

Destiny

When Earth's men will fall
On the day of evil's creation
A wall of flames will rise on the horizon
And a future they have set
By the protectors of time and space
A quest known, yet unknown to the universe
Man will change the past by the future
The temple in metal will awaken
Then a friend will trick one of death
When the first star shines blue
A time when death is thrown at heroism
The scout will kill the sneak
When creation is torn apart
The planet's cage burns
When God's Chariot falls
When end itself crumbles
He'll look upon the death of darkness
When the one sent to destroy shall do so
When the eighth dimension calls
Destiny opens its ring and kills its heart
A new dawn, unforeseen by the Gods
When living hope dies
A new universe is born
Evolution at the smile.

Translated extract from the Book of Alternity: author unknown.

Prologue: The Council Of The Brethren

Gryal Repa turned away from his stargazing to look at his desk, where a charred piece of red paper lay amongst a mess of star charts. Although he had previously memorised this message, he glanced at it once more.

To Lord Repa,

A meeting of the Brethren has been called by His Lordship Warren Marz for one o'clock your current day. Prepare your hall for all members' arrivals. This concerns the Archk.

Yours sincerely,

Lord Murner

As he picked up the letter, it disintegrated. Sighing, Gryal looked up into his mirror that stood erect at seven feet tall, a home for many a spider. Brushing the cobwebs aside, he stared back at himself, examining his features for the umpteenth time. Little light was coming through the towering ornate window, but his bright blue eyes illuminated his face in the murky gloom. His bald head hadn't changed, not since its creation. Gryal raised a bony hand to the mirror, as if to check it was a mirror, not a window with a stranger looking through. When his fingers touched the glass however, he only confirmed that it was not anyone else; this was truly how he looked. He could have sworn that there had been someone standing behind him in the reflection, but it must have been his imagination.

Oh well, it wasn't too bad. He'd just have to convince himself he wasn't too ugly. Well, he was kind of handsome, even though he happened to be dead. That wasn't to say he'd ever been alive. Being dead just meant that your energy, what makes you you, inhabits a place beyond what was generally specified as 'the universe'. His skeletal form looked much more ominous than he would have liked. He was getting too old for this. When he'd taken the post as overseer of the transfer of souls, he'd never thought he'd get *bored*. Gryal just wanted some time away from the job. He might have retired to Earth, if he could survive there...if he could taste. That was another occupational drawback. That servant who had delivered Mordrin's letter might have tasted good, he didn't know. It just tasted bland. It wasn't that he even *needed* to eat, it was simply a habit which, despite being a compulsion, had no real profits. He pulled his black robes tighter around himself.

The Entities' vessel sank gradually into the Rift. The neighbouring Tower was still crumbling in the flames around the ship, its inhabitants trapped inside, unable to escape the conflagrations. From the blackened hangar, the Chariot sped across the scene. It was nothing by the standards of the Towers, but to those of Earth, it would have been larger than any vehicle capable of flight. It comprised simply of a crescent, with a thin bridge extending from the middle of the inside arc. Having no regard for the doomed souls it was abandoning, the Chariot ripped its way through the rubble and to its next destination: Gryal's Tower.

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Gryal at this point was seemingly gliding across the floor. It was as he rounded the corner that he noticed Lord Stark Vingfamyn hurrying down the corridor towards him. Stark was a portly man, so much so that he was probably taller lying down than standing up. His rag of greasy, tomato-red hair was flying everywhere as he pelted at top speed on his equally fat legs. Stark stumbled to a halt at Gryal's feet, wiping a flood of sweat from his crimson forehead with a grimy handkerchief. Gryal inched backwards, trying to stay clean for the meeting.

Looking down at the man who only reached his torso, Gryal growled through gritted teeth, "What do you want?"

Why the Entities had made an Immortal such as this, he didn't know.

"Warren felt it necessary to send me to tell you that he's waiting in the hall."

"There's no need to use that tone about my brother," he snapped.

"He's my brother too," added Stark under his breath, his rare show of bravado evaporating rapidly at Gryal's countenance.

"Come on, I am going to the hall now."

Warren heard Gryal's footsteps a minute before he arrived. The Waters of Lution rippled at his touch, and the image evaporated. The Chariot vanished from sight, yet he knew he'd see the rider soon. His head whipped up as Stark fell onto a chair, spluttering. Rubbing his neck with a muscular arm, Warren watched Gryal take his throne at the Table of the Brethren. He enclosed the Waters in his fingers and lifted it up to its blackened shelf.

From behind him, Gryal announced, half-heartedly, “And here they are, the last of us Immortals: Lord Mordrin Murner and Lord Petti Lance. I must say, Mordrin, are the formalities in your messages entirely necessary?”

Warren returned to the table and sat with his humanoid fellows. Petti kept to the shadows however; ever since the accident he rarely showed his face in public, at least when he wasn't hunting. Warren's attention was drawn back as he noticed Gryal looking at him.

“Sorry?”

“I said,” Gryal rasped, with more than a note of impatience in his voice, “what news do you have on the Archk? I understand that's why you called this meeting?”

“Oh, um...yes, the Archk. Right, we know that since the Entities deemed it to be too vital an artefact in their quest for the meaning of our existence, it's been lost to us, correct.”

“Really? I didn't know,” chipped in Mordrin, his sarcasm enriching his words as much as he could make it.

“Very funny. Since our records were damaged the Archk has been lost to us in the void...”

“Well done, you've read a history book,” Mordrin couldn't keep the impatience from his voice now.

“I'm surprised, Gryal old friend,” said Warren incredulously, “I would have thought you would have taught our newest member when to *shut up!*”

Mordrin, who had been about to retort, caught Warren's stare, and shut his mouth in embarrassment. If he'd had blood under his thin skin he would have blushed.

“Thank you,” Warren sighed. “We have the Watch; as we know, all we have to do is tip the scales of power and we'll come out on top. We might have to reopen the Apocalypse.”

Stark found his voice at last, “Where is this going?”

“The Mancynn.”

These two words put the room in a dead silence. But it was not Warren who had spoken, it was Petti.

“Correct,” confirmed Warren.

“But what would we do with the Mancynn? Use him to attack Earth?” queried Stark.

“Of course not! Haven’t you been listening in any of our prior meetings!” cried Gryal. “Do you not remember what happened to Khaonat? When he tried to conquer Earth, we lost Atlantis! Our last beachhead!”

“Yes, that was helpful,” mused Warren.

There was no sarcasm in Warren’s voice. The others looked at him quizzically.

“I mean, if Atlantis hadn’t sunk, we wouldn’t have the advantage.”

They continued to stare at him with their mismatched eyes, a slightly shocked expression resting on their faces, some of them contemplating the validity of his words.

“Let me explain. Without Atlantis, the humans don’t know of the Postern. It is with this that we can lead the Towers to the Apocalypse.”

Stark was still not convinced, “What has that got to do with the Archk?”

“I’m saying that if we don’t find it soon, we may have to follow up on our contingency plan. I realise that up until now, quite contrary to my character, I have been against that particular strategy, but now I am prepared to go along with it. That being said, if anyone gains any further information on the whereabouts of the Archk, I urge them to come forwards.”

They all seemed satisfied, all apart from Gryal. It was something Warren had said, the tipping of the scales, it had awoken a sly, snake-like recess of his mind. Images were swimming in front of him, an experience he had not had before.

“Egypt,” he murmured.

“Pardon?” asked Warren.

“I don’t know. I just have this feeling that the Earth-country Egypt is important somehow,” he reiterated.

“There’s no evidence that Egypt has anything to do with the Archk,” uttered Warren. “Are you sure you are fit to be our leader? You have been at this for a very long time. If you need me to take over...”

“I’m fine.” He didn’t know what had got into him.

“Very well.” It was short and decisive. Warren turned to the group, “Petti, take care of Chaos. We don’t want him ruining things...again. We all know what we each have to do. We can be, and will be, victorious.”

Everyone stood to leave, and Petti crept out into the light, next to Warren’s chair.

“How can you know they won’t use the wand against us?”

“Don’t worry, brother, the weapon is securely hidden.”

Gryal still felt as if there was something else inside of him. He knew they had to go to Egypt, but he didn’t know why.

Suddenly, the doors slammed open, and a woman, tall, with short, neat, black hair, dazzling yellow eyes, fangs, and jade skin, strutted into the hall. She surveyed the room with a sharp movement of her head.

“I can take you to Egypt.” Her voice was sweet, but with a hint of someone who will look you in the eye and tell a lie without a care.

Gryal stepped forwards, “You are no longer part of this organisation. You have never been an Immortal. You have nothing of benefit, Mierdi. Get back on your Chariot.”

She laughed, “But I know the enemy. You’ll need my help defeating humanity.”

It was Warren’s turn to make a hoarse laugh, “Our goals are more complex than you think. I’m glad to see that during your last failure, you didn’t get a glimpse of our intentions. Anyway, we wouldn’t need your help, no matter how easy or hard the stratagem.”

“And do you remember what happened last time you got involved with us?” Gryal joined in. “You could barely control the Jackal.”

“You honestly don’t know, do you? They’ve destroyed an Adsindrarian!”

The shaking in Stark’s voice gave him out to be the only one of the group shocked by this news, “No they haven’t.”

“Oh yes they have, just over four thousand years from this Tower.”

Gryal grinned (well, tried to grin more; he was a skeleton, a skull is always grinning), “Then the other Adsindrarians will be angrier than usual. This can only mean that the endgame is getting nearer. Let’s go.”

The Brethren Lords walked out past her, into the inky-black corridor beyond. Gryal was the last to leave. On passing he spared a glance in Mierdi’s direction with his blue eyes. In a flash, she clasped hold of his wrist.

“You will go to Egypt,” she hissed.

Gryal felt a prickling sensation at the back of his eye sockets. He stared at her unfocusedly in a dream-like state. He wrenched his yellow eyes away from her.

“Yes mistress.”

1: The Paranormal Life Of Philip Quint

“Those exams have killed me I tell you!”

“Yeah, sure, because you know what it’s like to feel dead. Now get over it; Mr Sneak still wants to test us.”

“Well he’s certainly living up to his name. Another school project on the day our exams end! I mean, I thought they at least wanted to keep us alive.”

“A project on Egyptian culture won’t kill you. It’s easy. We know loads about Egypt.”

“I don’t.”

“Your problem is you don’t watch enough TV mate.”

“No, *your* problem is you watch too much.”

Philip Quint just couldn’t understand Tony Mantegna. It was just another fun school project. You’d think the exams were hard.

His internal grumblings were cut short however as he realised that they’d reached the bus stop, and that Tony was about to step onto a vehicle which would take him away until tomorrow.

“Wait,” Philip called, “Do you want to walk to my house for dinner?”

“You live over fifteen miles away!”

“So? My parents are going away for the summer, if you came over we could arrange for us to meet up. It will be harder once they’re gone. It’s not like you’re coming on the science trip to Switzerland.”

Tony sighed, “I’m busy.”

The bus door slammed shut and his friend was driven away. Once the bus was just a dot in the distance Philip began his own way home along the side of the dual carriageway. Cars of all shapes and sizes zoomed pass him in a blur of colour. The din was so great that it prevented any other sound from being heard. Philip could only just hear himself think of his homework. Mr Sneak had said something about either doing Egyptian lifestyle or Egyptian mythology. He wondered if he could do both. He might get more marks. But then again, Mr

Sneak might punish him for being a show-off and not doing the task properly. Oh well, the fun was worth the risk.

He had reached the bridge leading cars out of the town, the broad river running beneath it. It was an old, stone bridge, with iron railings on either side. One side was plastered in graffiti. On the dull, grey stone, the glaring, gaudy, vulgar words contrasted to such a degree that they seemed to glow. Your eyes might just water at the sight. He leaned over the side, watching the small, blue-green ripples pass. The sounds of the roaring cars seemed to melt into the background; all he could see was the river. Every so often there was some sign of a fish. Philip began to wonder if the Nile would have looked this pretty back in Ancient Egypt, with the pyramids on the horizon and clear skies above. If he'd lived back then, he would have knelt down on the sand by the Nile and watched the boats go by. The image in his mind's eye was so peaceful. He could use that in his project: 'A Day By The Nile, by Philip Quint.' It had a good ring to it. He decided to write it down when he got home.

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Philip's peripheral vision came back into focus. He stood up and got his new bearings in the woods. Philip took one step forwards and tripped over a gnarled tree root. He fell face first into a pile of fallen emerald leaves. The thick canopy let little light through, so the details of his surroundings were quite hard to distinguish. This was the complete opposite of the open sky above the bridge where he'd been just a second before. His legs felt like jelly as he clung to the crumbling bark of a nearby tree. Looking down, he saw something black on his hand. Philip pulled it off, only to recoil, dropping the slug. Rubbing his forehead, he set to work on locating his home. After a minute, he worked out that he was only a mile from his house, and began to follow the path west in the leaf-littered undergrowth. He had to congratulate himself; he'd landed further away in the past.

Once at his front door, he fumbled in his pocket for his keys. When he'd retrieved the tangle from his pocket, Philip opened the door and stepped into the peach-painted porch. He slipped his trainers off, put them onto the shoe rack and headed straight for the flight of stairs.

"Hello dear, how was your day?"

Damn it. He turned to face his mother, who was standing in the living room. She was tall, with chestnut hair which fluttered in the draft from the open window. Her loving, round eyes matched her misty top, and they were focused on him.

“Fine, mum. I’m just going to my room.”

“Okay. Dinner will be at five.”

Once he’d escaped, he ran up the stairs and onto the landing. He slowed down here, knowing he was alone. She was kind-hearted and benign, but maybe too much so. He just liked to be ignored when at home.

Now, what was that idea he’d thought of about the project?

At the end of the corridor he reached his white locked door. This time he didn’t bother with his keys, he didn’t really notice, he was too focused on his project. It had been something about the Nile hadn’t it? Not really thinking, he walked straight through his solid door, not leaving a mark.

His bedroom was relatively big, compared to those of his friends. One wall was taken up by bookcases, another by two desks. His bed took up the third. Philip swung his bag down on his bed and began taking out his many school books. There was a tinkling sound on the floor. He looked down to see his jumble of keys. It was then that he realised he hadn’t unlocked his door. Oh well, he’d been doing it subconsciously for many years now, it hadn’t killed anybody, yet. Philip skimmed through his bookcase for his atlas. He found it on the centre shelf and extracted it from its fellows. Flicking through it, he found Egypt on page 178.

At first he didn’t realise he was hearing it. It was a rustling, coming from the chair by his desk. After two minutes of Philip not noticing, the figure gave up.

“*Hello*. Skeleton sitting with his feet up on your desk eating one of your chocolate bars, goes straight through me of course, but you have to appreciate that I came all this way. Are you even paying attention to me?!”

Philip looked up to see...what numerous sources of fiction would have him believe was the Grim Reaper sitting up in his chair. Who else would a talking skeleton in a black robe be?

“Yes?” he asked after a moment of stunned silence.

The skeleton looked taken aback, “That’s it? Does this happen to you often? How many other skeletons are you acquainted with? Every other day, does a creature from some God-forsaken dimension materialise in your home? Earth’s changed since...what do you call them...medieval days. People were fun back then. But you’re so *boring*. You could have at least screamed.”

“Look, do you want something?”

More to himself than to Philip, the skeleton muttered, “I will never understand the human psyche.” Then it hit him, and he turned back to Philip, “Of course...I should have known why you’re not reacting.”

“Yeah, it’s simple. It’s evident that all my exams have sent me mad. I knew I should have been feeling more stress.”

The figure leaned the chair back onto its rear legs; the boy’s acceptance, though planned, was still unnerving, “Well, that’s not the reason I’m thinking of, but I’m sure if you were to see a psychiatrist, they’d be able to find something wrong with you.”

Philip put his book down and stared into the skeleton’s yellow eyes. They didn’t look like the eyes of a hallucination, yet what would he know?

“Let’s just for the moment say that you’re real, why did you bother coming to my house? Am I about to die?”

“No, and I’d rather you didn’t.”

Now Philip was starting to become intrigued; he may be mad, but that didn’t matter. If this was the Grim Reaper, why was he here if not to take him away?

It was as if the figure had read his mind, “I came here to give you two messages. First, concentrate on the task you’ve been given.”

Philip let out the breath he’d been holding in. It was going to be some cryptic clue that he’d have to work out. It was almost a cliché. Maybe Tony was right about him watching too much TV. He was almost disappointed with his brain for conjuring up such an unoriginal concept.

“Second, say ‘no’ at the time.”

“Why should I?”

Once he'd said this, the figure somehow looked a lot more menacing. He hadn't changed physically, but the atmosphere in the room seemed to have thickened.

“Just do it at the right time. We don't want you to get hurt. I'll be in contact, under the name of Gryal.”

This was too much for Philip's head. He had an Egyptian project to do for Mr Sneak. But before he could further analyse this mental cacophony, he had the sudden urge to not look at the figure in the chair. He couldn't understand it, but his eyes wouldn't focus on the man. It seemed to blur, go out of focus...and then it was gone. For a long time Philip stared at the spot where it had been, and at the wall beyond. It wasn't as if the paint on his wall was interesting, but it was almost as if some invisible force was keeping them there.

“Where are you, dear?”

Either his brain was trying to kill him or this was not his day.

“What, mum?”

He just heard her reply, “It's just gone five.”

He looked down at his watch and realised that he had been staring at his wall for longer than he had been under that mysterious thrall; she was right. Philip leapt for the door, hand outstretched to unlock it. He was about to close it when he glanced back at his desk. There was no sign of ‘Gryal’, apart from half a chocolate wrapper, and a slightly singed look on the chair.

By the next morning Philip was beginning to think that his visitor had been a dream. Dressed in his school uniform he sat down at the kitchen table and tucked into his breakfast: a bowl of some new kind of cereal. The spoon was nearly at his mouth when his mother sat down beside him.

“Just so you know, your father is taking you to a restaurant tonight.”

Philip replaced his spoon in his bowl. This wasn't the usual way his mother greeted him in the morning.

“Aren’t you coming?”

“No, I’m busy tonight.”

She was smiling, but her eyes portrayed a different story. They weren’t her normal loving eyes leading to a warm soul, they were deeply worried eyes. There was something she wasn’t telling him.

“What is it?”

She didn’t speak, she just waved her hand as if to brush the question aside. Not too concerned, Philip went back to his breakfast. He had to finish quickly, before it was time for school, and before his mother realised what time it was. Registration started in fifteen minutes.

Ever since Philip had left home, going that short distance away from his home before he could make the rest of the journey to school unseen, he’d been unable to think of anything but the encounter. Had it been The Grim Reaper? The thing’s messages, what had they meant? At what time was he meant to say ‘no’? And his mother’s actions, did she know something? No, it was probably a coincidence.

He stopped sharply. There was a piece of paper with his name on it that had suddenly appeared lying in the road. Looking out for cars, he ran out into the road and snatched up the paper. Once he was back on the verge, he unfolded the note.

The time is soon, but don’t miss it. And don’t fill your mind with thoughts of your mother. Concentrate on the tasks ahead of you, nothing else. I have told you the consequences. Stray too far and you will lose something you shall dearly miss and regret your actions.

Gryal

Out of anger more than anything, Philip tore the note apart and threw the fragments of paper back into the road, then realised that he had rejected a figment of his imagination. Yep, he was mad.

The spacious hall echoed the headmaster's speech in Philip's ears over and over again. He had never realised how long Mr Sneak could drone on for in an assembly before now. The head was making a speech about how well they'd done in their exams and about the importance of the Egypt project. He'd made it sound oh-so-appealing just yesterday...

"Now that your exams are over, we do not want to become one of those schools where the students forget everything as they feel they don't need to know it any more. That is why, though you may not like it, we are giving you the Egypt project. Over the last few weeks before the holidays we still want you to keep your brains active."

All this soared over Philip's head. What he did focus on however was that the headmaster couldn't seem to look any of them in the eye. His eyes were furtive, looking either side of them, and then darting around the hall, but never at the students. He wondered why that was. It seemed that everyone knew something worrying that they would not confide in him. Their excuse of course would be that there was nothing or that he wasn't 'mature' enough.

"Come on!" called Tony.

Philip saw Tony's green eyes boring into his. He could no longer hear Mr Sneak's voice reverberating around the art-covered walls. Then it hit him that the assembly had ended. They were two of the last few people in the school hall. As he usually did in such a situation, Philip strode out like nothing had happened. Tony groaned; he knew Philip had some arrogant tendencies, and used to be able to put up with them, but they were definitely getting worse. He could see Philip was already down at the common room without giving him a backwards glance.

His hair was ruffled as what felt like a wall of cold air rushed past his head. Thin fingers flexed around Tony's shoulder. He turned to the misty intruder. His heart skipped a beat and the blood drained from his face.

"No offence, but it's extremely important," it snarled.

"My allegiance is not with you, it never has been."

It laughed.

"I know."

Tony tried to rip himself from its grasp, but the smoke just tightened around him.

2: The Man In The Windows

Philip stared unfocused into the rain beyond the glass. The weather outside mirrored his mood: depressed and gloomy. He had never had a thing for being left in the dark and unknown. What was taking Tony so long?

“Ahem.”

Philip swung around on his foam chair.

“Finally, what took you so...”

But it wasn't Tony as he'd expected. It was the girl from the neighbouring classroom he'd seen occasionally around the school, the girl that he used to fancy...no, not fancy, like, just like. Her flowing, glossy brown hair was mesmerising though...no, focus, it wasn't. Oh, what was her name...Cary Cole, that was it. She swung her rucksack onto the carpet by her seat. And here came her gaggle of giggling friends: Susan Baxendale, Lucy Franks, Amy Tom and Anna Pepperdine. If only they would shut up. Their laughter dug into his skull, and rather distracted him from her.

Cary turned to them, “It's okay, go...go...**just go away!** Thank you, I want to be alone.”

Thankfully, they dispersed, yet Philip could not help noticing the murderous looks they were giving the two of them. And it wasn't only the group that was looking at him; Cary was in the seat next to him, resting her chin on her hands, as if she was expecting something. There was an awkward silence where Philip didn't know what to do.

“Um...do you want something, Carolyn?” he asked tentatively.

“I'm Cary, not Carolyn.”

He sat up straighter, still unsure as to why she had come over, “Do you want something?”

“Oh, I just saw you all alone and...”

He cut her off. He might not have known exactly what she wanted, but it certainly wasn't the spiel she would have him believe. He almost felt disappointed. And did she think he would fall for her sweet-talk?

“I asked you, what do you want?” he repeated, an edge in his voice.

Knowing this wasn't going to go the way she'd planned, she confessed, "I want help with my Egyptian project." She then saw his expression and hastily continued, "Everyone *knows* you're the best in the year at that sort of thing."

He had to admit, whilst trying to remain modest, that she was right. He knew of no one else who got marks as high as he did in the year. But it wouldn't be fair if he helped one person without giving assistance to others, no matter how beautiful he thought they were...but she wasn't just anyone, was she?

"I'm afraid not. Sorry."

He didn't see her get up. One moment Cary was in her chair, the next she was towering over him, casting an icy shadow in the warm room. She would be steaming at the ears, if it were possible. Her eyes burrowed into his own, as if searching for something to use against him.

"What?" He seemed to have taken her by surprise.

"I said no," Philip reiterated, a bit more slowly, a hint of aggravation creeping into the words.

It was disturbing, the slight cackle in her laugh, "Ha, you can't say that. I'm the most popular girl in the year."

He shrugged, "So? And do people really say that, especially about themselves?"

She threw a cushion at him. In a flash, he *phased*, and the cushion went straight through his head. Once he knew she wasn't going to throw anything else at him, he returned from static to solidity. He hadn't meant to do that, to show her; it was just instinctive. This seemed to just increase her explosive temper.

"You think you're so cool, don't you? Just 'cause you can do that doesn't mean you have to show off. It was bad enough doing it to escape being caught for breaking the library window last term."

He made a potentially concerning mental note that she hadn't seemed at all surprised by his abilities. "What are you talking about? Look, have you seen Tony?"

She looked perplexed, her anger forgotten, "Who's Tony?"

"Tony Mantegna. He's my friend," he said, blankly.

“Who’d be stupid enough to be friends with you?”

It occurred to Philip now that he probably should have found out what this girl was really like before fancying her. The worst part was that he couldn’t find a trace of guilt or acknowledgement on her pale features that she’d said something remotely insulting. Oh, the pain he endured in trying to keep his face straight and his voice calm. He failed straight away.

“*Thanks.*”

“You’re welcome,” she replied swiftly, not picking up on his sarcasm. “But really, can you help me?”

Philip stood up straight. He wasn’t going to pay attention to her pleas.

“Lessons are about to start.”

And at a brisk pace, he strode off. Cary tried to grab his sleeve as he passed, but only succeeded in tripping over her bag.

Flustered, and generally embarrassed, she called after him, “I’ll want an answer!”

It seemed that for the rest of the day Philip could not shake Cary off. Every time he left his humid classrooms, she was in the corridor waiting for him. On the second of these occasions he was forced to resort to charging into the bustling crowd of students, eager to get to lunch. Considering the thickness of the throng, she did surprisingly well to keep close to him all the way out into the cafeteria. It was here, in the dining hall, that he could finally lose her in the queue. So that she would not have time to sneak up on him again, as soon as he had obtained his meal, he sped up as fast as he could without spilling anything, moving to the table in the corner, furthest from the other pupils.

After a while, though, he thought it strange, but pleasing, that Cary had not yet got to the end of the queue. Maybe she had brought her own lunch and left it at the common room. Yes, that was probably it. Sure that today there was no strange phenomenon occurring, he dug into his rock-solid slab of pork and partially burnt peas. How do you even *burn* peas? It tasted of cardboard, but the slightly out of date juice washed it down. When he had finished his main course, which had been small, but had left him with no desire for more, Philip leant back in his plastic chair and rested his head on the wall behind him.

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