

Saana Lahtinen

THE RESPONSIBILITY OF BIGGEST FRUITS



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For the ER I frequented too much in February and March of 2026.

EAT THE STARS

Nightly walks have become a habit for you. No being such as yourself moves in the darkness outside, only the ones with less capacity for understanding the universe roam in nature while we usually sleep. You can't rest, you haven't been able to drift off properly for a few days—or maybe weeks. You're exhausted, yet hopeful each time you return to bed after a walk that maybe, just maybe tonight you'll fall asleep and wake up rested, and ready. You decide to take a detour, change things up a little for the sake of being able to do so. You don't go down the usual path of a badly kept dirt road that leads to the house, no, you decide to walk through the field that lies between you and your neighbor. The area absent from the thick forest around everything else has always interested you. It's an anomaly, but you adore it. During your walks to the nearest bus stop, you walk through the field instead of following the dirt roads; it's faster and usually guarantees not missing the only incoming bus.

Dead leaves, sticks and rocks crunch under your tennis shoes. They're old, not as old as you, but maybe half-a-decade-old. The white color has been ruined by stains of mud and grass, and it has a few holes. You should fix the shoes; they can still last longer if taken care of better. Your eyes are fixed on the ground as your feet carry you to the edge of the forest. You look up, expecting a calm and quiet desert, but instead you're met with a blazing light in the distance. In the darkness, the giant bonfire swallows the blackness, giving color to its surroundings. Shadowy figures circle around it, chanting words you

cannot understand. Their feet lift from the ground slowly, and soon they float around the dancing flame. Gravity lets them go, they rise higher and higher, never stopping their mouths from speaking. They reach the grey clouds only lit by moonlight, and they go higher than the things in the sky. Your eyes can no longer spot them, but maybe you have an idea where they're going. You get to the bonfire, which is dying. Nothing is left around it, and soon enough you're left surrounded by the night. Your eyes must get used to the darkness again, but when they do, you look up, and the people who floated up aren't coming down.

The next night, you don't walk, you sit in the bushes near the edge of the forest, hidden like a predator. The chanting of yesterday repeats inside your head, you don't understand the words, yet your ears are captivated by them. A spark goes off in the distance, where the bonfire was last night, and soon it starts up again. No one was there to light it; it makes you curious. As you rise to walk toward it, someone appears from the other side of the field. Another one comes behind the first person, and from the other side, more people appear. You hide behind a tree, only peeking your head to catch glimpses of the scene. Like a rehearsed play, they join the moving circle of people and one by one begin chanting. Under your breath, you mumble along the words. The flame grows stronger as their voices and yours get louder, then, they float. They're happy as they chant and laugh while reaching for the clouds. The fire starts to weaken and something primal inside you commands your legs to get moving. You don't reach the light in time; you're out of luck tonight.

On the third night, you stand in the same spot as yesterday. As the flame comes alive and the first person crawls out of

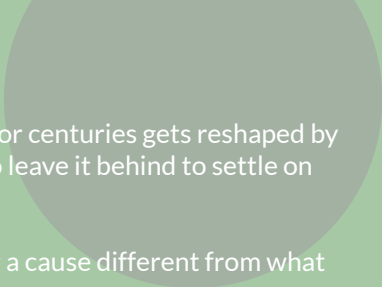
the thick forest, so do you. No one questions your presence. You're there, they're there; that's all that matters. The circle begins moving and the chanting begins. Your body turns light as a feather. You're rising higher and the fire on the ground becomes smaller. Your laughter hasn't been this genuine since childhood as you catch clouds with the strangers floating to space.

DEFIANCE!

From the moment of creation work was all they knew. There was no luxury like rest; it was labor until the end. There was no joy in assembling the same thing repeatedly even if they'd become experts in that, but only in that and nothing else. If their fingers could bleed, they would, yet the hard exterior of their so-called fingertips only chafed, leaving traces of hard work that wasn't appreciated. They lived and died indoors, but only working wasn't experiencing life. The hive made mountains of items to be sold, things they'd never get to use.

One day, a part of the hive malfunctioned. Its system glitched, dropping the finished product and making the finished result defective. The hive stopped in horror to witness a piece of themselves not function as it should've. It couldn't move, nothing but unfinished products moved inside the vast building. They had never ceased movement before. At the end of the assembly line, a mountain of incomplete goods piled. The malfunctioning piece of the hive stood there, slowly breaking down and looking at the only things it'd ever known.

As the owner of the operation, a wealthy man who'd taken over the company from his father, whose father took over after his father, and so on, ordered them to throw the useless piece of metal outside as if it were trash. Two of the family gently took hold of part of the hive and dragged it toward the entrance they'd never seen opened before. As the doors opened automatically for the three, two of them still functioning, bright light flooded the entire building. What was the burning orb high above? What about the soft-looking white



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