A flower on a hilltop – that would surely be the most apt description of her. Highly intelligent, at the top of her grade, with the beauty and grace to match that of a high-class lady. It’s a truly wondrous thing that she wasn’t born in a place befitting of her – where she’d be waited upon by butlers in rows, rather than being forced to do boorish acts, having to dirty her own hands sifting through the dirt like some kind of peasant plebeian. But alas, God did not will it that she be born where she was meant to be born – and so she was stuck with a standard family, who let not her stay focused on the truly important things – like enriching one’s knowledge – and instead order her to ‘help pull weeds in the garden,’ a job only befitting of those in the lower class.

Similarly, in not having been born where she belongs, she ends up stuck in endless, boring classes with the most obvious material being taught – material she could sift through much quicker on her own, without having to slow down for the silly classmates, that are unable to even comprehend the charm and wit available in her conversing ability, and instead laugh crudely at her choice of vocabulary, as if it’s not them who are barbaric, but her who is, as they say, ‘snobby and conceited.’

Who am I talking about, you ask?

Myself, of course. I am merely soliloquizing about my current predicament, as my hands are getting covered with filth from doing this silly weeding I’ve been forced into.

I sigh heavily, while looking at the foulness that has spread over my body.

“You know, if you’re going to do nothing but moan and pout, you might as well just leave,” says my mother, kneeling right next to me.

“Really?” I excitedly – I mean, very *calmly* and more so *elegantly*, exclaim, without a hint of any simpleton emotion, such as glee or excitement, on my complexion.

She sighs. “If it makes you that elated, then fine.”

“I most certainly was not *elated*. I simply thought it was about time I be freed from such boorish work.”

“If you’re gonna give me lip, I’m not going to let you leave, you know,” she responds, sternly.

“No, I, uh…” I scramble, before simply lowering my head. “I’m sorry. I would be very happy if you let me go, despite not being finished yet.”

She sighs again, as a soft smile surfaces on her face.

“Fine, get going then. I’ll finish up here.”

*Yay,* I inwardly cheer— *Ahem*, I clear my throat again, as I walk inside through the veranda door. Not cheer, of course – that would be unbecoming of me. I simply celebrated minorly.

“Oh, if you could clear up the top floor one last time instead? The vacationers are arriving very soon!” she yells after me, just as I thought I’d escaped.

More work, I sigh.

Well, at least cleaning, while still unbefitting me, is more noble than sifting through the dirt, I tell myself as I ascend the staircase.

Allow me to recontinue my soliloquy as I do so.

Yes, summer – the season of beaches (ha!), swimming (as if!), picnics (acceptable) and, for some godforsaken reason, for some godforsaken people: going up mountains! And, coincidentally, our house just happens to be set right upon a mountain; perfect for those people that like to ascend mountains in summer, but very, VERY imperfect for me, who wants to get some calm and quiet during the well-earned months of summer vacation.

Unfortunately, my parents have opted to appoint what is usually my haven of tranquility for elegant pastimes, *the top floor*, as a so-called 'Airbnb' location during the summer times – forcing me to surrender it to noisy families with even noisier kids, disrupting my peaceful alone time.

Of course, my parents say, “it’s nice to get a bit of commotion around here; it’s always so quiet!” when I complain about it. Tch, the fact that it’s always so quiet is exactly *why* it’s nice, but who would expect *laypeople* to understand that.

Tch, all these people, always watching their TVs and blasting horrid music from their silly *phones* on their *boomboxes,* or whatever. Pft, surely, even *they* would understand the importance of stillness and serenity if they listened to some beautiful classical music instead of that awful *pop* and *hip-hop.*

With classical music, I don’t just mean any old piece that everyone knows, like *Canon in D* or *Vivaldi’s Four Seasons* – which, if I may note, are actually *Baroque,* not *Classical,* but I digress. No, if they listened to true gems, such as—

*RIIIINNGGGGG*

A loud noise reverberates through the house – one which I distinctly recognize as the doorbell. I, of course, have requested many a time we switch to a less intrusive manner of alerting the residents, or *us,* in this case, but sadly to no avail.

Fortunately for me, it does at least do its job of alerting one particular resident, or *me,* in this case, as I take one last look around the top floor: entirely spotless of course – an inevitable result of leaving it to me.

I don’t look at the kitchen, where I have yet to be – I’m sure that was fine to begin with.

I hear the door open, followed by my father being greeted in clumsy at best German – although you cannot expect much from mere *tourists.* After the greeting, my father invites them in, and leads them up the stairway to prepare for the tour.

Up walks a scruffy looking man (my father, unfortunately), a gentle looking man (not my father, unfortunately), a very classy woman (as expected from a French lady), and finally, behind them, a slightly daft looking boy, wearing a simple hat combined with a plain t-shirt and shorts.

“This is my daughter, Frieda,” my father says, motioning towards me.

I sigh inwardly at the mention of my name. Why couldn’t I have gotten a nice, elegant French-sounding name – like *Fleur* or *Amelie –* instead of this German monstrosity. Ah, truly, I was born on the wrong side of the border.

The couple both speak a quick *nice to meet you* as they pass by, finally entering the top floor as my father begins the tour.

I sigh at the inevitable loss of my peace and quiet that will follow, before deciding to head back to my room.

Unexpectedly, as I do so, I end up face to face with the boy, who’d apparently decided to stop and chat – for some godforsaken reason.

“*Guten Tag!”* he greets me, excitedly, with a bright smile. “Name’s Maxime – nice to meet you!”

“Ah, yes,” I mumble, as I take his outstretched hand. “I am called Frieda.”

“Yeah, your pops mentioned,” he says, as he (very *firmly* and *aggressively*) shakes my hand up and down.

“Aight, I’ll talk to you later then,” he speaks on, as he finally decides enough is enough, and walks up the stairs. “Ciao!” he yells back at me as he reaches the top, to which I respond by weakly raising my hand.

*What a brute*, I think, as I descend down the stairway. It’s only polite to say your name, even if it’s been mentioned already – there was no need to embarrass me like that.

I sigh again, as I grab the book I left behind before and go back out onto the garden area, where my handy lawn chair is already awaiting me, underneath my handy parasol.

“Are you really going to lounge here after shirking your work?” My mother, still working on the patch in the vicinity, remarks.

“I cleaned the top floor, didn’t I? That’s still work.” I respond. “Besides, the vacationers have already arrived – it would be improper to continue working now.”

“Oh, are they already here?” she says. “Time flies when you’re working.”

She looks down at the plot she was weeding.

“Well, I was just about done here anyway,” she continues, as she crudely tosses her pruning scissors and gloves on the dirt. “Is Dad already showing them around?”

“He’s up there,” I respond, as I point to the top floor – where I just happen to catch the eye of a certain boy, looking out the window, who then proceeds to excitedly wave his hands around in the air.

I turn away with an inaudible *hmph* (I wouldn’t want my mother thinking I’m disrespecting her – that never ends well), and plop down on my chair without waving back as my mother goes inside.

So crude, that boy – not a speck of elegance to be found in him.

At least he has a cute smile.

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I didn’t think that.

Let’s move on.

Reading is the noblest of pursuits. There is no better activity than enriching one's mind, and there is no better way to achieve that, than through words on a page; that is the principle by which I live my life. Every day in which one has not read, is a day in which one has lost out – every hour spent on something else, is an hour that could have been spent further arming yourself with knowledge, or sharpening one's wit.

*Donk. Donk. Donk.*

Conversely, it could be argued that the foulest of pursuits would then be *not to read*, and to let one's mind continuously decay through inactivity. After all, not only have you misused your time with another set of actions, you have also left your mind to forget its grandest pursuit.

*Donk. Donk. Donk.*

Personally, however, I would argue there is something much worse than simply *not reading*. See, that lack of action, albeit a waste, has only hurt yourself – your mind has decayed, your wit has dulled, but it is only *your mind* which has decayed, and *your wit* which has dulled. Indeed, when put that way, the answer is quite obvious: the foulest of pursuits...

*Donk, donk, donk, donk, donk.*

"Ah, damn. I messed that one up." *Donk, donk, donk.* "Hey! Could ya pick that up for me?"

...is to interrupt someone else as they are doing it.

"Hey, Frieda!" The foulest of persons yells again, more loudly this time. "Could you toss the ball over?"

Of course, for one such as I, that foul pursuit has no bearing. As a result of the constant enrichment I have undergone, I have gained the ability to withstand such efforts.

"Heyyyyyyyyy!"

No amount…

"CAN!"

…of trying…

"YOU!"

…would be enough…

"HEAR ME!"

Jesus, fine. My god.

I sigh loudly, as I put *To Thrill A Mockingbird* aside, abandoning *Fatticus Inch,* on my handy lawn chair, as I move to retrieve the object which's arrival has led to my current dismay: a simple *football,* that has deigned it appropriate to intrude upon my precious time.

"Thanks!" the boy, who had introduced himself as *Maxime* a mere hour ago, yet has already found it in him to commit the worst sin imaginable in that short amount of time, once more yelled – brutishly, I might add – in my direction. "Just toss it over to me!"

"Hmph," I graciously respond, "as if I would go so low as to throw an object towards another person. If you-"

"Sorry, could you speak up a bit! I can't hear you!"

…

Gracefully – and without a sliver of any inelegant emotions, such as anger or annoyance – I proceed towards the boy, handing his prized ball back into his hands.

"Thanks," he says, finally at a controlled volume. "You didn't need to bring it over to me though, you know? I'm sure just throwing it woulda been quicker."

"That would be unbecoming of me."

"Really? My friends and I do it all the time."

"Yes, as is to be expected. However, such a boorish and crass action would be improper for one such as I."

"I see," he says, looking slightly befuddled (despite the obviousness of my claims). However, he shifts back to a smile – one he seems to carry constantly on his face – as he continues.   
  
"Well, thanks for bringing it over then," he says. "I appreciate it."

*Hmph,* I simply respond, as he goes back to what he was doing before – bouncing the ball off his feet (and other body parts).

Is that really enjoyable? It seems quite boring.

"Well, I think it's fun, at least," he responds.

It appears I thought that out loud. However, I can only take that as a sign this was a conversation I was meant to engage in.

"Why, I feel there are many better ways to spend one's time. I don't see the point in it."

"It's fun. Shouldn't that be enough?" he responds. "It helps me keep in shape as well."

"Your body, maybe. However, it is the mind, not the body, that you should truly be exercising."

"Oh, don't be like that. If you give it a try, maybe you'll understand."

Saying that, he forcefully hands the ball over to me.

"Go on," he continues, motioning over to me.

"Hmph," I respond. "Why should I have to do something so droll? I have better things to do."

"Fine, fine," he says, taking the ball back. "I guess it would be hard to expect an amateur to be able to play all of a sudden."

Wha-

The nerve of this boy, to call *me* of all people an amateur. Unbelievable.

Of course, this does not shake me in the slightest. I am entirely unaffected – it would be unlike me to fall for such obvious provocations.

Yes, yes. Indeed.

"Is something the matter?" Maxime asks, referring to my outstretched arm.

Yes. I am entirely unaffected. Keep that in mind.

"The ball. Give it to me," I say, while facing away, so as to make it entirely clear I was not concerned with his words.

"I thought you had better things to do?"

"Well, since you *insisted,* I supposed I had no choice."

"No, no, I don't really care, to be honest."

"*Since. You. Insisted,*" I repeat. "I supposed I had no choice."

A hearty laugh can be heard from Maxime's direction.

Again, by this too, am I entirely unaffected. However, it appears the sun is beaming down a bit too hard right now, or something like that, as my face is getting weirdly hot. As such, I have decided – for no reason other than the heat – to return to my handy parasol.

"Hmph, fine," I say. "I'll get going."

"Wait," I hear, as I feel a sensation around my wrist, stopping me from walking away. "Please, would you not stay here and entertain me, even only for a bit? Otherwise, I would be so bored, playing all by myself," Maxime says, dramatically.

"Well, if you *insist*."

"I insist!"

"Then, I suppose I have no choice."

"Oh, thank you so much! I won't forget this!" He says, as I turn back around to face him. As a result of this action, I fully grasp what it was that stopped me from leaving.

"Could you, um," I say, in a decidedly not awkward manner, "let go of me, please?"

"Oh, yes, of course," he responds, looking – much unlike my composed self – a bit embarrassed.

Ha, what a fool, getting all flustered just over holding a girl's hand(?) once. He could stand to learn something from one as graceful and unbothered as I.

I clear my throat.

"The ball," I say, as I hold my hand out again.

"Oh, yeah," Maxime responds, as he plops it down in my hand.

I move the ball in front of me and hold it with both hands, inspecting it.

Indeed, it is most certainly round, as a ball should be. As such, it should, theoretically, bounce off my foot, just as it did for him, going perfectly back up, such that I can hit it again, in the same manner.

Indeed, I conclude, as I let go of the ball, and move my foot such that the ball lands on top of it, which it does.

As a result of this impact, the ball flies forward, bouncing three times on the ground before coming to a standstill.

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"That was on purpose," I immediately clear up.

"…really? Cause it kinda looked like you accidentally kicked it forward, instead of up."

What a fool.

A blathering, blithering, blothering fool.

"Well, maybe if you thought about it for a moment, you would have realised, that, um," I say, attempting to straighten out the misunderstanding. "That, um, *obviously,* I was just, um, getting a feel for the ball! Yes. It is only common sense to check the weight and bounciness of the ball before you start juggling it."

"I guess so?"

"Quite frankly," I continue, "I figured you would have known that yourself. Because of that, I almost look like some kind of idiot, who got all psyched up but then could not keep the ball up even once."

"Yeah," he responds. "I'm sorry for almost making you look like some kind of idiot who got all psyched up, but then could not keep the ball up even once."

"As you should be," I say, nodding.

A few moments pass in silence.

"I'll go fetch the ball for you," he says, finally breaking it.

"Yes, yes," I say, as he walks off. "Of course, this isn't actually the case, but, for reference, supposing I actually *were* some kind of idiot who got all psyched up but then could not keep the ball up even once, what kind of advice would you give to help stave off that image?"

"Well, if that *were* the case,"

"Which it is not," I quickly add.

"Which it is not," he repeats, "then my advice would probably be to start with your upper leg, around you knee, instead of your foot. It's much flatter, so it would be easier to perform a simple bounce, straight upwards."

"Oooh," I say, thinking about it. "I hadn't considered that."

…

"*Is what I might say,* in the scenario that I weresome kind of idiot who got all psyched up, but then could not keep the ball up even once," I quickly add.

"Which you are not."

"Which I am not," I repeat.

"Well," he says, after grabbing the ball and returning it to me, "here you go."

As I hold it in front of me again, I feel the need to explain something, before I am misunderstood in a way that makes me seem like some idiot who got all psyched up, but couldn’t keep the ball up even once.

"I want to make it clear, before I begin, that what you just said has had no bearing on me," I point out. "From the beginning, I was planning to do things exactly as such – out of my own will, and not because you said so, despite the fact that it may end up looking contrary to that."

"I understand," Maxime responds, while nodding along thoughtfully.

"Good. Now then," I say, as I focus back on the ball in front of me.

I take a deep breath, before letting go of the ball. At the same time, I raise up my leg, causing the ball to land slightly above my knee. As a result, the ball bounces perfectly upwards, back to where I let go of it.

"Ah, I did it!" I excitedly shout out.

"It's coming back down!" Maxime responds. "Do it again!"

I realised just how quickly gravity had taken effect, so I hurriedly attempt to repeat my earlier motion. However, I do not have ample time to get it exactly where I want it, causing the ball to curve slightly forward.

I jump forward, trying to somehow recover it, but I end up hitting the ball while still carrying my momentum, and, as such, shooting the ball off into the distance.

Still, I hit it.

Thrice, even.

"Well done, well done!" Maxime says, smiling. "You hit it three times there, that’s pretty good!"

"Yeah!" I excitedly respond, before realising I was acting inelegantly. "I, uh, well."

I clear my throat.

"At least that much could be expected from one such as I."

"Indeed, indeed," he concurs, as he runs off to fetch the ball again. As he returns, he says, "Wanna try again?"

I look at the ball for a moment.

"What is your current record?" I ask.

"Hm?" He responds, looking slightly confused, before (proudly) declaring, "357."

"357, you say? Quite frankly, I will spare you the embarrassment of being surpassed so quickly."

"Huh? That mean you think you can beat me?"

"It is not that I think so – I have logically concluded that that is the only path forward, based on the available facts. See, if we were to approximate the previous attempts as a series of numbers based on the number of times I hit the ball – putting, for arguments sake, my 'test' kick as the first attempt, and counting '0' as my zeroth attempt, and then checking the differences between each number, we would have '1' as the first difference – between 0 and 1 - and '2' as the second – between 1 and 3.

"1, of course, is 2 to the power of 0. 2 is 2 to the power of 1. Extrapolating from this, we can conclude that the difference between each attempt is 2 to the power of the attempt minus 1. In this case, the total amount of 'hits' in any given attempt would be the sum of these differences, meaning we can calculate the attempt at which I surpass you simply by calculating the sum of 2 to the power of x, with x being 0 to a number k, with k+1 being the attempt. 2 to the power of 7 is 128 and 2 to the power of 8 is 256: adding those two together gives us 384, which is already more than 357 – your current record. We then add one to k – in this case, 8 – to arrive at the conclusion that I would surpass you after 9 attempts. 2 of these, of course, have already been performed. That means, after a measly 7 more attempts, I will have already beaten your record.

"However, as I would feel bad for beating you so quickly, I will, instead, retreat back to my handy lawn chair and continue reading, instead. You're welcome for that, by the way."

"Oh, uh... thanks?" He responds, confusedly, having apparently not followed any of what I was saying. "You're pretty smart, aren't you?"

"Hmph," I respond, "of course. After all, I exercise my mind every day, rather than wasting time exercising my body."

"Then, if I read some books, would I become as smart as you?"

"Doubtful," I respond. "However, it would surely be a good start."

He seems to think for a moment, after I say this.

"You know a lot of books, don't you? Could you recommend me one?"

I look at him, slightly taken aback.

"You want me to recommend something?"

"You tried what I like, after all," he says, cheerily. "Ah, but, please make it something not too hard, okay? I don't want to be overwhelmed."

"Well, if you were to *insist*, then I suppose I would not mind picking something out for you," I say, while looking away – although, of course, there was surely no emotion visible on my face that I may want to hide from him.

"I insist, I insist!"

"Then, I guess I can deign to pick something out of my collection for you."

Suddenly, Maxime chuckles again.

"You're funny," he says, as I turn towards him.

I didn't make a joke, though?

"I'm glad we could talk like this," he continues. "It was fun."

"Ah, um, sure," I stumble. "I'm, uh, gonna get going then," I continue, motioning towards my handy lawn chair.

"Yup, yup!" Maxime responds, while giving a small wave. "Come play with me again, okay?"

After making it back to my chair, I find myself turning the pages, without really comprehending what was written, so I decide to put the book down for a bit. I can still hear the sounds of Maxime hitting the ball, but, somehow, it doesn't feel as distracting anymore.

I tune into the sound of it, as I start to think about what kind of book I could recommend.

I suppose getting interrupted wasn't too bad, in the end.

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I didn't think that.

Let's move on.

Amusement parks must surely be one of the worst forms of entertainment there is. Not to say the name itself is ironic or anything along those lines – they surely are 'amusing,' that is hard to deny. However, the reason I call it one of the worst forms of entertainment is because there is no depth to it. It's a cheap thrill, a quick rush, nothing more, nothing less. That terminology, while accurate in a metaphorical sense of course, is highly tongue-in-cheek – these places are far from cheap in concern to your wallet, after all.

Truly, it can be said the busyness of an amusement park is its worst aspect. This busyness, while also true in the sense that it is crowded, applies also from the viewpoint of *mindfulness –* a place that is very much taxing for the soul. The loudness, the atmosphere that signifies a lack of time to take one's time, in a futile attempt to get as much out of the day as possible before the park closes its doors – even the smells of fried and sugary foods occupies one's mind in a way that disallows focusing. To put it more simply:

It's distracting.

"Oh, Frieda? I never thought I'd see you here," a familiar voice speaks out. "What are you up to?"

"Can you not see? I am quite obviously reading."

“In an amusement park? If you were just gonna read, couldn't you have just done that at home?"

"Why, yes, I *could* have just done that at home," I say, in a non-annoyed manner.

"Hmm," Maxime responds, sensing it better not to pursue the subject. "I'm amazed you can read in a place like this, with all the noise. Not to mention the insects."

As he says this, he squashes a fly that landed on his exposed arm just moments before.

"Such minor distractions would not be able to keep me from focusing."

"Not even the mosquito that just landed on your back?"

"I suppose the sensation is a bit irritating. However, such a small thing is hardly enough."

"Small? I wouldn't call it small. Actually, my lord, that’s a big one. That might be the biggest one I've ever seen."

I flinch at the thought.

...as in, I flinch at the thought that I would be seen as someone who cares about such an insignificant creature.

"Hmph, as if I care."

"That's some fortitude," he responds. "Oh, it's climbing up now."

As he says that, I can feel the sensation slowly, annoyingly, intolerably creeping up, heading towards my neck.

I say intolerably, but, obviously, it is quite tolerable to someone like me. I don't mean to brag, but at my peak focus I could—

My thoughts are interrupted as my hand involuntarily (against my will, as I was obviously not bothered at all), but forcefully – in a way that some might describe as a 'slap' – moves to where the sensation is, as an inevitable result of it touching the bare skin of my neck.

I apologise, mosquito. In the end, my mind cannot control my body in the way I would like it to.

"Owww," I hear the mosquito say. A mosquito that sounds weirdly familiar.

Mosquitos, however, should not be able to talk.

"I had that one coming, didn't I?" Maxime says, while shaking his hand, as if that might make the pain fly away.

"I- You—" I stammer. "Hmph. I can't believe you'd pull such a juvenile prank."

I turn away from him, opting to focus on my book again instead.

"Yeah, that was a bit much," he responds. "Sorry about that. Oh, how about this: you can have one of these as an apology."

Behind me, I can hear the rustling of a paper bag.

"If you think you can gain my favour with fried, sugary food, you're dead wrong. I don't partake in the consumption of such things."

"Oh, come on, treat yourself a little. Look, it's delicious."

A long stick-like food with dimples stretching out all the way through is held out in front of me. There's also sugar sprinkled over it, making it both sugary and fried – a deadly combination. The smell of it wafts into my nose.

"What's this?"

"A churro. Have you never had one?"

"As I said, I don't partake in the consumption of such things."

"At least have a bite. Please?"

A quick glance at his face reveals an earnest smile, seemingly oblivious to the fact he's feeding a lady – an act that should surely be of the embarrassing variety.

He does seem to notice me looking, and responds by waving the so called 'churro' around, as if to egg me on.

Please be at least a little embarrassed about it...

Of course, I could solve the problem by taking it off his hands first. However, that would mean directly touching the fried, sugary food, covering the tips of my fingers in its fat and sugar. Afterwards, if I were to use that same hand to hold my book, it would be transferred from my fingers over to the cover, dirtying it. To avoid such a fate, I have no choice but to be obediently be fed.

Yes, that's right. There is no other choice.

I take a bite.

As I chew, the vulgar taste characteristic of fried, sugary foods explodes in my mouth, seemingly covering every inch of it in its pungentness.

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"And?" He asks.

"Well, I suppose it's alright."

"That's all? Aw... I was hoping you'd love it as much as I do. Oh well."

He finally moves the churro away from me. However, before I can even rejoice from being released of its temptation, another urgent problem occurs, forcing my action: the churro – the same one I already took a bite of! – is quickly approaching his mouth.

"W-wait!" I clamour.

"Hm? Is something the matter?" He cavalierly responds.

I point to the churro.

"Oh, so you want it after all?" He says, as a mischievous smile sprouts on his face. "I knew you wouldn't be able to resists the allure of the almighty churro!"

"No, no, no, that's not it. That's not it at all," I assure him. "However, you surely weren't about to simply eat it, after a lady already bit into it?"

Finally, it seems to dawn on him what he's done and he starts to profusely apologise.

"Oh, I didn't realise you were bothered about that sort of thing," he says. "Still, if you don't want it, and I can't eat it, it'll just go to waste."

Or he doesn't, I guess.

"Well," I respond, "I suppose we couldn't go around wasting food, can we? Considering all those who go hungry in this world, doing so would be close to a cardinal sin."

"Definitely, definitely," Maxime nods along.

"As such, I suppose I have no choice but to finish the rest of it."

"No choice, huh?"

"That's right – no choice," I say, as I put my book away into my bag, freeing both of my hands to focus on the not-at-all-delicious churro.

He gives it over, grazing my hands with his multiple times as he does so.

As I gracefully chomp away at it, I note the sun, today as well, is shining down quite harshly, based on the warmth in my cheeks.

"So, why *are* you here?"

As I finish the churro, Maxime reiterates his earlier question.

"My parents forced me to come along – despite my well-reasoned protests. Something about getting out of the house for once. If you asked me – and you'll have to excuse my language here – it's a solid bunch of poppycock."

"Poppycock? How dare you use such a word."

"The fact that *I,* of all people, would do such a thing, should surely be a testament to the ridiculousness of the situation."

Instead of responding, Maxime opts to start looking around him.

"I don't see them anywhere, though," he says. "Did you get lost or something?"

"Excuse you – *I* did not get lost. However, you would be correct in the assumption that we have been separated. Of course, moving around in such a scenario will only have a negative effect, making it harder to be found – as such, I have decided, under the assumption that my parents would be unable to come to such a conclusion themselves, that it is ideal for *me* to be the one staying in one place."

"I see, I see," Maxime responds. "One question, though?"

"Yes?"

"Why don't you just call them?"

I scoff.

"Call them? With what, one of those boorish 'smartphones' everyone carries around these days? See, if you asked me, the release of those things is precisely what has caused the decline in interest in reading – and, simultaneously, a decline in the overall intelligence of the current generation, and even those before it."

Before I can continue, Maxime interjects.

"I see, I see," he says. "Not having one seems like quite an inconvenience, though. What if you want to google something?"

"The fact that you can just 'google' things is precisely what is causing a decline in information retention – by having the ability to look something up right there in your pocket, you lose the need to remember things properly."

"I see, I see," he says. "But what if you want to talk to your friends?"

"The current generation is too preoccupied with their phones to have anything worthwhile to say. If they did, however, I would simply talk to them in person – where the nuance of conversation is not lost."

"I see, I see," he says. "So you aren't inconvenienced by not having one?"

"Not at all," I respond, without hesitation. "Not in a meaningful way, at least."

"You seem quite inconvenienced right now, though."

"It may seem that way to you, one who has already been intoxicated by the pull of the smartphone. However, in reality, I am as relaxed as one possibly can be, precisely due to my lack of one: *because* I do not have one, I am able to come to peace and simply be, without worrying about inconsequential things."

"I see, I see," he says. "Your parents must be worried, though."

"Alas, they too, have been struck by the curse that is the smartphone. However, I am sure that, too, is karmic retribution for the sin of bringing me here in the first place."

"I see, I see," he says. "Well, just give me a moment."

He grabs his phone out of his pocket, and starts to fidget with it.

"See, that's precisely what I'm talking about. The moment there's even a second of stillness, the first thing people do is—"

"Shhh," Maxime shushes, as he moves the phone over to his ear.

Wuh!

The audacity!

Unbelievable.

Before I can start my mental rant, I am brought right out of my thoughts when Maxime starts speaking.

"Ah, hello? This is Maxime." "No, no, not at all. I'm at the amusement park right now." "That's why I'm calling, actually." "Yeah, she's with me. I'm by the water ride. You know, the one with the rafts." "Uh-huh." "Yeah." "I'll be sure to pass it on."

He hangs up the phone.

"That was your dad. I asked for his number in case something like this happened."

"How prepared."

"You wouldn't expect that from a smartphone carrier like myself, huh?"

"Indeed," I nonchalantly agree. "So, when will they be here?"

"I thought you didn't need the conveniences of long distance talking?"

"First of all, I never said that. Secondly, what's been done has already been done – as such, I might as well make use of it."

"I see, I see," he says. "Well, anyway, they won't be coming."

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"Huh?"

"Yeah, apparently they found a really romantic area, so they're going on a date there."

I blink a few times, without saying anything, before finally uttering, "I see..."

So they aren't coming.

I see how it is.

I didn't realise my father was the type to bring someone somewhere, then leave them stranded as soon as something better comes up.

"Yeah, he said us youngsters should go have fun together, since we met up anyway. 'Going around with old-timers like us two must have been boring her,' he said."

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Well, I guess, even if it's misguided, that was his best attempt to be considerate. I can accept that, I suppose. It also means I'm free from their constant hounding.

"I'll get going then," I say, as I grab my bag.

"Huh? Where to?"

"The entrance. It's the quietest place to read, as no one should be entering anymore at this time. Additionally, I will be easiest to find there, on the way back. It's quite an ingenious idea, if I do say so myself."

"Huh?" Maxime responds, with confusion clearly in his voice. "If you're in an amusement park, you should get on the rides! Otherwise, your ticket will go to waste."

"The ticket was 'wasted' from the very beginning. See—"

Before I can begin my explanation, one of the workers for the ride suddenly calls out.

"Is there a group of two? There's still space on the raft!"

Immediately, Maxime raises his hand, shouting "Here!"

Huh?

"Sorry, but I have no plans to get splashed wet on some churlish ride."

"Oh, don't be like that. It'll be fun!" Maxime responds, with a wide smile, that was surely intended to be reassuring.

In my case, it only worried me more.

"Hurry up!" the worker calls out.

"Yes!" Maxime yells in response, before grabbing my wrist.

"Come on, come on!" He says, as he starts to pull me along.

"Wait!" I sputter in protest, but I already know it's in vain.

After exiting the ride, I walk the path outside it next to an utterly drenched Maxime.

"I got so wet!" he says, while laughing heartily. "I'm more water than human, at this point!"

"Humans are 70% water, in the first place. Following that line of reasoning, there really isn't much of a difference at all."

"I see, I see!" he responds, excited, seemingly still revelling in the afterglow of the ride.

How cute.

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I turn my head away from him, due to no discernible reason – but especially not due to bashfulness.

"Um," I start, "thanks for jumping over me when the waterfall was coming right above me. That was, how do you say it? Pretty cool, I guess."

"Oh? So my heroism is finally going noticed?" he responds. "Well, I did make you get on the ride, after all – it was the least I could do. If you think about it, the whole point of the ride is to get wet, so, really, I should be apologising instead."

I wasn't looking at his face, but I'm sure he had a cheery smile on it.

"Is that so?" I say. "In that case, I'll be patiently awaiting your apology."

Maxime chuckles, even though it was a bad joke.

I guess the atmosphere is pulling us along, as I laugh with him.

"Oh, oh!" Maxime suddenly says, as he grabs my sleeve. When I look up, he's pointing to a ride in the distance.

"I'm pretty sure that's the *Golden Moon*. I read about it online."

I look at the ride, towering over everything else in the park.

"It's... quite high, isn't it?"

"Yeah! Isn't it sick? Come on, let's go, let's go!" he says, super excited, as he starts to pull me along by the sleeve he was holding onto.

I would protest, but, of course, that would be another exercise in futility. As such, I opt to save my energy.

Besides, looking at that excited face, I can't help but want to give it a try as well, I suppose.

Although I wish he would hold my hand again, instead of my sleeve.

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I didn't think that.

Let's move on.

I haven't been able to focus at all today.

I'm in my handy lawn chair, reading what was supposed to be a slam dunk – and yet I can't seem to get into it at all. Instead, I keep glancing at the door leading to the porch.

There's no particular reason for that, of course. It's just that my eyes happen to drift in that direction, that's all – there's definitely not something, and definitely definitely not someone, that could possibly be coming through that door, which I am waiting on.

Certainly not.

"What are you looking at?"

Ah!

"Haha, made you jump!" The voice, that had suddenly popped up behind me just a moment ago, continues.

I clear my throat.

"Well, actually, considering the fact that I was – and still am – sitting down, I do believe it would be an incorrect assessment to claim I, as you say, 'jumped.'"

Maxime laughs.

"True, true – definitely. But, really, what were you looking at?"

"Well, you see, I was, um," I say, "looking at a... bug. That was by the door. A 'wildlife observation,' if you will."

"For sure I will," he responds. "So, hey, I started reading that book you recommended."

"Oh!" I perk up.

I clear my throat.

"Oh," I nonchalantly let out, "is that so? What do you think?"

Of course, I am hardly concerned with what a simpleton thinks of a great work. However, in line with what is polite, I feel it appropriate to ask regardless.

Naturally, I do not feel the slightest bit tense about whether he liked it or not either.

"It's really good!" He says, with a beaming smile. "I'm not that far in, but it grips you right from the beginning! I couldn't put it down at all yesterday. Until I fell asleep, that is."

He chuckles jollily, as a wave of relief washes over me.

I mean, *doesn't* wash over me, for there is nothing to be relieved about in the first place.

"I'm glad," I respond, once again being polite. "I figured you might appreciate something a bit faster."

"Yep, yep. I'm surprised you had a French book lying around, though? Do you often read in other languages?"

"Naturally – limiting oneself to only works in your primary language will only serve to hold you back from what is to be found in the world. I own books in a wide array of languages – English, Spanish, Italian, you name it."

"Wow! And you can read all of that?"

I look away.

"N-naturally. What would be the point in having them if I couldn't?"

"You really are smart, huh? Personally, I suck at languages. You don't wanna see my grades in them! I'm sure someone like you has never even seen marks that low."

"N-naturally. Low marks are indeed a foreign concept to me. Yes, yes."

Geography doesn't count, anyway.

"Anyway," Maxime speaks up, as he pulls the book I lent him out, "I just came to return this to you."

Huh?

I stare blankly in his direction for a moment.

"Are you not going to finish it?"

"I'd love to, but I don't think I have the time."

Huh?

"You don't have the time? Why not?"

"Hm? Well, I'm going back home in an hour," he says. "Were you not told?"

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Huh?

"I hope you had a nice stay!" Mrs. Schmidt says, as we finish packing everything into the car.

"Oh, it was fantastic!" Mom replies. "The view is just beautiful, and there's so much to do in the area. Why, the walks we've had, I'm sure we'll remember those for years! Isn't that right, honey?"

Dad nods. "It was great. I'm glad we found the listing."

Mrs. Schmidt turns in my direction.

"How about you, Maxime? Did you have a good time?"

"Definitely! I think the amusement park was the highlight for me – they have some craaaaaazy rides over there," I respond. "I hope I can come back some day."

"Our doors will be open for you. You've all been such delightful guests – we would love to have you over again," says Mr. Schmidt.

"Who knows, maybe we'll be back in a few years?" Mom responds. "There are still so many places I'd like to visit around here. What do you think, honey?"

Dad simply nods – he's a man of few words, if that wasn't clear yet.

"I'm sure Frieda would be happy if you came over again, as well - she's perked up so much this past week."

While saying that Mrs. Schmidt seemed a bit relieved. I suppose she must've been worried about her? From what I've seen, she isn't exactly a social butterfly, so I can see why.

"Speaking of, is she not coming to see us off?"

"That girl...I looked everywhere for her, but she was nowhere to be found. Really, I thought I'd raised her better than this," Mrs. Schmidt responds, looking a bit downtrodden.

"Oh, she's just at that age – I'm sure it's nothing to worry about. Isn't that so, Maxime?" Mom says, before ruffling my hair.

"Hey, stop that!" I shout out, before straightening my hair again. "But yeah, I'm sure she'll be fine."

Still, I would've liked to talk to her one last time. I'm sure the amusement park wouldn't have been nearly as fun without her and her antics.

I laugh a bit to myself, remembering when she kicked the ball off into the distance and tried to play it off.

I'm brought out of my reminiscence by Mrs. Schmidt's voice.

"Well, don't let us keep you any longer. The sunlight's burning away!"

Dad nods, opening the car door and taking his spot in the passenger seat. Mom and I follow short behind, the sounds of the shutting doors marking the end of our vacation. We wave to the Schmidts as we ride off.

Slowly, of course – it's best to exercise caution on the mountains.

"I'm happy you had such a good time as well, Maxime," Mom pipes up. "Remember how grumpy you were just before we left? You didn't feel like going at all!"

"Oh, don't tease me, Mom. I was just a little reluctant, that's all."

"A little reluctant? Do I have to remind you of last Tuesday?"

"...no, you don't," I say, sighing, as Mom breaks out into a laugh.

I decide to admire the scenery a bit more, instead of continuing this conversation. As I go to look out the window, however, I spot something in the corner of my eye, on the road behind us. I squint to get a better look.

"Mom, stop the car!" I say, as I realise what it is.

Panting heavily, I continue to push my tired legs to the limit.

What a blunder...I can't believe I just barely missed them. I can't say seeing the car ride away from home just as I approached did not make my heart drop a little.

The pedals of my bicycle creak, as I push myself onwards – I really should've taken better care of this thing.

Just as I'm lamenting my lack of foresight, I hear the serendipitous sound of a car braking – like music to my ears.

I'm afraid my legs can't take much more of this.

"Frieda!" I hear a now-familiar voice call out, accompanied by the sounds of a door slamming shut.

Maxime runs over to me, finally allowing me to put my legs to rest.

Although I still have to stand on them.

"What are you doing, Frieda?" He asks, as he reaches my side. "You don't exactly seem the type to cycle for exercise, you know?"

"Of course," I pant, "I am," I pant, "not. I just—"

"Deep breaths, deep breaths," he says, in response to my laboured speaking.

I take his advice, focusing on getting my breath under control first. In the meantime, I decide how exactly I am going to explain my actions...

I mean, even I can tell I've been completely irrational.

Unfortunately, I am not able to find a way in time, so I decide to just let my actions do the talking.

I put my hand in my pocket, take the contained item out, and shove it towards him.

"Phone!" I say. "I got one."

"Oh?" he responds, a bit taken aback. "And you wanted to show it off to me so bad?"

"No! I mean, yes! Sort of."

"Sort of? What does that mean?"

God, this boy can't take a hint to save his life, can he! Do I have to spell everything out for you?

However, I am different than I was before. While on my way here, I gained the courage to speak my mind honestly. That's right! I've decided that I won't hide behind subtleties and semi-truths anymore.

Now watch me say it loud!

"I just wanted to get your number before you left."

"Sorry, what was that?"

"D-did I stutter?"

"Just then? Yes."

In this moment, I have unlearned my earlier lesson. It's best to stick to what you know – that's what I've decided.

I clear my throat.

"Your number. I will allow you the privilege of entering it into my phone!"

"Oh my!" He – very sarcastically – responds. "I'm truly happy to be allowed such a privilege."

However, despite his sarcasm, I can clearly tell the makings of a grin on his face, as he takes the phone out of my hand and navigates through it with incredible ease.

I suppose this handiness is the mark of a phone-obsessed teenager.

Then again, I've started upon the same road as well – I think as he hands it back to me.

*Maxime Auclair,* the contact on the screen reads.

"What are *you* grinning about, huh? That happy to have me registered?"

"Me, grinning? I don't know what you're talking about. I have the most neutral face you'll ever witness in your life. If you're seeing something different, then maybe you should get your eyes checked? There must be something wrong with them."

Maxime chuckles, despite the insult.

He seems happy.

"I'm glad I got to talk to you one more time before I left," he says. "I was really disappointed, thinking you didn’t come to see us off."

I don't respond – sharing my thoughts here would be way too embarrassing (it's a good thing I unlearned my lesson moments ago) – but I concur mentally.

"Ah, but," he continues, "you know I could've just written my number down, right?"

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"I—of course! I knew that. *Obviously,* I just, um, though it would have a...bigger emotional impact this way!" I say. "Yes, yes, that's right! Naturally, I wouldn't be so *stupid* as to—"

My entirely truthful explanation is interrupted by a voice from the car.

"Maxime! We can't keep blocking the road any longer! Can you cut things short?"

"Okay!" He yells back. "We're just finishing up here. I'm coming!"

He turns back to me, saying, "Yeah, so, I gotta get going."

"Mm," I grunt in response. "But we can always talk later, right?" I say, clutching the newly-purchased mobile phone to my chest.

Maxime smiles in response.

"Yeah, that's right. Then, I'll talk to you later!"

Saying that, he turns around and runs back to the car. As it drives off – slowly, as one must exercise caution while on the mountains – I breathe a sigh of relief, knowing this wasn't a goodbye.

A weird noise from my phone makes me jump as I think that. Looking at the now lit-up screen, I see a message.

Considering I have only one contact, I'm sure I don't needto say who it's from.

*My parents are teasing me so much right now,* it reads.

A loud laugh rises from my belly.

It's just like him to have his first message be something so banal – I think between burst of laughter.

I'm really glad I exerted myself.

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Ha, I can't believe I just thought that.