

*The young boy sat in a classroom, listening to the words of his teacher. She was lecturing them on motivational topics, telling them that each of them were unique, each of them special. He had gone home that day to his inventor of a grandfather; an old man with wrinkles that lined his face and oil splattered over his clothes.*

*“Grandpa,” the boy had questioned in his young, high pitched voice. “Are we really all unique?”*

*The old man had pondered over this, murmuring things about congruent angles and shapes, and what caused all of them. The boy only understood half of his mutterings, the main concept some word that started with “P.” He told his beloved grandson that sometimes, you will find congruent things in life, but perhaps, not for long.*

*Another dream; the same dream. A dream where I do not feel myself, yet I feel so familiar; something so different than ordinary life.*

The boy groggily stepped out of his circular bed, feet searching for the rugs that are scattered throughout the room. Most houses had cement floors, covered with round or organically shaped rugs. The rich could afford wood floors; a single tile cut from sequoia trees. Others, the poor, have twigs and leaves scattered over the floor, none exactly able to fit with each other.

Walking into the kitchen, the boy pulled out his cheerios and cringed at each spoonful. His teeth had always been crooked, and they clashed when he tried to chew. Sometimes he recalled the teeth of the people in his dreams. They were these straight, perfect rectangles that fit snugly together like pieces of a puzzle. The boy’s teeth will never be like that.

That day he didn’t have school, because of the weather. Huge chunks of hail were scattered all over the winding streets. Only on nice days do cars try to venture on the curved roads, but mostly everyone would get by with bicycles. On that day though, all the chunks of ice make any form of travel almost impossible.

With no school, the boy didn’t have much to do. At the age of thirteen, every student had already learned most of the academics- cursive was as easy as breathing, in which students were given their own chalkboards, along with cone shaped pieces of talc, or when the school could not provide that, uncut chunks of jagged limestone. In the circumstances in which students used pencils, they were given bulbous wood carvings filled with the same shaped graphite. Science was an extremely small subject

and more or less covered. Art was mostly contours or non-objective, with only organic shapes, which the boy found uninteresting. The final subject, history, only stretched back to the past fifty years, the parts before that a mystery. There were some rumors of other courses that were forbidden, but he did not try to meddle in them. For, he would call himself “the average boy,” but no one was average. Nothing in his life was the same; everything was supposedly “unique.” Just like something he barely remembered from his dreams.

The boy decided to search for something to do around the house, for going outside was out of the question. He descended down to the lower floor by jumping into a small, round carriage. Using a pulley mechanism, he slowly lowered himself, and jumped onto the soft blades of grass awaiting him.

The ground level, as the boy liked to think of it, was actually a vast garden, filled with curled trees and spindly flowers. A glass dome encased the vegetation, and kept the area warm. The boy loved to explore the fields of green, wanted to know what was in every nook and cranny. Today was the perfect day for him to go exploring, get lost in the mysteries of the plants.

He began where he always did, under the largest tree in the garden. Being laid out in a circle, the tree was the center of the enclosure, and different plants grew around it in concentric circles. Every time the boy explored, he loved looking under its gnarled roots, which had not been fully grown in the ground. Sometimes, he could even duck under arc of a root, as if he were passing through a portal to a new world, rather than just the other side. As he adventured under a substantially large one, he noticed there wasn't dirt underneath; rather, there was a gaping hole. Instantly filled with curiosity, the boy set off to find a stone, and dropped it down the opening. After a second, he heard a small *clang*, meaning the drop wasn't too high. With a quick breath, in, out, he braced himself and jumped.

With a loud *thump*, the boy landed on a smooth, cold surface. His hand groped for a source of light, and eventually found a switch. As a dim light bulb flickered on, he could not help but gasp.

The room was extremely strange, filled so many things he could not name. The floor was covered with tiles, each being the exact same shape, and fit right together, nestled without any overlapping on the ground. All across the walls were books, each with a tall spine similar in shape to the tiles but taller, so they could be stored tightly among each other on the shelves. In the front of the room was a wooden desk, on it was a leather bound book, and some kind of screen, one that looked similar to the personal chalkboards they kept at the school, only the sides were... aligned, in a sense. The boy could not find a word for it, something that was on the tip of his tongue.

*Perhaps I could find something about it here*, he thought, and picked off a book from of the shelves.

At first, he could not decipher the writing. Everything he had ever written before was in cursive, and this was some kind of blocky print. Each letter that was the same looked identical, and some were made entirely of straight lines. It seemed to be the same language, and the boy tried to match up the letters to the ones he knew. In this way, he was able to decipher most of the writing.

*Mathematics* was the title of the book. It was relatively thick, so the boy flipped to the middle. In the section he flipped to, he read about asking your teacher for a ruler and a compass to do an investigation, and the boy realized that this was something that kids were meant to learn about. And yet, he was confused by this because it was never on any agenda or syllabus he'd ever read. Why was there no such thing as "math?"

Reading on, he learned about something called "construction," where you duplicate things using only a straightedge and a compass. The boy had always had a compass to make circles, but never a straightedge. In his whole life, he rarely saw anything that was straight, most things being in nature or curved. But this book was full of straight things, from the figures shown to the pages themselves. He read about constructing certain points in triangles, (one of the only named shapes he'd heard about) and making perpendicular bisectors. Most of the vocabulary words he knew, or could use context clues for. There was only one thing to construct he had never seen before entering the room.

Something called *parallel*.

It was the alignments of the pages, the tiles on the floor. Each line that never intersected in the same plane was considered *parallel*. The thought made the boy shiver. One mantra of a teacher of his was *never say never*, but with parallel lines, a never was possible.

With this thought creeping into his mind, the boy closed the book, and walked to the desk. So the sides of the desk were parallel. And so was the screen. Even some parts of the letters he had seen in the book. Why was this place overflowing with something he'd never seen before anywhere else?

Looking for answers, he reached for the book on the table. Judging by its looks, he guessed it was a journal, and confirmed it as he flipped through the pages. The text was in print, but easier for him to understand as it was hand written, the writing small and neat. Hungry for an answer, he began to read.

April 20:

*Sometimes, I feel confined in this world. Every day is like the same day- I get up for work and come back home, exhausted. The cubicle is like a prison, with no way of escape. Is there anything that can save me?*

I've tried to tell this to my father, but he does not take me seriously enough. He has already retired, doing whatever pleases him. At the moment he is staying at me and my husband's house, for I cannot bear to send him to a retirement home. His mind is still healthy. I don't want him to become something trapped, like me.

April 24:

My father tells me that my son is quite the inquirer. According to him, the young child has asked if we are really all unique. I believe my son has twins in his class- identical ones. That's probably the reason for his curiosity, but my father thinks otherwise. My philosopher of a father has gone into "deep thought" mode, and says that mathematics allows for so many congruencies. He says that with just parallel lines themselves, with a transversal there are so many congruent angle pairs, (Alternate interior, alternate exterior, corresponding) and began to babble on with parallelograms, squares, rectangles and trapezoids. At the moment he's off in his workshop, a small room in the basement filled with tools and textbooks. He says he's creating an experiment, assuring me that it's one hundred percent safe, but I'm not so certain.

May 11:

Father is finally done with the mysteries of his little "experiment." Today he has given me something that looks like a little girl, about my son's age. He tells me that her name is Maia, and it stands for Mathematical Artificial Intelligence Adolescent. She's a cute child that can make natural conversations with me and is extremely smart at math. Father says that she can also destroy anything I want her to, despite how she looks. He wants to see what would happen if I told her to get rid of parallel lines. I feel hesitant with the idea, but maybe it's what I want, too? Don't I want to get rid of my confinements, feel free in the world? I've always felt like parallel lines and geometry in general seemed too stiff, too manmade. Would I feel free and organic if I've rid myself of all of those things?

May 18:

Today, I made my decision. I have told Maia that I wish for everyone to be unique. Away with the cubicles, away with every day being exactly the same. She tells me that to do so, she must get rid of parallel lines. I tell her that she can do whatever she wishes. Maia is like my second child, a girl I have been doting on ever since my father gave her to me. I keep her in my room, brush her hair and

tell her stories. I've been raising her like my child, chiding her as to never touch her "grandfather's" workspace, and to always be polite. It would be quite confusing to introduce her to my son, a girl who is not my daughter but still mine. I will wait for them to be older, when they are mature enough to understand.

Maia is telling me that she's getting rid of parallel lines, all by herself. She knows that she is a robot, once rolling back her frilled sleeve and showing me her arm- entwined metal that looked like twisted wood. She tells me she can destroy anything she wants to, and has left the room for the first time to rid the world of the parallel lines.

June 2:

Life has been different after Maia destroyed the world of parallel lines. Everything has become irregular, or organic. The staircase has been ruined- the rectangles misshapen and collapsing. Father assures me he'll find a new way for people to get upstairs- something using circles. I have not tried to venture out into the roads yet, but we don't have much food- the wires that connect the fridge were parallel and had been destroyed. My husband has told me he'll go out to get something, and has left in the car. He has not been back for quite some time.

June 5:

Oh, it's horrible. I've just received a phone call. My husband is dead.

He had been driving past the local prison, off to the supermarket. The people there were malicious, horrible people kept behind bars and fences. But I suppose Maia had not made any exceptions. The once parallel prison bars became crooked, fence holes widening and shrinking, not the uniform rhombuses they used to be.

I hear one man was able to get away. He was the one to run in front of the car on purpose. For whatever reason, I don't know. All I know is that it killed my loved one, and now he's gone forever.

There's nothing I can do but cry right now. I need food, I need love. Maia has returned from doing the deed (or perhaps now it's a curse?) and she hates how sorrowful I am. She wishes for me feel better, but I cannot.

In memory of my husband, I have planted a tree near the entrance of the basement. The tiles of the kitchen floor have been mostly shattered, and soil peek out from underneath. For some reason, she hasn't touched my father's work place. Perhaps it's because I had instructed her not to. The

foliage I plant is a tall, handsome tree, and around it I plant fruits and flowers. They do not grow as I remember them, each being twisted and strange.

I do not know if I like this new life.

I cannot stand it.

I've left this notebook for father to read. I don't want to be there to see him cry. My last favor I asked of him was to make the house the best it could be for my son. But I don't want him to remember this choice I've made. It was such a rash decision, and I find myself regretting it. I want to know if Maia's arm really can destroy anything.

I will ask her to rid my son's memories of this event, and then rid the world of me.

With a chill, the boy flipped through the rest of the blank pages. In the back, he found a rectangular photograph, old and wrinkled. On it was a picture of a beautiful young woman, eyes bright. Her thick, hazelnut hair cascaded over her shoulders. This must have been the author of the book.

This must have been his mother.

The boy soon realized that almost all of his connections to his family have been destroyed. Only one person was left.

He had to find this Maia.

\* \* \*

In preparation to meeting her, the boy read most of the textbooks on the shelves, after school. He read about programming, more mathematics, and subjects he'd never even heard about. By the time he had gone through all of the books, it was early spring. He decided that he was ready.

He had not been to his driveway in many years, the flat asphalt in the shape of a large circle. Using a broom made up of collected twigs and leaves from the garden, he first brushed away the dirt and leaves that accumulated there. Then, with the edge of a piece of wood scavenged from the workshop, he took his school chalk and drew a line, a vibrant streak of yellow across the black. Next came a transversal, and using a compass with the talc rather than a pencil, he measured the angle of the two lines. Constructing an equally measured one, and then creating a line with the two points.

It was a constructed set of parallel lines.

The boy sat in the glaring sun, awaiting the robot. She arrived sooner than expected, flying over with a jetpack. Her hair was golden as the sun, and she wore a frilly white dress with matching gloves.

"Get back," she snarled. "I'm destroying this."

Quick as he could, the boy jumped in front of her. “Not before you get past me.”

They circled around each other, until he pounced with a stick in hand. With a scream he cut her face, as she yelped and socked him in the eye. They both recoiled, jumping back, and stared at each other.

“Not bad,” Maia sneered. She took a glove and ripped it off. Underneath was the arm the boy read about in the journal, a beautiful limb made out of twisted metal. “Say goodbye,” she said, the metal humming as it warmed up.

“Wait!” the boy yelped. She froze, but glared at him nonetheless. “I, um...” he tried to recall the information he read in preparation to this encounter. What popped in his mind was programming.

“You’re a robot, right?” he asked her. Maia nodded, eyes asking *so what?* “Well, that would mean that your brain was coded using binary and such, so...”

“All the ones and zeroes that make up who you are now? They’re all parallel.”

Maia stared at the boy for a second, and then his words dawned on her. A single water droplet fell from her eye, followed by others. With silent tears slipping down her face, she slowly pointed her arm at her own head. Shaking violently, the metal began to vibrate louder, ready to destroy another life.

*Wait*, the boy thought, *can robots cry?*

“Stop!” he yelled, pushing her to the ground. He pinned down her arms as the weapon went off, shooting a beam of light that exploded in the sky. “How are you crying? That’s not possible!”

“I... I don’t know,” Maia whimpered, tears mixing with the dark red oil from the cut running down her face. Unless... unless it wasn’t mechanical oil either. Brushing her cheek, he brought the red liquid to his mouth and tasted a familiar metallic taste; blood.

The boy was determined to figure this out. “Do you remember the old man who created you?” he asked, trying to fit pieces of this puzzle together. Maia tilted her head at this, looking confused.

“I was about five when I met your grandpa,” she said. “He found me in the streets, when I was missing my arm after my father severed it off. My father... he was a scary man. Said I cost too much money for him to buy his spirits. After he cut off my metal arm to sell, he abandoned me in the streets.”

It was beginning to come together for the boy. There were two solutions, the first being that this girl really was a robot. Maia had only seen her arm as mechanic, the rest covered by synthetic skin.

Or, she was a cyborg. That would explain everything, and seemed to be the logical answer. His grandfather must have given her a new arm, and allowed his mother to raise her with the love she deserved. Thinking that she wasn’t ready to go back to society after the experience with her father, he

probably told everyone that Maia was a robot so she could stay away from human interaction for a while. He must have been planning to reveal her true identity someday.

But the boy's mother must have told Maia to get rid of parallel lines. And since Maia loved her foster mother so much, she decided to carry out whatever her mother wished.

And things fell apart.

Taking the journal out of his bag, the boy opened it to the last entry and showed it to Maia. "This," he said, "Is how my mother actually felt about the destruction of parallel lines. So you don't have to go about destroying them now."

With such a burden raised off her shoulders, Maia began to cry again. Although this time, they were tears of relief. "Oh, goodness," she sobbed, "oh thank goodness."

She walked over to a tree nearby, and showed the boy a nest. Inside was a family of cheeping bluebirds. "I couldn't bear to kill them. I've had so many die by my hand, and these birds were to be no exception. Do you see those feathers? On both sides of a vane the barbs are parallel. But I just... couldn't."

"It's okay now," the boy said, "we can allow parallel lines anywhere- we can rebuild the world"

"I guess we should get more acquainted first, before we begin to work together," Maia suggested. "What is your name? You already know mine."

Looking at the floor, the boy shrugged. "I never had one. I can only remember things from when I was six, after you, well... you know. Most people have just called me 'you' or 'him.'"

"Well that won't do," Maia said, thinking. "How about this: since my name stands for Mathematical Artificial Intelligence Adolescent, then your name could be... *Matthias*!" Matthias smiled at her pun, and decided that it was a fine name.

Now fully introduced, both decided that they would try to rebuild the world with parallel lines. Mathematics and further sciences should be taught, along with other subjects. Students would be able to use computers and other digital technology again, and things could be typed. Children would receive braces, to help straighten their teeth. Houses would be built with a foundation made of quadrilaterals with parallel sides, mostly squares, with bricks making up the walls as rectangles so they may stack together easily. Cars would be more accessible, as the parallel roads would be much safer. More adjustments to the life Matthias' mother had created would be enforced, as both he and Maia would try to pave a new road for the future to come.

A straight, parallel road made of congruent, rectangular cobblestones.