

Theory of Relativity

"Lasciviousness, violence, and fraud. Or as they are more commonly called - lust, pride, and avarice."

Upon my studies of olden lore I have found, in the margins of an old song, the two following excerpts from two different stories, both coincidentally named "*Duende*." The first was by "Abeneil Retsnit," whilst the other was by "Batereine Lints." Both of these authors have claimed that their stories are entirely true, without lie or error in them. Following are the two excerpts:

Amongst the "onion tops" that formed the tops of Darwinia, Duende crouched on the tiny spirals that followed the cone upwards. Her inquisitiveness in the tiny pond of water that gathered at the base of the cone may have evoked feelings of lasciviousness for some or perhaps a slight twinge of avarice before they once again hid it behind their wooden masks.

Duende may once have had robin-blue eyes, high cheekbones, and rosy cheeks. She may once have been impressive in figure and gentle by nature. Now all that remained was a scarred hollow of what she had been. Fresh scars ran amok on her face, whilst her gnarled fingers groped in mid-air for an unknown object. She looked down upon the cobbled street below her. Oh look! A baker preparing his goods for another day's sale. Small rolls of crusty croissants competed for attention along the shelves of buns and bread. On the other side of the street the old widow lived, in a drafty old house which had no place on the busy thoroughfare of this street.

It was safe here.

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Gnarled knobs of once smooth hands groped among the many rosewood drawers in the old house. "*Where is it? Where is it?*" the old woman moaned with dread.

Her eyes moved frantically within their small sockets, whilst her hands seemed to be puppets of her eyes, twitching erratically towards wherever her eyes looked. She looked under the mirrors, under her jewelry, under her personal cards, scrabbling amongst them all, without any result. An old rickety chair was in the middle of the room. Perhaps it was there? She hobbled over and lifted the vinyl cushions, opened the coverings, and looked inside.

Nothing.

The knock came again on the door, soft but persevering. Her time was here. What was she to do? A soft whimper emitted from her lips, but still she continued her frantic search. The person outside the door heard nothing. She placed her ear next to the door to discern some sound from the silence of the drafty old house. She heard nothing. She put her eye to the small peephole in the brass doorway. She saw nothing. Yet she could feel the energy slowly rise in the house. A small sound inside the house attracted her attention. She looked inside the peephole again. For a second or so, she saw the old woman standing in the middle of the hallway, a step back from the door itself, before her eyes only saw black. A minute later, a faint sucking sound was heard, and the woman slid to the ground. Her mouth opened and closed as if to say something. However, no sound came. Her hand moved in its last moments towards her coat pocket, reaching inside and taking out a small box. As she exhaled her last breath, the box fell from her hand, dropping to the ground with a dull clunk.

In the shadows of the door, a long slithering shadow writhed back into the house through the small gap beneath the door. The old woman stooped, and seemed to place something into a small basket, before retiring back to her chair.

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After careful contemplation of these two texts, I embarked upon an intellectual research of sorts for this land of "Darwinia." This place would naturally lead me to "Duende," who could surely tell me more about the mystery of these two texts, which, seemingly irrelevant, were still placed in the same margin by some thoughtful scribe. I found that "Darwinia," if the letters were rearranged, would also spell "Nairwadi," which was a small town in the heart of India right in the middle of the industrial boom. I thus arranged for a journey into India just to discover the purpose of these two texts.

Having arrived there, I took a small stroll down the main street. The roofs of the houses pointed towards the skies, reminiscent of post-war Russian architecture roofs, a feature quite strange, considering India's distance from Russia. However, after some small refreshment in the form of a small croissant and a light drink at a local baker, I discovered an old house exactly opposite to the baker's small café. Following Duende's views of the baker and the old house, I decided to approach this house softly.

A soft knock at the door of the old house sent the entire floor quivering, as if the intrusion of sound was too much for it to bear. The creaky old door was opened by an old woman. She wore a black shawl, which covered most of her except her eyes and her hand, constantly clutching in midair. Her marriage finger, I noticed, had a band of whiter skin around it, as if a ring had once been worn there for a long period of time. I quietly told her about my mission in India to uncover the truth of the two excerpts. She would not let me in. Instead, she told me to wait, and disappeared inside the labyrinth of her house to reappear quickly with a small box in her hand.

Leaning in to me, she whispered softly: "*This is an ancient relic of India. It must be taken away from here. Already, people have come to take it away,*" and as she said this, I

noticed a small snake with a rectangular head and dark flecks of black that formed faint bands along its small scales sliding up her leg, "*I have only been able to take care of them with this small but dangerous snake. She only answers to my call. Now take the box and never come back again. I see you come from far, but with good intent. I trust you to protect this relic. If I am wrong in my choice, then I will be punished most cruelly, yet I believe my choice is correct. Go now, and be fast.*"

I took note of her message with a small nod, and left with great haste to depart from the country. By doing this, I could at least save this sacred relic from "them." I hastened to take the first available transport out of India, back to my country, where there would be some form of protection. It would take four hours before the first train would leave. I took the time before the train left to find out about the small snake the old woman had. The relic could wait to be examined on the train. It was still too dangerous to show in public. A fast search proved the old woman's snake to be indeed dangerous. Distinguished by the faint bands of black speckles, as well as its rectangular head, it was confirmed to be the poisonous *Oxyuranus microlepidotus* or, more commonly, the "Inland Taipan," or the "Fierce Snake." She was indeed deadly.

The four hours had passed, and my research was safely conducted. I was now on the train, alone in a single cabin, and could now examine the relic that she had given me. A small clasp locked the entire box. After some picking with small screwdriver, I managed to open the box. Inside, a small oblong object lay nestled on a fine cushion of red silk. It was an aged piece of artistry, no doubt sculpted by some long-dead worker of the arts. However, scripted along the inside surface of the box lay a small message: "*Time befalls upon the misfortune, who cometh upon the box.*"

I did not know what to make of the message until I looked at my hands. Were they so wrinkled and old just a few hours back? It appeared that I had fallen under a curse of some

strange sort, not that I believed in these things. Time may have been coming, but for me it was running out. A commotion was heard in the carriages next to mine. I could not be alone for much longer. This relic must be returned to the old woman. Nairwadi was not far off in the distance. Its lights still twinkled brightly in my eyes. They were coming quickly. I leapt out the windows and, with light feet, flew away to the roofs of Nairwadi like a moth, darting about as if it were hiding from some mysterious force.

I reached the Russian roofs of Nairwadi, and there crouched, fearful of discovery. My hands were becoming ever more gnarled, and my veins stood out like an ancient highway upon wrecked wastelands. They moved convulsively, grabbing at empty air. It must have been dawn by now. I looked down upon the cobbled street below me. Oh look! A baker preparing his goods for another day's sale. Small rolls of crusty croissants competed for attention along the shelves of buns and bread. On the other side of the street the old widow lived, in a drafty old house which had no place on the busy thoroughfare of this street. I had found the old widow.

Once again, I flew as a moth down towards her door, and knocked lightly. I heard nothing. I placed my ear next to the door to discern some sound from the silence of the drafty old house. I heard nothing. Perhaps the old widow was dead. I placed an eye to the small peephole in the brass doorway. I saw nothing. Then, I heard a soft sound inside the house. I looked inside the peephole again. For a second or so, I saw the old woman standing in the middle of the hallway, a step back from the door itself, before my vision turned black. I felt a bite on my trousers. Almost detachedly, I realized it was hers. I heard a faint sucking sound, and then my energy left me. I was unable to stand, and sank to the floor. My mouth moved as I tried to tell the old woman to take her relic back, but no sound came. I desperately moved my hand towards my pocket, and lifted the relic out. But, alas, my life failed, and the small box dropped from my hand with a dull clunk to the ground. My last thought, before my final

breath failed me was unsynchronized, and unplanned, but my mouth formed with it a single
silent word: "*Duende.*"