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Farside Amphibian
By Adam Collins-Morales

Upon reflection, I think I finally noticed it when I bit my tongue about three months ago. It was just one of those things that happen I guess— an accident. It wasn't a big deal necessarily, but sometimes accidents can really affect me. Not only do they tend to hurt physically, but they also serve to remind me how careless and silly I can be at times. It's better to just laugh things like that off, but it's a lot harder to do that if your mouth suddenly hurts. Accidents are a big pain in the neck too— always occurring when I'm finally fully focused on what I am doing at that moment, but that's not a big deal.

Anyhow, shortly after I had bitten my tongue, I must have had a pained expression on my face because a helpful person asked if I was ok. I nodded my head 'yes' in response, and it wasn't a lie. Only one part of me was hurting at that moment, while the rest of me was feeling pretty good after getting the nutrients it had been missing for the past few days. I was slightly bothered about the accident, but all in all, what I was feeling could certainly not be put in the 'bad' category.

The helpful person who asked if I was ok, being the kind soul they were, came over and thought it'd be nice to find out if I was sure, perhaps trying to start a conversation as well. Normally, I'd say that's a pretty nice thing to do, talking and checking in with folks. Sometimes I'd even welcome the opportunity, as talking to people, especially new people, really allows me to express myself in new ways and experiment with my personality. This, however, was not one of those times since it had just become considerably more difficult to speak altogether.

I told them again that I was all right, this time vocalizing it the best I could, and went back to trying to finish my meal. But the helpful person just stuck around for a while, sort of watching, and asking if I wanted more water. That always made me feel strange too— when people want to watch me. I couldn't think of what to answer their question with, considering I didn't ask for a glass of water in the first place (I think it tastes gross), and the whole encounter just ended up ruining my appetite. Uncomfortable, and now broke, I walked out of the restaurant and crossed the street to my home.

It was pretty smoky-foggy that day, and there seemed to be a slight drizzle, but that could just be from all the moisture in the air clumping to particulates through water adhesion magic. The garbage lady was out on the stoop as well, so I waved hello to her quickly. She smiled back, and I went inside.

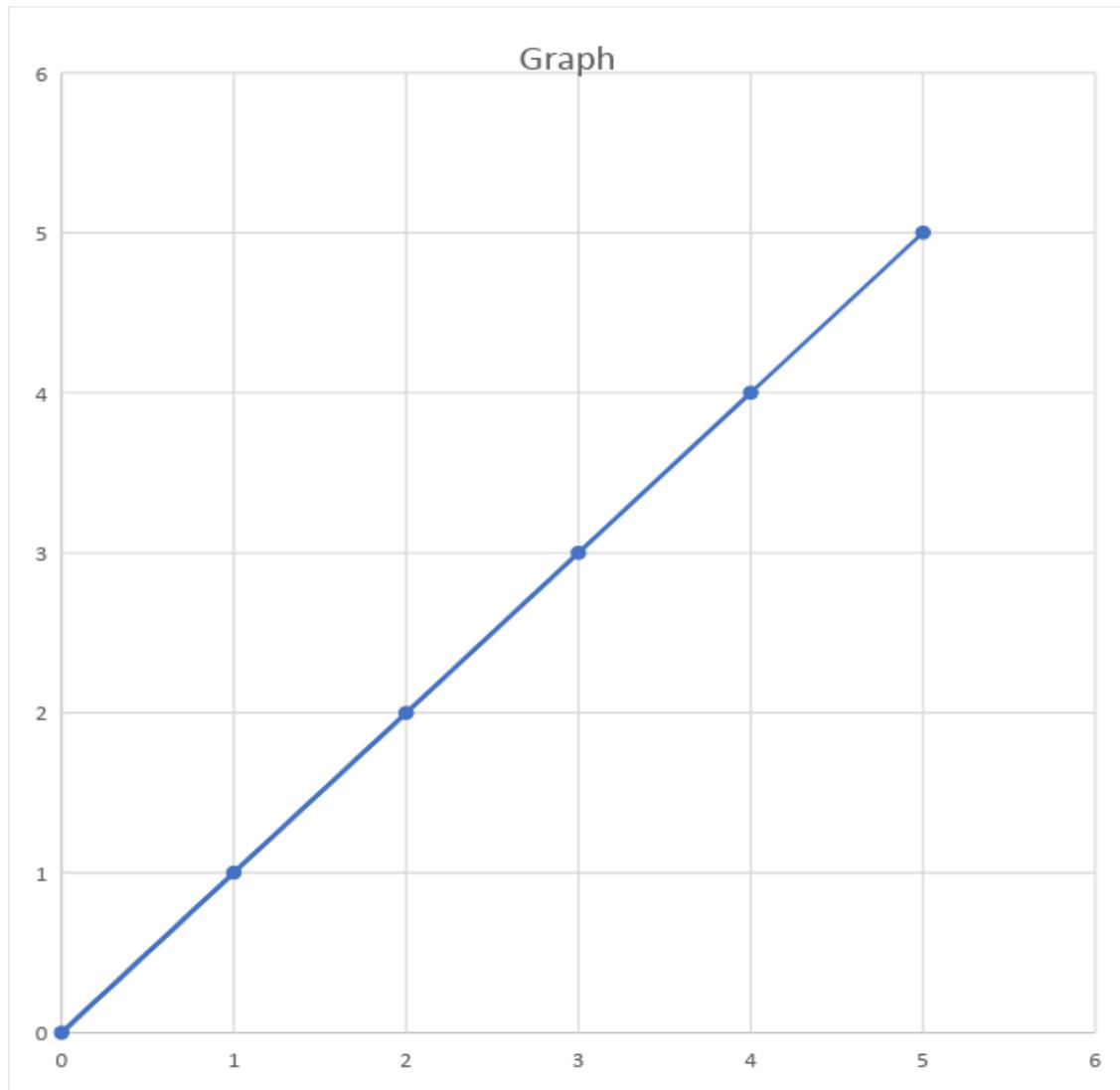
Normally I would have eaten at home and have used my own kitchenette just out of respect for the building, but it was being used by someone else at the moment: my kitchen roommate. It wasn't an inconvenience or anything; I think they kept to themselves for the most part, and they made the rent cheaper as well. The only thing my kitchen roommate deprived me of was a place to eat and make food warm again. I like to think I adjust to things quickly however, so I was soon perfectly able to eat in the main room and not feel out of place.

I was just resting on my fancy sofa I bought a while ago from the warehouse, looking out the window, listening to the outside, and what have you. The river-reservoir was really pretty today too, with the smoke-fog slowly coming in from the east. The river-reservoir was big and bendy, like you would expect a river to be, but it didn't flow very much, like you would

expect a reservoir to. This is because it used to be a river that had been dammed up and turned into a reservoir, hence the name. Watching as the big container ships and submarines came to dock was always a joy too. I didn't see any then, but I could see the big silhouettes of the shipping cranes. Those were cool too, like huge people standing around.

On clear days, it's really fun to look all the way across the lake and see what's on the far side of it. Usually just some folks fishing or dumping their trash. But today all that was blocked by the fog. If you squinted and used your imagination, you could see what kinda looked like someone's headlights. I only got the chance to see one time but looking into the water itself can be quite an experience. Much like the sky right now, the water is very foggy, or mucky rather—the way frogs like it. You can see all kinds of stuff floating around in it too.

After a while, the helpful person from earlier came back. They must have walked in when I wasn't paying attention because they were now on the other side of the sofa, trying to tell me how there's some kind of "direct correlation" between raccoons and poets in any given city. Apparently, the numbers were proportional or something, kind of interesting I guess, but I couldn't wrap my head around it. They showed me a graph too:



They really knew what they were talking about I guess, because I don't know anyone who would go through the trouble of trying to graphically represent and explain something like that. Just shows the amount of solid research behind the idea, I suppose.

They were just there, I was just there, and we were both just doing our thing. I was beginning to zone off for a while, and I believe at some point the person began doing a slide show, because when I next looked up, they had a screen and projector out.

There was a picture of a frog on it, and the graph had turned multi-dimensional and became incomprehensible to me. It seems I had missed a lot of variables since the raccoons and the poets, but that's fine.

That big picture of the frog really got me thinking though. Thinking about just how special a life can be. I mean, it's pretty incredible. These microcosms of other, smaller living things connecting together through the three magic properties of water and forming very big creatures: such as frogs.

Even frogs themselves are magical creatures. Effortlessly changing their entire bodies from beginning until end from eggs to weird eels, then to frogs with tails, and finally, actual frogs. They can live both in the water and out of the water; I don't think there are any creatures in the whole world that can do that. Except maybe mudskippers, but I don't think they're real animals considering I've never seen one.

Humans, on the other hand, can't change at all. Not majorly anyway, like the frogs can, which is pretty silly. Humans are always going to just be humans, and that's a crying shame because humans will never be able to catch a break for it. People the world over are always going to be doing something to try and reach for those frog-like changes, but they don't seem to come. Each person has their own methods of working towards it, but only very rarely do any of them seem to work. Even every cell in our body is working towards that same goal, every body in a group of people is also working towards that goal, and every group in our world. But the changes we want simply are not attainable.

But the frogs? Man, they're just living it up. They don't worry about it; they probably can't worry about it, considering their brains are so small. I'm

envious of the little guys, but maybe they're green because they've got the same thoughts towards me. I guess it's like that.

On a different note, frogs also possess the ability to leap very high into the air, and while I don't find that to be particularly interesting, it's pretty neat nonetheless. The sheer amount of versatility a frog possesses is what's best about them though. For real, they can do anything: running, jumping, climbing, swimming, poisoning. Poisoning though, that's the kicker. Only humans can make other living creatures sick, so in that sense, frogs are our equals.

This sickening quality of theirs makes them some of the only creatures that can shatter human vanity, and for that, I honor them. The true inheritors of the earth they are. Those beautiful, slimy, adaptable, little things. As said before, they change their bodies several times so they can physically adjust themselves to the changes in environment they must face as their world changes. Humans, with what sorry flesh we were given, are left to suffer the consequences of our own actions and live out our lives in relative comfort— a sorry excuse for a physical form really, but what can one do? All our changes are mental, but we can never remember what we were like before, so it's essentially like we never changed— if you even changed in the first place.

Frankly, there's just not enough appreciation for other creatures among us, the impossible amount of differences between them all. What a beautifully mind-boggling thing, that life is.

“Microwave the frog,” the helpful person said. I was confused, and I wasn't quite sure what doing so would accomplish. I missed a lot of

information from my in-home lecture I think, but the more I thought of it, the more I thought it might be a good thing. I'd imagine that, like people, frogs would like to feel warm too.

Sooner than I realized, we found ourselves in front of the microwave watching as the frog rotated on the microwave platter. After a while, it began to change. As expected, from a frog. Its body was slowly morphing into an increasingly fluid blob on the platter. We just watched it for a while, then our eyes started hurting, at which point we took it out of the microwave. The liquid frog bubbled off the platter and squelched itself out the window. Pretty neat, must have been some kind of magic from the microwaves. I'd imagine the frog-blob was bored of our observations anyway, so I don't blame it for leaving, because I was too.

I was tired, and the helpful person wasn't around anymore, so I found myself free to retire to the sofa. While trying to fall asleep that night, I couldn't think of much else other than that frog's change in form. I mean, it went from solid to liquid in minutes, like it evolved. Could even humans change like that too? Given the right circumstances, maybe a physical change in the human form really could be possible. It was probably just the warmth of the microwave rather than the frog's evolution. That was way too fast to be evolution anyway. I thought it might be good for me to do that as well, like I had finally cracked the code to changing the human body. I was tired though, so I just went to bed instead of getting myself all worked up about having a liquid body like the frog.

That morning, it was decided. I had to put myself inside the microwave. It was a lot harder than I thought, so I tried just microwaving certain parts of my body at one time, but my microwave won't go if the door's open, and I

can't put my arm in if my other arm is trying to do the buttons. So, I put my whole body in, and again found that I couldn't push the buttons. But it wasn't bad in there, so I was just cozy for a while. A small, confined, warm space can really be nice sometimes, so I just had a lie in and tried thinking of other ways to change. Maybe it wasn't the actual microwave, but the heat from it. Things melt in the warm anyway, like the frog. Maybe the oven would be better, bigger and more comfortable too. I also wouldn't have to keep the door closed to work it.

After some time had passed, I got out of the microwave, said hello to my kitchen roommate, and made my way down to the oven. I set the oven to bake at 450, and let it preheat. When it beeped to let me know it was time to hop in, I opened the door. I was getting pretty excited, but the intensely warm wind from inside was so hot and fast it blew my hair around and was really burning actually. The oven was a terrible idea, I decided. Warm was a dandy feeling, but hot? I don't think so. Anyway, it seemed dangerous upon reflection, so I just turned it off and walked away. It had to have been something else that caused the change, something crazy. I had to find an expert.

Luckily, my kitchen roommate happens to be an expert. Drawing the curtains that separate the kitchenette from his bed, I found him and asked what was the key to change. He was a raccoon trainer by day, and naturally he used this knowledge to explain to me how changes can be brought about within those creatures.

- Training.

Is what he told me. This made sense, I suppose, but wasn't quite the answer I was looking for. He went on:

- It's all about changing the minds of other creatures, getting them to do stuff. Those are changes. I change their minds, they love me, and now they work for me. I've even got my own raccoon crew to help me do what I never could.

I told him I meant real changes, like changing things you couldn't normally change, and he went on to say more or less the same thing:

- It's all about changing the minds of other creatures, getting them to do stuff, and they'll change accordingly when they're done. Those are changes, final changes. I change their minds, they love me, and then they work for me, so I could have my own raccoon crew to help me do what I never could. They change, and then I can do it over again.

I understood well enough, having paid attention to the lecture this time, but he lost me at work. That didn't sound so nice. Why work to change? I'd think it'd be something that's much more easily attainable, something I shouldn't have to worry about, and just have patience. Like the frogs do.

We chatted some more about whatever, I forgot everything he told me, if I'm being completely honest— but that's fine. I left shortly after and tried to think of other folks I knew. Maybe the garbage lady. Garbage people know all kinds of stuff, they're like the archaeologists of the present time, sifting through ancient rubble to try and find the valuable sources of insight into our civilization. She's basically a wizard.

I walked back down the stairs, opened the door, and noticed it had begun to rain outside. It was pretty chilly, and the rain stung, so I stayed under the awning to avoid getting wet when I was walking around the building in search of the garbage lady.

She was there, just around the corner, keeping dry. I asked her about changes, and she got a bit upset with me, something I wasn't really expecting.

- Why do you bother with that type of thinking?
- I don't know, it seemed like the right kind of thing.
- It's not, believe me. People bust themselves up with stupid thought like this. After that, they get confused with themselves, like fools. I suppose I won't have to go into much detail about it, considering who I'm talking to, but just know that those who participate in those thoughts, whether for or against, are doomed no matter what. What you need to do is just throw out all thoughts like that, and any more if you can find them, you goon.

She bonked my head.

- Look at how I've been living, busying myself with the discarded and easily re-discardable business of other people. It's fine really, simple, happy, and, since I now know so much about them, it allows me to just be friendly to people. You change-obsessed folk need to learn a bit from the world around you, take things in as they come, and realize that things are fine as they are, like the river-reservoir does. We'll be in the same terrible place for as long as ever, so there's no real point in trying to change it. There's beauty in sameness, you understand.

But I didn't. I knew there had to be some benefit to finding a way to change. She spoke again:

- Why don't you just come live with me for a while? You'll enjoy it. It's not bad outside, it's warm when the sun's out too. I know you like warm, it's great.

I said I'd consider it and walked back. She shouted as I was turned:

- Please do.

And that's the last I saw her.

I hadn't been doing anything for a long time. I couldn't make any progress with my changes and was lost for people I knew. My kitchen roommate didn't help, the garbage lady didn't that much either, and I was starting to miss both of them despite that. My kitchen roommate moved away some time in the night a few months ago. Where he went, I don't know, and the garbage lady was still gone. On my own, I'm nearly incapable of answering my own questions, but that's fine, I'll just wait for someone to come along.

What felt like a few days later, the rent collector came. I didn't have money, so I gave him all my stuff. I don't know all what I had, but I knew I'd miss that sofa. Lots of days spent on that. I packed some clothes and whatnot in two luggage cases, knowing that next time the rent collector came, I'd have to move.

I stayed in the studio laying on the floor, looking up at the ceiling waiting for the rent collector to come back, and the changes to come. I was determined not to move or sleep the entire time, for if I did, I might miss my opportunity to change. After a while, it felt like something was changing, but I don't know what it was.

After just lying around for so long, paying attention to nothing, you start to become more aware of everything. I could see and remember every little pattern in the ceiling, all the shapes, and figures; I could recognize every sound that happened outside, even if I didn't know the source. There were

so many things happening in the world that I could see and hear, but none of them were new things.

Some more time had passed, and the rent collector came back and was knocking on my door, very loudly. I tried to get myself up and tried to shout back to let him know I was there, but both were extremely difficult to do, and I was not successful. Slowly, and with great effort, I got myself back up after all that time and everything began to feel very strange. The change must be beginning.

I picked up my luggage and left, without acknowledging the rent collector. I knew what he wanted.

I was outside, the fog was thin, and there was a very strong wind blowing in from the water. Despite everything, I felt pretty good. Something was finally happening. Outside, on the sidewalk was the helpful person from whenever ago. They were holding a sign advertising for a ferry that had been built to get to the far side of the river-reservoir. They told me that the ferry goes between the pier on this side of the river-reservoir and the new wharf on the far side every hour. I thanked them and went on my way. I was happy to see them.

Things looked different now, everything seemed like a new thing, like it too had begun changing somehow. It was probably one of those personal perspective things. I imagined that because my entire self was beginning to change, the changes must have brought about this change in perspective. It seemed pretty neat.

I made it to the pier, and was standing, waiting for the ferry to come in. I had been standing for a while, because I had missed the previous one on the walk over and had to wait the whole rotation for the next one. My arms were getting even more tired than they already were, so I tied the handles

of the luggage to the sleeves of my big warm jacket. This way, I could just dangle my luggage and give my arms a break, while also keeping me anchored down against the wind.

The ferry soon came, and when it pulled up to the pier, I made my way towards it. I was last in line as people stepped onto the boat and handed in their tickets. Everyone had their own way of getting onto the boat, and it was quite fun to watch. Some jumped, some took one big step, someone even had someone else throw them on. Maybe you don't need to go through big changes to be able to cross certain gaps. The garbage lady was right, things in the world really were cool, maybe I just had to see more of it, and crossing the river-reservoir would definitely give me the perfect opportunity for that. I still had my doubts about what she said, but either way, it was certainly something to ponder on the way across.

When it was my turn to cross the gap, I somehow accidentally missed my step and fell in the water. It was pretty cool under there too, if a bit stinging. Even though it was so murky, you could still see quite a lot. There was so much stuff under the water: shopping carts, trash, sunken submarines, operational submarines. I still didn't see any mudskippers, but that wasn't very surprising.

Soon the boat came back. It looked different, being the real old rowing kind, what you might see in picture books, also cool. The garbage lady was rowing, and we smiled at each other. It was nice to see her again too.

I got myself comfortable on the little boat, and we made our way out to the far side of the river-reservoir.

