It was early in the day, at least by the standards of a college student who had not yet started their summer job. I was staying with my parents for a few weeks before heading back to school and starting a research project for a few months. Though I was still in touch with some friends from high school, they were all off at summer internships, vacations, or otherwise occupied. My days were taken up mostly by video games, biking, the occasional lunch with my mom and sleeping in. It was relaxing, for the most part. Some days though, the boredom would creep in. I'd wander around my parents house, wondering what to do before inevitably settling into another bout of absentmindedly staring at YouTube videos. So when my phone rang and a number I did not recognize filled the screen, I shrugged my shoulders and tapped the screen to answer the call. I was bored out of my mind and I wanted something, anything to break up the monotony for even a little bit.

“Hel—” I started, but a robotic voice on the other end of the line started up immediately, cutting me off.

“T.O.O Events is hosting a party tonight at Jewel Lake. It will start at 6 PM. You are invited to attend. There will be wine and cheese. A text will arrive soon with your invitation attached.”

And then the call ended. I stared at the now blank screen for a moment, wondering what in the hell I had just heard. I was used to spam calls trying to keep me on the line as long as possible, not giving me five sentences in a stilted robotic voice and hanging up. A quick Google search told me that T.O.O Events was in fact a real event planning company. I doubted how effective of an organization they were if their method for distributing invitations to their events was to cold call people with a jarring robot voice. I wasn’t going to pay it any further attention. I was going to put my phone down, fire up the Playstation or the computer, and veg out like I had been doing for a week now. But my phone buzzed once again, this time a text message popped up on screen. It was the promised invitation to the party.

‘You are invited to a party 🎉 at Jewel 💎 Lake hosted by T.O.O events tonight at 6 PM. We will have wine 🍷 and cheese 🧀 and an incredible opportunity for everyone. We hope to see you there.’

And suddenly, it all made sense. “An incredible opportunity”. This was some Multi-Level Marketing thing. Whoever was funding the party would get people to the lake, get them a little tipsy off of free wine, and pitch their essential oils, or protein shakes, or whatever it was. I still didn’t understand the invitation distribution method, and the abundance of emojis was a little off putting, but I was satisfied that I had figured it out. I slipped my phone back into my pocket and settled down again, ready to let my brain rot a bit.

Hours passed. I did very little, bordering on absolutely nothing all day. I would've argued that this was my right as a student home for a few weeks, the semester only having ended a few days prior. But life comes knocking and drags us kicking and screaming to our responsibilities, whether we want it or not. My responsibility took the form of preparing dinner for myself and my parents. This was a fair ask, I thought and I found myself feeling in much the way my mother must have when I was a child, constantly thinking about what to make for dinner. A dirty secret, one that I am sure would have been employed were I not a picky eater as a kid, is that if you have mushrooms, onion, garlic, veggie stock, sour cream and assorted spices, you're never more than forty five minutes away from vegetarian stroganoff. I used this to my advantage many times during the school year, and now that the clock was creeping closer and closer to "dinner time", it felt right to use it now.

Of course, a large part (the only part, really) of that dirty secret was having all the ingredients and my cursory glance at my parent's refrigerator revealed that the mushroom situation was more dire than I had realized. I did some quick math. Ten minutes to the store, ten minutes to grab what I needed, ten minutes back. I'd still be cooking when mom and dad got home from work, but I decided that was acceptable and headed out.

There was a part of me that told me to just say "Screw it". To make something else, to make a pared down stroganoff, to order a pizza. But I had set my mind to mushroom stroganoff. So I got into my car and drove ten minutes to the local grocery store. And in doing so, I passed by Jewel Lake.

I was surprised to see anything going on at the lake. Despite the invitation that I had received, I wasn't even sold on the idea that there was a party. But as I passed the lake, I saw

what indeed looked like a rather large party being set up on the beach. Two semi-trucks, white save for the black “T.O.O Events” emblazoned on the sides of their trailers, were being unloaded by employees in high visibility vests and their contents moved to a stage I could see on the beach.. Elsewhere, tables were being set up by and decorated with rather nice looking table cloths. A catering van was pulling into the parking lot. This was in fact looking like a big deal. My immediate rejection of the entire idea of the party suddenly felt rash.

Putting the feeling aside, I focused on the road and the task at hand. I had a dinner to make. On my way back, the event was looking even more put together. The stage now had speakers and microphones scattered across it. I still felt like going to this party would get me on some marketing list I didn’t necessarily want to be on, but would it necessarily be *that* bad? The car’s stereo told me it was 4:45 PM. I could make dinner and not be too late to the official start of the party. Fashionably late, they call it.

Dinner was nothing special. Tasty, certainly, but I had made the dish so often I was akin to saying a word so often it loses meaning temporarily. Sustenance and nothing more. I assisted with the clean up and excused myself for the evening.

The downside of visiting home is that I was working with a fraction of my usual wardrobe. I didn’t have a great handle on what appropriate dress for this party would be. Passing by the lake didn’t give me a ton of information to work with. Neither did the robot who called me or the emoji-filled text. I fixated on the word “wine” in the invitation. Wine was fancy, wasn’t it? Nothing in my wardrobe really screamed fancy, even if you considered my expanded selection back at my apartment, several hours away.

I kept it simple. Grey t-shirt, pink button down, and khakis. Throw in a light sweatshirt for good measure (again, this was a May evening in Minnesota) and I figured I would look acceptable. After a quick check in the mirror, I grabbed my wallet, phone, and keys and headed out.

Neither my mom or dad asked questions about where I was going. It wasn't that they didn't care about my whereabouts or well-being, but they trusted me to make smart decisions, to take care of myself. Looking back, I wish that they had.

Stepping out of my car and into the parking lot of the beach, I immediately began to question my decision to come, based solely on the basis that someone had organized a beach party in Minnesota in early May. The temperature was still not "summery" and the cool evening breeze combined with the lake chilled me more than I anticipated. But I was here and I had gone to the effort of putting on some nice clothes, so I decided to roll with it.

The sound of the party wafted out in the parking lot. Music, laughter, all the typical sounds of reverie. The typical entrance to the beach was blocked by a sign reading "Closed for private event". A bored looking man dressed in a button down shirt and khakis sat at a podium beside the sign. He wasn't the type of person I would expect to see checking invitations or IDs or whatever it was he was doing. The guy was built – more of a nightclub bouncer than anything. As I approached, his expression changed from "I want to go home" to "corporate mandated happiness".

"Name and Invitation?"

His face may have adopted a faux smile, but his tone certainly hadn't. It was as if Ben Stein was checking me in. Not that I blamed him, this was probably the most boring station to be

at. He had to be hoping for someone to get a little too rowdy so he could toss their ass into the parking lot.

“Ben Lawson,” I said as I fished my phone from my pocket and pulled up the text from earlier. I felt nervous for some reason, like I was trying to use a fake ID to get into a bar. The guy could probably crack my head open just by thinking hard enough. It was likely best to stay on his good side. The bouncer barely glanced at my phone before turning his attention to his clipboard.

“Lawson, Lawson ... There we go,” He scanned his list and made a small mark on his paper. I expected him to wave me in, but he just looked at me.

“You’re late.”

The words chilled me. He hadn’t wavered from his flat tone, but something in his voice caught me off guard. We stared at one another for a beat before he gestured in an “on you go” fashion. I wanted to respond but nothing came to mind. I stepped past him and onto the path to the beach. By my watch, it was 6:30 PM. Fashionably late indeed.

The sound of the party grew louder as I traversed the short path. When I stepped onto the sand of the beach, I had let go of any feelings of unease. I was going to have fun, dammit.

The festivities spread across a wide swath of the beach. There was the stage that I had seen, currently featuring a karaoke machine and a guy really giving his all on the high notes of “Take On Me”. In front of the stage, a fire was roaring in a pit, the area around it peppered by adirondack chairs. Those sitting in them were eating and drinking the promised cheese and wine while chatting and laughing at the brave and thankfully nearly completed choice of karaoke song. There were games set up a couple dozen meters from the fire, far enough that those playing didn’t have to worry about running into or throwing anything into the fire. A volleyball game

was in full swing, a few cornhole games were seemingly getting competitive, and a few of the jockier looking guys were tossing a football around, making diving catches into the sand.

And of course, there was the lake. Jewel Lake was by no means a large lake, half a square mile in area or so and *maybe* fifty feet deep at its deepest point. A large lake would have local legends as far back as anyone could remember about lake monsters, tales of people gone missing in the darkness of the lake. Here though, we had none of that. We had a wonderful little spot in our community for boating, fishing and tubing. A great place for families. A perfect spot for a party.

“Can I help you?”

I flinched pretty hard at the sound of the voice. I had become so entranced with watching people that I had not noticed a woman approaching me. Her black polo shirt was emblazoned with white letters. T.O.O Events. She was a staff member.

“Oh, sorry,” I stammered out, embarrassed at my reaction, “I was just taking things in.”

The woman smiled and I was immediately at ease, embarrassment erased. It was a warm smile. The sort you’d get from a grandparent during the holidays.

“Oh, as you can see, we have all sorts of activities set up,” she gestured to the stage, the fire, and the games, “and we have drinks and hors d’oeuvres at that that table and we’ll have sandwiches ready for everyone shortly,” gesturing to another table where there were indeed bottles of wine, water as well as cheese and crackers set up.

She stared, as though she expected me to say something. I wasn’t entirely sure what, so I thanked her and made my way over to the drinks table. She smiled again. If this was some sort of MLM thing in disguise, at least they made you feel welcome.

I am not a wine drinker. I never have been. I had assumed that there would be other drinks, cheap beer or simple cocktails. Something for those of us with less refined palates. I was apparently mistaken as the only thing present at the refreshments table was a rather impressive selection of wine, with a smaller smattering of bottled water. There wasn't even any white wine. It was all red. I dislike white wine. I *hate* red wine. Sighing inwardly at the only problem I had with the party so far, I grabbed a water bottle and made my way to the fire. I didn't want to simply butt into one of the on going games. I figured I would sit by the fire and wait for something to wrap up and sneak in at that point.

The chair closest to me that also happened to be empty was close enough to the fire to enjoy watching the flames dance in the pit but far enough that I couldn't feel its warmth, making me thankful that I had decided to bring a sweatshirt. A few small groups had formed, conversations filled the air around me. I focused on one, then another, then another, trying to find a conversation that I could jump in without much trouble. As I was focusing on the fire and the conversations around me, something from the corner of my eye caught my attention, and I tilted my head slightly to see what was happening.

A girl had taken up residence in the chair next to me. I nodded, smiled, and said "Hello", in the way that you do when a stranger approaches you and I turned my attention back to the fire.

"What are you looking at?"

This time, I thankfully didn't flinch at the unexpected sound of someone talking to me. I turned to face the speaker, the girl who had sat next to me. She was remarkably pretty and not exactly dressed for the chill weather. She had short black hair, cut just shy of being called a pixie cut and deep emerald green eyes. Her attire, like mine and many other attendees, was simple. A black t-shirt with a colorful logo that I didn't recognize emblazoned across the front and grey

sweatpants. What she had apparently neglected, was a sweater of some kind and my proximity to her was enough that I could see goosebumps raised up her arms. At this moment, I realized I was gawking and needing to say something.

“I’m sorry?” In my surprise, I hadn’t fully processed her question. It shouldn’t, at this point, be too much of a shock to learn that I am not used to people, especially women speaking to me out of the blue.

“You’re staring at something pretty intently. What’s up?”

I was still a little in shock. This woman was very pretty and she was talking to *me*.

“Oh. It’s the fire. I like watching the flames. I think it’s pretty.”

She laughed. “Fair enough. Another question: Are you OK? You seem a little off.”

It’s not every day that you get invited to tell someone that you’re surprised that they’d give you the time of day, and I struggled for a moment internally before responding.

“I guess I just wasn’t expecting someone to just sit down and start chatting, is all”.

“You’re at a *party*,” She looked at me like I was crazy. “OK let’s try this.” She stuck her hand out and smiled at me. “Hi, I’m Lavinia. What’s your name?”

I returned the smile as I took her hand and shook it, my heart skipping a beat as I did.

“I’m Ben. It’s nice to meet you, Lavinia.”

After that, conversation got easier. I started looking less at the fire and more at my new found fireside companion. I learned that she too was in town for a bit before going back to school and that she had also gotten a weird invitation to this party. As we talked, we got away from talking about the party and more about ourselves. We discussed college majors (Chemistry for me, English for her), hobbies (while she didn’t share my enjoyment of video games, we learned that we both enjoyed biking), and even our families.

As the sun got lower and lower in the sky ,Lavinia's goosebumps turned into visible shivering. I decided to risk sounding cliché.

"Would you like my sweatshirt?" I probably sounded incredibly awkward, but I hoped that I played it off cool enough.

She laughed, a sound I had become accustomed to over the last hour or so. "I'm actually going to see if I can find the restroom and get this topped off." She pointed at her wine glass. "I might take you up on that in a little bit though."

She stood and walked away. The sun was now low enough that the fire was casting long shadows across the sand and I followed her shadow until it faded into the night. Five minutes passed, then ten. When half an hour had gone by without her return, I allowed myself to feel a pang of sadness. While I never expect anyone to feel like they're stuck talking to me, I guess I would've appreciated a "Hey, I'm gonna go chat with some other people now". Regardless, I had been having a good night. I had already gotten more out of it than I had ever expected. I wasn't going to let this ruin my night.

I stared into the fire again, the flames seeming even larger and more impressive in the rapidly fading sun. I could hear the wood cracking under the intense heat, even sitting as far from the fire as I was. Fascinated, I watched the flames dance up and down for a long time. I let my brain revert to "school mode" for just a short time as I considered the forces and effects that shape the flames and that make it dance so beautifully.

I shook my head. There would be time for school later. For now, I needed more water. I decided that Lavinia probably wasn't coming back at this point and left my seat, making my way to the drinks table again. The table was being restocked by another T.O.O employee, who didn't seem to notice my presence. As I approached, I could hear a low sound, almost like a drum beat.

It wasn't until I got within a foot or two of the table that I realized the sound was a chant from the employee stocking the table. They grabbed a bottle of wine, chanted a short phrase and placed the bottle on the table. It reminded me of the Catholic masses that my parents dragged me to as a kid. I hadn't realized that T.O.O Events was a religious organization, but it didn't bother me, so long as they didn't kick out non-believers and I didn't leave the party with an admonition to go to church the next day..

My footsteps were dampened by the sand. This time, I was the one who did the startling. I tapped lightly on the table, shocking the poor guy, who dropped the bottle onto the sand.

"Oh, I am so sorry!" I rushed to pick up the bottle and handed it back to the man. "I didn't mean to startle you. What language was that, Latin?"

I didn't and still don't know what Latin sounds like. The guy could've told me it was Portuguese and I would have believed him.

"Uh, yeah. Sorry. Just a personal thing, I hope that doesn't make you uncomfortable." The guy seemed genuinely sorry and I wasn't even drinking the wine, so I just smiled.

"No worries, man. Could I just get a water bottle?"

He passed me a bottle straight from his cooler, which I appreciated immensely. I pulled off the plastic lid and drank, relishing in the cold water. I raised my hand in thanks to the drinks guy and turned to head back to my seat. As I walked away, I could hear the rhythmic chanting begin again, low and slow.

My chair had been claimed by someone new when I returned from retrieving my water bottle and despite my hopes, Lavinia hadn't returned. I had no claim to the chair, so I took this as a sign to make my way to another activity. I sidled up to one of the cornhole games that had

quieted down a bit and grabbed a bean bag. I nodded at the guy standing by the other board in what I hoped was a universal sign language for “Quick Game?”. My suspicion was correct, and he grabbed a bean bag of his own and the game began. Not wanting to play in silence (well, not *silence*, there was still a party going on), I spoke up.

”Enjoying the party?” As I spoke, he tossed the bean bag and it thunked against the plywood board. As with the trucks I had seen earlier and the employee shirts, the boards too were emblazoned with the text T.O.O Events.

”Yeah man, it’s pretty chill.” His tone caught me off guard. He was really channeling his inner Cheech Marin, at least through his voice. I had always thought that was a voice put on as an act. On the outside he didn’t look like the hippie, stoner type. He was dressed neatly in a polo and chinos. I regretted the stereotyping almost immediately - this was a thought I would be keeping to myself.

Another thunk, followed by a “Hell yeah!”. The serve had been returned. His aim was better than mine and his bean bag slid into the hole of the board.

”Nice shot.” I readied my next shot, focusing as best I could. Winning is secondary in settings like this, but that doesn’t mean I couldn’t try. My bean bag again thunked against his board, pushing my previous bag into the hole.

”Sweet.” My companion’s voice was still jarring to me. I really expected someone with his voice to be in a tie-dye t-shirt with his hair messed up like he’d never seen a comb. Before his next toss, he reached down to his feet and grabbed a wine glass, a plastic stemless thing, a good choice for a beach party. The sun was just about set, but there was enough light between the sun and the fire that I could see that he had more than one glass. Four, in fact, by my count.

”Good wine?” This, in hindsight, was a stupid question.

“Dude, this stuff is so good. Have you tried it?” Upon shaking my head, he dropped his bean bag, and jogged over to me. He stuck out his hand with the glass in it toward me. “Hold this - I’m gonna go get you a glass. You’ll never want another drink again in your life”.

I opened my mouth to protest, but he was already gone. I really don’t like red wine. I figured it would be OK to refuse. If nothing else, it’d be another glass for him to drink, if he liked it so much.

I assumed he’d be gone for a minute at most. Maybe more if he stopped to use the bathroom or said hello to someone. When five minutes had passed, I sat down on the sand and looked out across the lake. The moon was full and reflected beautifully across the lake, the water distorting its features as the lake’s surface rippled under a light breeze. This view of the moon wasn’t one that I saw often but I made a mental note to go out to a lake during a full moon again. It was wonderful.

Microphone feedback from behind me brought me back into the real world. I wasn’t sure exactly how long I’d been staring at the lake - three or four minutes maybe. My cornhole companion had not yet returned. I realized that I never learned his name. This was now two people who had seemingly used the excuse of refilling their wine to get away from me. I had officially moved into “miffed” territory.

The feedback broke through my thoughts again.

”Ladies and Gentleman, may I have your attention? Could everyone make their way to the stage area, please?”

At this point, I was close to being done with the whole party. I had gotten what I wanted out of it, a night of light entertainment to stave off boredom. I had gotten out of the house, had some nice conversation, a third of a game of Cornhole, and was abandoned by two separate

people. Some good, some bad. I was ready to call it a night, intent on making my way back to the parking lot. The growing crowd by the stage was intriguing, but not so much so that I felt terribly compelled to stay.

What did compel me to stay, however, was the tug I felt at my wrist as I reached the edge of the crowd. I spun around, shocked that someone might be so bold as to physically restrain me and keep me at the party. I was ready to be angry, ready to rip my wrist away from the offending person, ready to yell and make a scene. But all complaints died in my throat, coming out as a choked “Ugh” sound and my heart skipped a beat. It was Lavinia.

“Hey Ben! I’m so sorry!” Her voice was sweet, bubbly, and a little slurred. A wine glass in the hand that was not grabbing my wrist showed signs of being freshly drained. “A couple of us got asked to help move some stuff to the stage and then I got pulled into another conversation. Everything was such a whirlwind. Are you ready?”

I blinked, taking a moment to register what she had said. “Ready? Ready for what?”

If you have a friend who you’d label as a “happy drunk”, you’re familiar with the smile that they get. No smile is too wide when you’re happy drunk. They get affectionate, emotional, and at times, physical. Lavinia was apparently a happy drunk. She yanked on my wrist and pulled me into a hug.

“We’re about to get started.”

Before I had time to question further, Lavinia whirled us around to face the stage, where the speaker was holding a bottle of the wine overhead. I had missed a portion of her speech, but I gathered that something important was happening.

“Go down the street and attend a mass at the Catholic church. They will offer you grape juice and call it the blood of christ. They will ask you to do this in remembrance of their god’s

sacrifice to humanity,” Her voice was getting louder and louder, peaking the microphone.

Shortly, it seemed that she would not need it, “But they can offer you no salvation. They know nothing of the world beyond ours. We offer you that salvation tonight.”

I was truly ready to leave now. Whatever Jonestown cult bullshit was going on was not something I wanted to be a part of.

“Lavinia, let’s get out of here,” I struggled against her embrace, but she held firm. Her arms held me like iron bars, her feet planted in the sand like roots. On any other day, against any other similarly sized person, I could have at least made their time holding me a little more difficult. But today was not any day and Lavinia was apparently not any person. I was stuck.

“Will those of you who have not partaken of the blood of the Old Ones, please come to the stage?” The woman on stage spoke again, and at this, Lavinia began to walk, dragging me with her. I thrashed as best I could, trying to escape this embrace, but my arms were pinned at my sides. Looking around, there were another half dozen or so people begging dragged like I was. Onstage, glasses of wine were being poured into those cheap plastic glasses everyone had been using. Six glasses – one for each of us.

One by one, the others arrived at the stage and were forced to the ground, heads tilted up and the glass of wine poured into their mouths. They resisted while they could, but by the time their glasses were drained, their struggle had ended. They stood, motionless. Waiting.

My desire to leave the party earlier may have been my saving grace. It put me at the edge of the crowd, furthest away from the stage. As we approached, a gasp pulsed through the crowd and motion from the lake out of the corner of my eye distracted everyone. Myself, Lavinia, the crowd, and the freaks onstage.

Rising from the center of the lake was a dark pyramid. Quickly, the structure proved to be much too large for the dimensions of the lake. Within moments, it appeared one hundred feet tall, if not more, its base growing wider and wider as it rose. No one could move or speak as it rose, the pale moonlight softly illuminating the unearthly thing. The light revealed no markings on the pyramid, only that it was built of a smooth, dark stone. When it had finished rising, its base ran from one side of the lake to seemingly the other and its tip began to block the moon. When the thing shuddered to a stop, the crowd began to drop to their knees, in apparent reverence. Lavinia followed suit shortly. The moment that she did, I ran.

I ran like I had never run before, kicking up sand behind me, not caring who might have gotten sprayed by it. I was going to get off the beach, to my car, and get home, and call the police, the FBI, the Army, I'd call god damn Scully and Mulder if I needed to. But this was not natural or good.

I was expecting to be stopped, for someone, maybe that enormous bouncer, to grab my ankle while I ran and drag me back to the stage. The feeling never came. I never looked back, lest I give them the time to catch up with me. Apparently, I didn't have to worry. I made it to my car, started it up, and peeled out of the parking lot without interruption. Grabbing my phone, I called 911 as I sped away.

"911, where's your emergency?"

"Jewel Lake! There's something going on at Jewel Lake, I think they're poisoning people and —"

I couldn't finish my call, it cut out. The road before me fell away, fell into a void and I with it. Shortly afterward, my car fell away around me. The doors, hood, engine, all of it falling into a terrible black nothingness. I floated for I don't know how long. I got the sense that the

passage of time was not real here. I also got the sense that “here” was also a concept that didn’t apply.. Eventually, against the blackness of the void, a shape began to form. A triangle. Only faintly appearing against the nothingness, it eventually became apparent that I was seeing the pyramid from the lake. I didn’t want to look at it. I wanted to vomit at the sight of the thing. But no matter where I turned my head, I saw that pyramid. Closing my eyes yielded similar results, as if the image of the pyramid had been burned into my retinas.

As I fell closer and closer to the pyramid, it began to move and to shift. I realized, once I got close enough, that it was opening. I looked in one direction and a small opening on the side was opening like the door in a house. In another direction, a face of the pyramid was falling away to reveal the interior. In yet a third, the pyramid rotated through time and through space to reveal its insides to me. One way or another, it wanted me to see.

See I did. Inside, a swirling, squamous mass of spheres, tori, and prisms, all interconnected and horrible. I floated close to a sphere and I did what I could to avoid touching. Its surface was fractal in nature, I could see it too was made of impossible combinations of shapes. This place was truly awful. Pyramids within pyramids, housing geometries no human could construct, no human could even conceive of. I saw myself, reflected through time and space in a triangle with impossible angles. I was bathed in warmth and cold as the color of the place turned from orange to green to blue and back again. As I turned and squirmed, as I looked out, as I wished to die so that I may rid my mind of the awfulness of that place, the mass appeared in front of me. It did not speak, I don’t think it could. But I knew it was going to let me go. I knew that it wanted someone free. Wanted someone who could bring more people to it.

Behind me, and above me, and inside me, the pyramid closed. All the sights and colors were gone. And then, where before there was blackness, now there was nothing.

I awoke in a hospital bed. My mother and father by my side, accompanied by a doctor, a nurse, and two police officers. I had some questions to answer.

Or so I thought. The cops were there only to give me a lecture about driving late at night and to give me a ticket for falling asleep at the wheel and crashing my car into a stop sign. I was the only one hurt, a broken arm and sore ribs the only immediate sign that any damage was done. They didn't know what I was talking about when I mentioned the party at Jewel Lake, though it did prompt them to ask if I had anything to drink that night. I laughed at this, a deep belly laugh that hurt my ribs and surprised me at its sound. They shrugged their shoulders and seemed to take it as a "no".

Jewel Lake is still open, there are no signs of the party having taken place to this day. Googling T.O.O Events returns no results, as though it never existed. There was nothing on the news about a pyramid rising from the lake. Nothing about the coming of an otherworldly being to consume us all. And I never saw Lavinia again, despite looking for her on social media once I got home. I hope that she is alright. My text message relaying the invite to me still exists, though it by itself is not proof of anything untoward. A simple spam text and nothing more, right?

The only proof of that night exists when I close my eyes at night to sleep. I used to dream of fantastic things, of people and places that could never exist. But now, I dream only of that place. Of that horrid mass of impossible geometries in its pyramid outside of time and space. I float before it. And I know that it hungers.

