
FALINE
QUEST

FALINE QUEST

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Faline San and her best friend must find the author of People Who Eat.

Categories: F/F

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DAY 0 — MAY 30

The piano accompaniment is *A Taste of Honey*. The piece is commonly regarded as one of the Beatles' weakest songs. It's also, shamefully, one of the only ones I've heard. I can play piano—it's also one of the first songs I ever learned. At about half its normal pace, it's infused with a sentimental quality absent from the full-time version.

There's a movie playing. I'm not sure what it's called. The girl beside me put it on; I had abstained from the decision process two hours ago. It isn't notable but for its rather well-arranged soundtrack comprised exclusively of piano covers of old music. Towards the movie itself, the sum-of-its-parts, I'm neither interested or invested. The movie's attempts at pathos simply fail to move me. I think that much of this dull quality comes from the tepid midsection. While the movie looks and sounds gorgeous, it's unambitious and follows the pattern rotely.

... I could sing the lyrics to *A Taste of Honey*. I've heard the song itself once—that's not how I learned. I used to sing it, at half pace, for my family. Before everything.

I remember how my mother would laugh and laugh. With that lilting laugh she'd make sparkling the whole house. Music would ring out inside the hallowed halls. Light would overtake even me, even me. But for a very long time she's been in the hospital (or whatever that place she is now really is, poked and prodded for the good of science and the human race, it's fine, it's

pragmatic, necessary, utilitarian—). Scratching pours out of her empty eyesockets and rolls down her face staticky tears. The doctors say that there is no cure. I remember how solemn and serious their voices were. No tremors; it was practiced. The condition is too common, and they're used to telling girls like me their mothers won't come back.

(My father cannot unplug her. She will suffer and suffer until her brain is all taken over, because my father cannot unplug her.)

A Taste of Honey soars into beautiful harmony. I really do love how the last part of it—*"sweeter than wine"*—rolls into this gorgeous broken G-chord. That is a G-chord, right? It fills me with nostalgia. It's a song associated with goodness, for me. I think the world as a whole is good, but there are some things that are less right than they were ten years ago, or eight, whenever I learned *A Taste of Honey*. I'm eighteen, so… yes, ten years ago.

I look at the girl beside me. The orange light from the projector stains her hair brown. This girl is my best friend in the world. She is, maybe, my only friend. Isn't that a sad thought? I don't think it has to be. 'Two people is the strongest defensive position for magic.' I read a story where that phrase featured, once.

I see a tear slash down her cheek, slowly, dragging like a dagger through a painting. She smiles softly at the movie, totally engrossed. I slowly look back to the wall where the cheap projector splashes a vivid but all too 1080p image. I can make out the pixels, rough, chunky, solid things, but that might be the compression on the movie itself.

"Ah," she says.

My eyes flit to meet hers. She's looking at me now with a little, wavering smile on her face.

"It's so..."

"I'm really glad you're enjoying the movie," I say. I'm honest, when I say it. I don't lie in general. That's another thing about me you should know. I'm not prone to deception of myself or others. "It's really nice seeing you so happy."

I notice: *A Taste of Honey* omits the peppy repeated chord, leaving off on *wine*. More solemn and final.

My best friend nods, and looks back at the wall. The movie is entering its denouement. I still see the tears in her eyes. I decide I'm going to try and pay attention to the rest. The movie has been undistinguished thus far, but I don't expect it to end messily. It's a good example of a movie that's ostensibly well-formed, but one that's lacking in ambition or defining traits. Cohering lazily to the shape of a good movie does not a good movie make.

I think about other people's minds a lot. Right now, I'm thinking about how my best friend has bad taste.

She's susceptible. That's how I'd put it. I don't blame her for it; her naivety and love for what I'd consider lesser elements of a story charm me and counterbalance me. They remind me to be conscientious about why I feel what I feel about certain things. She loved that movie, though; I found it rather dull and

unengaging. Perhaps it was well-presented, but many things are well-presented while fundamentally lacking in ambition...

Yes, she falls to emotional compels often. Sometimes we sit and when we're comfortable and she's locked her legs around mine (I look at her questioningly and my pace accelerates just a second, I'm not used to human touch, not since my mother went off to the hospital or worse the scratch reclamation facility (I don't want to think about this, don't make me think about this, don't let me think about this)) we're just watching a movie and suddenly I'll see her crying, crying because it's so beautiful! It's beautiful, she says to me, she says my name. My best friend says my name (I remember. I remember that.). "Can I hug you?"

("Yeah. Yeah, of course, it's okay.")

Sometimes she cries for no reason. She thanks me for letting her be around me as if that's something to thank me for. ("It's okay.")

I think she was hurt. Maybe it's something to do with her colorful hair. Did she dye it, and get hit, and now she feels bad? It has to be something like that, right? It's alright; she'll make up with them, right? I've been telling her she can sleep over at my house, if she wants, but she always d-d-delays, "Haha!" stall, succumb, submit, sell off your succor, safety, silence. In an emotionally vulnerable state, people are a lot more vulnerable to crying from these sort of dross movies. That's what it is. ("It's okay.")

... I'm sorry. Saying that sounds sociopathic of me, doesn't it? I'm simply... trying to observe naturally, without placing my own biases in it all. I value realism. My hypotheticals are realist, right? I bet you'd agree. I bet **[ ] you're** agreeing right now. (I

can't hear you. This is a simulation of the real me. I'm not really talking to you, am I? Just narrating, right? Interpret the story correctly, imperative command so you know who's on top.)

It's okay. ("It's okay.")

I think her natural hair color is brown. My best friend, I mean. She transmutes brown to white through bleach then colors it green like a chameleon or cannibal or witch changing skins.

I'm sorry. ("It's okay.") I think about her a lot. To the exclusion of other things. She's the only thing that's been nice to me in this world. Nice to me the way I want people to be nice to me, at least; I recall an incident where a slavering moron of a boy came up to me and I had to slam his head against the wall. He wasn't hurt permanently. Regardless now everyone shifts around me and gives me space. I'm happy with that. I'm fine with that: no one else sparkles; not like my mother or my best friend, so they can all go fuck themselves. (How do you think they do it? (I bet it's real dirty.))

... Sorry. Do I seem angry? I'm not, don't worry. Don't step back like you're frightened. I'm a teenage girl. We're allowed to talk emotionally. Most of us are emotional. ... With me it's all an awful sham, though. So don't try to use compassion on me. I'm a sociopath, and I want to kill people for the sake of it. (I'm not angry. (If everyone could ignore me except for or even her, that world...))

(If everyone could ignore me (if everyone could leave me alone (if all of them would just leave me alone, like that catty Catie or Catydid or Catelyn or Catrina or C or somethink else hard and harsh like that, pointy? and something sadistic, she's terrorizing me, slashed with a black streak across her face and she's tilting

her head at me and you know she didn't mean anything by it but "it's just mediocre," *A Taste of Honey,* that was my mother's song. That was my mother's song. (If everyone would just ignore me then it'd be a better world for them too. (I won't claw their eyes off.)))))

(It's not just mediocre.)

Besides my best friend, my sister cares for me as well. She runs a cosplay account; her name is Katherine S. S. is my last initial too but she *only* ever renders it like that, never the full name. I wonder why sometimes. Her partner's name is Abslave Marr. Marrying a Marr? K.S. Marr. That's a cute name, with a ring to it. I don't know if her partner is a man or a woman; I know the name because I saw the notification on her phone. My dad would be upset if it was a man. My mom would be upset if it was a woman. Which means it's safer to go for a woman. I hope that Katherine knows that.

Yes, it's safer to go for a woman. Anxieties about men pervade anyway. I think men are easy to come to hate. They're pathetic, aren't they?

What does my best friend think of my sister? What does my sister think of my best friend? They've met, once. I try to stay outside of the house. I think my sister is disinterested in her; my sister is apathetic and doesn't care about anything, anything in this world. Wait... ahahah. No, that's not true: once, I crept up the stairs sneaking, snickety, slink-thief: quietly wrapped my hand around the black doorknob: turned it, sound and sight illusory invisible: the door *just moved forward an inch and I saw:*

What?

(It's nothing.)

My best friend liked her, I think. But she likes people, right? She likes everyone. She mirrors, matches my mother, provides light where there ought to be none. I am dour and put a damper on all interactions; she lifts them up an equivalent amount. Together we sum to zero.

Yes. Her hands creep along my legs as she infiltrates my lap. I look down at her. Her head, warm, leans against my torso, pushes underneath my arm. I'm conscious that I'm holding my breath. I'm conscious that she's falling asleep. I'm conscious of her underneath me, of the connection that I feel with her now. I can see her own chest rise and fall. I can see the outline of her body better than I can imagine it. Can I imagine it? I can't. (I can't imagine anything like that.)

(Won't **[T] you** leave me?)

002 / [Things may be alike. Don't worry, it's just a quirk of this universe] - DAY ?

Sometimes very rarely when I'm driving back to my house even though I make the turn into my neighborhood at the right point off the freeway that connects us to our town I'm gripped by this weird feeling that comes to me in a dark and insidious flash: *That everything is wrong*. The idea that I've stumbled into some screwed up counter-world, an alterworld in which dark and despairing and despairful things crawl around horribly, slimily, probing out with their multifarious tentacles to grab and drag some poor girl who's stumbled in from the land of the living...

I'm driving through, down these lonely labyrinthine trails, and they're the same as normal, but something in the lighting is different, or the surroundings are different. There's some second world I've temporarily inhabited here. No one else in the car beside me, no other people. Lights flicker in my eyes. There are no people in this alterworld. The universe born of silence, eradication of all sentient life, except for the sole observer, whose viewing of this place is, somehow, metaphysically necessary.

Maybe it's the fact that the sun is setting. The buildings are in the right place, and so are the signs. Yet the scene taken as a whole... it's wrong. (Wrong holistically. Coherence to what's inside yet form and content are, indeed, inseparable.)

(I've been reading books more recently. In the wake of everything that's happened with my mother, with my father, with my family... when something is sad, the only thing you can do besides painfully take it on the face is to evade your feelings by immersing yourself in a second world. When I read books, I'm transported to this other universe.

There's one piece of writing that has that effect most strongly. I remember clearly how upset we all were about it, how strange it was to us. It's called *People Who Eat*.

I'm not totally sure how to describe the story. Well, for one thing, it's a quest, published on a website called SufficientVelocity. SV is mostly a place for fanfiction and other transformative works to be posted, though it has a different (less erotic (or fluffy, emotional)) mien from Archive of Our Own. Despite this, *People Who Eat* was a piece of original fiction. (Why do I use the word "was", you ask? I'll get to that another time. Listen.)

It differed from most SV quests in a lot of ways. I think... part of what was attractive to me was the vivid representation of the protagonist's internality. The usage of the second-person *you* was genre standard. Most quest main characters weren't really individuals in their own right, but a sort of gestalt mind, actions decided upon by vote, personality, temperament, and other mental conditions largely downstream of this. While there were a couple of quests that I felt like worked in a way to more directly execute this in a way that was harmonious and traditional, *People Who Eat* took a literalizing glass to the idea of a player-controlled *you*-construct—it was a rough, uneven story, not quite a true quest but not a novel in any real sense,

some form of unique collaborative roleplay especially reliant on the "author."

It was confusing to me. I didn't quite understand what decisions or thoughts compelled that author to write the story in the way they did. Why the dropped plotlines, if in the end the player votes turned out not to matter? What was the thing that the author meant to say, writing this story? Was it just a form of communication of feeling? A fancy letter?

Hah. That wasn't the part that was *really* confusing to me. The part that brought so much strife to me and my friends and all the people who lived in this town... why did it mirror the world?

Why was *I* in *People Who Eat?*

Faline San. There's only one other person in this world who shares my name, a YouTuber—pseudonymous, though. And yet I'm in *People Who Eat*... if that was all, it'd be normal. A coincidence I could accept. (But it's not.) You see, everyone I know but my best friend is in *People Who Eat*. Adslave is a corruption of Abslave. Cana is perhaps Catie. Katherine, even, is transmuted to Catherine. So which came first? *People Who Eat* or those who surround me? Obviously the real world, right? That's what's tricky. A chapter was posted, *Velocity*, in which Faline San (fictional) is stabbed, assaulted by the main character, through the gut. The main character promises—promises to see her on the other side—and that day—you know —

I've begun to think that—

The day *Velocity* was posted, I remember waking up and laughing. I remember the dampness of blood. My sleepwalking is normal, most of the time, but the day *Velocity* was posted, the

day before I read it, I woke up with the second-smallest steak knife in our kitchen clutched in my hands, pressing into my belly, and a terrible, terrible—not a gash. Three dark dried-blood punctures.)

Well, sometimes, even more rarely I stop the car, and realize this isn't my street, even though the buildings and the signs look similar, even if the trees are the same. I hurriedly check the map. Totally quiet around me, as if this place is a secret realm, it's Queensend Drive. My street is Last King's Lane. I wonder, then, if there's a weird joke being played on me by the universe. Of course that's not possible. God doesn't exist. Unnerved, I make a Y-turn, exit onto the road, and drive straight ahead until I end up in familiar territory once more. And, well, I can't help but notice now that my street is itself a reflection of Queensend.

I wonder what the Faline San (or maybe Feline Chan) that lives in Queensend Drive would think of this. Would she feel unnerved, seeing the reflections of this world? The things people hate most, after all, are what they see themselves in the strongest. Yes, I think she'd feel just like me.