

The City and the Country

by [Justin Wong](#) (January 2025)



Bucolic (Henri Jean Guillaume Martin)

In the beginning all the world was America. –John Locke

Part 1

Chapter 1

“...What I mean, life has become dull. Look at how we are made to live, chasing money, though for what? What is the prize at the end of it. Please tell me. There is no hope of ownership, this was a given for previous generations, was it not? The fruit of one’s labours represented in some kind of asset. And

even if you were of that fortunate kind – meaning our forebears – the human lot consists of death. Then what is all the struggle and strife for?” said Quentin Ignatius going off on one of his famous rants.

“Well, you are right to say that things have become difficult for us.” remarked Joseph A. Scott. “Though if we play our cards right, maybe we won’t have to work to have something. Haven’t you heard? That when the baby boomers die, it will constitute a huge transfer of wealth.”

“There are many problems with what you are saying. The average lifespan has risen and continues to rise. When the boomers all begin to croak, they will be 90-100, and we will be in 60-70, and becoming senile ourselves. What do you suggest we do? Freeze our eggs and start families that late in the day? Nature didn’t intend us to conceive children through the medium of Viagra, but rather in our youth as was natural throughout our history. And besides, as much as I can be taken with fits of morbidity, I can’t move myself to anticipate other people’s deaths.”

“Then what do you want to do? You don’t seem to be happy about work, nor about receiving an inheritance. What is your suggestion?”

“I think you misunderstand me exclaimed Quentin, I am not against the work ethic per se. Many radicals, myself amongst them, have seen themselves in such ways, *Homo Faber* and all. I just see the rewards for it as being demonstrably worse. Can you even deny that the system has been gamed? For the interests of the boomers and to the detriment of everyone else. If this is so, why should we continue playing the game? rigged as this is.”

“What and become a bunch of bums, Parasites – a simulacrum of the people you claim are destroying society?”

“Perhaps, though what I claim to be highlighting is deeper

than money. Look what this current system is doing to the human spirit. We have ne'er had so many drug addicts and melancholics. There is much talk about a mental health epidemic. Poppycock. Would a more accurate explanation to this phenomenon be that many people are disgruntled with this society. What this culture is feeding us, with work, housing, relationships, family isn't working. I have been thinking this myself, and to be honest, I desire to escape it."

"Escape, and go where exactly?"

He didn't give him an answer, at least there on that night, in his friend's shared abode. And when Quentin Ignatius exited the apartment, Joseph A. Scott was as mystified by what he meant by this as on the moment he brought it up.

Chapter 2

Quentin's views were not formulated in the abstract, but rather a lived reality. Every experience from his living and working life went in to creating this worldview, which was slowly becoming more pessimistic as the years went by. Homeownership was not only out of reach, though more of an impossibility. This was to say nothing about the possibility of marriage and the rearing of children, things supposed to provide the average person with meaning.

He knew that there were others, if not in his position, then in a comparable one, earning a couple of quid over the national minimum wage, living transiently in shared abodes until the landlord sold his asset, and upended their lives. What was strange to Quentin was why this evident injustice didn't lead, naturally to an uprising, a call to arms against this system of inequity. As for now, there was silence on the streets – no hoards of youths were up in arms that their collective futures contained in it, no seed of hope.

There is every chance that this was so because no one knew fully what the future had in store for them, and they believed wholesale, what older generations fed to them about graft being the gateway to success. Quentin knew this to be an anachronism, that labour in the current year didn't equal property, for he was young enough to be penniless, but old enough to know he had no future.

His views began to consist of an amalgamation of the pessimism of the previous Saturday. The only possibility for him, and others like him, was to demand change, or escape. Though to where? What countries would be favourable to those brimming with potential, though yet to make themselves in the world, not due to any fault on their end, but to their collective futures being robbed from them. When one read the news beyond his provincial bounds, much of the western world reflected the dire conditions in England. Australia and New Zealand were not a refuge they had been for the likes of Mr Micawber in the 19th century, and life there, was interchangeable with the situation in the north.

In the meantime, he was still very much perplexed of where to escape to, seeing as the developed west was off the table, as much as this mortal coil, suicide not being a solution.

But he carried forth with his drab routine, awaking at 7:30, crawling out of the bed at quarter to, and leaving the house at quarter past. Then, still tired from the grim night before, he would shuffle off to the bus stop, waiting for his vehicle to arrive from out of the bustling streets, taking him, and others to their places of work.

He arrived at the office around nine; dependent on the tardiness of the driver, or whether there was traffic, roadworks, or other delays; then take phone calls from morning to evening, broken up by midmorning and afternoon breaks, and a 30-minute lunch midway through.

The work's repetitious nature was not why Quentin disliked it, but the customers ringing in were exclusively obstinate. So much so, that he came to believe that the line he worked was less to help people with I.T. issues but a form of catharsis, and that people ringing in got what those from abject circumstances did from football hooliganism, or other pathologies.

Though here Quentin was, engaged in its gentler cousin, though on the butt end of it. Although never discussing this with any of his colleagues, he was well aware of a power dynamic between the caller and the answerer. Callers were free to rant, yell, and curse, whilst the handlers had to sit there, as calm as an immolated monk. This was where the incongruity hailed from, that even in their coarsest turn, the customer was unable to be called out, and thus invulnerable to critique, whilst Quentin, even in helpful moments, received from many of these ingrates, weekly complaints.

Many of these no matter how irrational, were taken with an unreal seriousness by the management, who relinquished common sense to corporate ideology. But the weak and officious management wasn't the only thing worrisome. The business had an air of paranoia, as if it was functioning not in pursuit of the profit motive, but rather it was the brainchild of a deranged eccentric who thought his persecutors were spying on him. The company watched everything their workers did and announced the fact in message boards and meetings. When workers were looking up things they shouldn't, they were fired. When home workers logged on to an I.P. address other than their home one, they were fired. When workers lagged in their work if only a bit, they were fired. The workplace had save for the bullets, the atmosphere of a warzone. One didn't know if they were going to lose their jobs, though it was a possibility one was never made to forget. One could never be relaxed, calm and at peace in the job, with the spectre of the dole queue haunting the workers in the office, as the spectre

of the grave haunted soldiers of the Somme. This was only intensified by there being no permanent ties between the employer and the employed, for many of them at least. His team worked for an agency on a six-month contract that would be extended for another six months at the end of it, if management agreed.

This gave many feelings of uncertainty, with them never knowing if there were coming or going, if they would be fed and watered this month, and be thrown on the scrapheap the next. This arrangement was to the advantage of the management, and with their staff being so precariously placed, they could fire them on a whim.

Although this arrangement, the one where people had no ties to each other (taking into consideration the corporation was a person) was in the spirit of the age, and not an aberration of it. The same force that led to the loosening of ties between man and wife, led to the loosening of ties between business and worker. This was one of the reasons that Quentin just didn't look for employment elsewhere, as they all reflected the same circumstances, none were better or worse.

After the working day was over, which was around 5, he made his way home utilising public transport, which was regrettable for Quentin as he would have liked to own a vehicle. He was robbed of this by his pay-package, which was measly, a significant portion of which went on rent, which was increasing more and more, year on year, and at a higher rate than the national minimum wage, which his hourly rate hovered slightly above. The economy seemed so geared to the glory of a few and to the expense of many, that in conspiratorial spells, he thought that he was living through some silent capture of the country, the way this society was now becoming a Shangri-La of the landlord, a paradise of the plutocrat.

This meant that he took public transport daily, amongst so many dreary countenances, returning home from the drab, smog-

filled city. One would have supposed those he journeyed amongst didn't possess liberty but were condemned in a jailcell evading the eye. The mood of this spectacle wasn't helped in autumn and winter, with the days shorter, and natural light eluding him from when he got up to when he slept, his time spent huddled in the office.

When he returned home, he would crash on his bed for half an hour, before he would cook dinner. Living amongst others led to confrontations, especially with five of them and only one kitchen. People desired generally to cook around 6, 7 and 8 o'clock, so at times there were quarrels around who could use the kitchen and when. At times it was freer regarding who came and went, born of his housemates being undomesticated. They didn't have the skill to prepare a meal, nor the inclination to learn, and dined on food culled exclusively from the canteen or the takeaway.

Though the arrangement Quentin lived in made him curious: why did he have to live amongst a revolving carousel of unknowns, when older generations were given the luxury of ownership? The answer to this lied in the decades long assault against family life, deemed as repressive, patriarchal and confining by those pulling the levers of power. You didn't need to convince Quentin of the extent of this destruction, as a part of his job he had taken enough phone calls from mothers with *miss* before their name to know that whatever those with power were trying to achieve, they had triumphed in their endeavour.

There were women without husbands, men without wives, and due to this, children without fathers. Could this be the source of his alienation? Or as it's otherwise called, atomisation. Although what didn't make sense was the current system of housing. The whole idea of having a 3- or 4-bedroom house, presupposes the traditional family, the one in the process of disintegrating.

The idea that warmth should be confiscated from man through

social forces was regrettable. But if that was the case, one becoming silly to deny, then the layout of cities needed to be remoulded to fit this vision. But as of yet, there was no plans to build houses for single mothers and bachelors, and as a result it manifested all the inequities witnessed. Split up family units required a place for the mother and the kids, and another one for the man – two instead of one. This was why accommodation was out of reach, particularly if you were younger, and inhabited the bottom of the hierarchy.

It was a topic that those at least in his predicament discussed frequently – immigration and immorality robbing them of property. Although Quentin tried not to get too anxious and indignant as to this predicament, but he thought more about money than he surmised a rich man did.

Beyond these fiscal anxieties, he tried in his free time, to pursue leisure activities: the internet and video games. He visited Joseph on a biweekly basis. He also liked to read books about being a man in a modern, technological civilisation – these dark times. He naturally gravitated to tomes on politics, economics, and history, he also visited a facet of his not-too-distant past, a collection of ethnographies and books on social Anthropology. These he held on to from his time as a student.

Chapter 3

It was Saturday – a day off from work – which for Quentin meant several things. At times he would use his weekend – the Saturday in particular – to go to the city centre, and peruse clothes and video games stores, to sit in the cafes. This was on his lonesome. As he possessed no friends or girlfriend to go with, it was something seldom done. It wasn't so much that he was compelled to do this alone amidst gleeful couples and families, but the sights of the city: in ever-present bricks;

monochromatic colours; the functionary houses of commerce, and polluted haze, looked to him like the inferno without the consuming fires.

And although Quentin didn't have a friend to go to the town within the daylight hours, it didn't mean he didn't have friends per se. There was Joseph A. Scott.

That day, he forewent his trip to the city, as he was going to see his friend instead. Their meetings usually consisted of a drink and chitchat with an interlude of food. It was an occurrence he routinely looked forward to, the highlight of a drab and meaningless life, his alienated existence. This was his only opportunity to converse with another. Though it wasn't so much that conversing with another soul was so significant – he did this as a part of his job, day in day out – but his conversations with Joseph consisted of topics he found timely and engrossing. The talk that day would be of more of the contentious kind. This was not for nothing. He had something to reveal, something he assumed his friend would find to his dislike.

"Yes" replied Quentin.

"Well, how can you, the whole business is insane."

"Why do you say that? People have always done and continue to do this kind of thing."

"But it is not so much that you are going to emigrate – live abroad – but rather it is where you are going."

"And what is the significance of this?" said Joseph wondering why his friend was being so sceptical."

"Well, if you were going to go to America. Canada, Australia. Germany, France etc, I wouldn't find your scheme half so questionable. But it is the fact that you are going to a.....a"

"A jungle. And why is that so absurd to you?"

"Well, it is going against the grain. Look at the migrations you see in the news, all the wretched of the earth, moving to lands of greater wealth and opportunity. You seem to be doing the opposite of this."

"Well, there can't be wealth and opportunity for all. The very fact there are so many coming to these countries is the thing that makes it so difficult to succeed. You know what with there only being so many resources."

"We may be fighting for scarce resources, but how does it get resolved going to a country where there are none?"

"Well, because I want to escape this entire system of living. The one of economic growth, productivity, consumerism. What do we get from such a system? A vanishingly small slice of the pie that is getting ever smaller."

"To say that you are going to a third world country would be one thing, but the place you are going is less than that. At least go to a place with running water, sanitation, electricity, gas, the internet."

"Why are you trying to defend this system we are living under? It is not as if you yourself have anything to show for your labours. Isn't this apartment that we are in not rented? And can you feasibly own a place like this in the future?"

"Well, realistically at the moment, no?"

"Then how, pray tell me, can you defend a society that provides you with no opportunity? How can you justifiably speak of its superiority? What difference does it make if you are without property in a 1st world country, or are dispossessed in Timbuktu? It is the same outcome in a different state.

"I never thought of it in that way. So, are you serious about this? Or is it another one of your fantasies?"

"It is the most serious thing that I have planned to do yet. I'm sure I'm not the only one who has been brought down by the mundane nature of modern life: the alienation; the ennui, the monotony. Besides, primitive societies have always been a great source of fascination for me. I did my degree in Anthropology. I think of my plan to leave the country as a continuation of my studies. I plan to write an ethnography of a primitive society. Studying such a society will help me to understand our origins, as hazy and as vague as these are. More than that, it can help me to see if I can find man's essence, one lost in the creation and triumph of civilisation."

"This is ridiculous, you are not at school now. "

"Call this trip some private research."

"So, you're definitely not pulling my leg?"

"Certainly not, I have booked the flight for next month."

Quentin thought that Joseph would be disappointed in his announcement, they were close friends after all. Joseph looking forward to their meetups as much as Quentin did. With the advent of Quentin emigrating from England, at least indefinitely, these would naturally cease. Joseph would be a buddy down, not that Quentin was the only friend that he had, but he got something out of their meetings that the other friends didn't provide.

He made sure to make these protestations known on the two succeeding occasions they met up before Quentin's sudden and abrupt evasion. Whatever problem Joseph had with Quentin's travel plans; Quentin had a solution for it. Whatever danger that Joseph said lurked in the jungle, Quentin had an answer for it. He wasn't going to budge. Though as a compromise Quentin said he would sporadically write letters to his friend, keeping him updated with all the goings on, as much as this was possible."

Part 2

Letter 1

The last time I spoke to you, I promised to write to you. Here I am, keeping my promise. The trip was long and extensive, not that I thought it would be an easy ride. I touched down in Sao Paulo, lingered around, for a while, took in some of the famous sites and cavorted with the locals, until a bus took me somewhere into the sticks – way out in the country. I am on the other side of the world, I don't need to tell you that the sights of this country were wildly different than the sights of England.

Plants, trees, and beasts are all strange and unfamiliar to me. I was expecting this to be so. Though I must confess that I am ignorant as to such facets of the natural world- the flora and fauna. My expertise lies in social Anthropology instead. Though the things that worried me was how dangerous and poisonous the wildlife could be. In this environment, I don't know which plants, fruit and flowers were innocuous, and which could lead to delirium and death. This wasn't to be a problem and when I exited the bus from the lengthy and extenuated ride, into the heart of the rural countryside, I hired two locals for a small price to take me into the rainforest.

I thought it would be difficult to request, though it turns out that there have been other foreigners – or eccentrics as they see it – who have gone into the rainforests depths to meet tribal people.

Although it was little to me, monetarily speaking, it was money well spent to hire these men as a helping hand. For people who live in a neighbouring village, they have an uncanny familiarity with the forest, as if they weren't venturing like me, into some tropical unknown, but rather an

extension of their home. If I thought to myself that the journey to this point, by plane and bus was long, frustrating and arduous, nothing had prepared me for the journey to the forest's heart. The terrain was rough, trees were packed closely together in cheek-to-cheek manner. The paths were thorny and sometimes slippery. These things were one such interruption. The noises from the forest could be loud and overbearing. Birds and beasts drowned every inch of this woodland with a profane chorus. I don't need to tell you that temperatures of this region are incomparable to the mild ones back home. In this place, the heat knew no rest. This was both day and night. I sweated much and grew dehydrated, until I saw a source of water from which I could drink from.

Though the heat, the manoeuvrability and sounds weren't the only obstacle in which we found. There were also vast rivers in which to cross. Whenever we went up to one, my guides would tell me in their rudimentary English, "River, river, we ride by boat now."

We would journey there by meeting a few stray tribal members who had wandered off from their grounds, who would help us in our predicament of wanting to travel down the river. They lent us a canoe, although this is an inaccurate description. Such people live in ways quite averse to the ones back home – there being no concept of property as such. They told us where we could find canoes, which were never far from fresh water. People travelling through this land left them lying by the bank whenever they wandered to and fro. Such was the nature of this journey. I lost count of how many rivers we travelled down, nor can I tell you how many miles I must have traversed.

It was three days before my arrival, and thus three nights that I slept underneath the stars, albeit in a makeshift bivouac alongside my newly formed companions. I dread to think what would become of me if I didn't have them nearby. Though nearby they were, and I arrived at my destination to meet the noble tribe of the Yasowa. I must confess this was the moment

I was dreading the most – coming into first contact with the tribe that I was to live amongst. I wondered if they would hate me or welcome me with open arms. I heard that such people could hold deep resentments, especially to those of neighbouring tribes. Would they look at me as equally suspicious? For this I had no way of knowing how.

Though when I did meet the members of the Yasowa, I was met with embrace and derision in equal measure. Some were happy to see me, others looked at me with contempt. I was told by the guides who lingered around, that I wasn't the only westerner to come there to slum amongst the primitives. This was perhaps enough to account for my cold reception amongst the elders.

As to the world of the Yasowa, did it live up to my expectations? In some respects, it did.

The natives lived in a series of tents on one side of the estate. This was shared amongst families. The division of labour was between men and women. The men hunted during the day, whilst the women dealt with domestic duties – cooking, cleaning, washing clothes.

The whole tribe ate in communal fashion. Meat and vegetables were handed around equally to all. I was surprised to find they didn't grow agriculture on their grounds. Being well versed in this area, I heard that some tribes grew wheat, corn, or other grain on their land, some have gone through the transition from hunter gatherer to agricultural man. This could easily be done, considering the amount such crop grew in Brazil. Not that I am complaining at such a lack. I came to see man in the state of his pure origins, and this is what I got.

I spent the day hunting and was thus forever on the move through the forest. When I return home at the end of the day, I'm dead beat. In such conditions, I never have a restless

night. Not just this, but I feel that I have lost a considerable amount of weight. My ribs can now be perceived through my skin. Though I have enjoyed nights of uninterrupted sleep, I can't say the content of my dreams have always brought me peace. Last night I dreamed that I saw the city: skyscrapers reached into the heavens blocking the life-giving sun; traffic from vehicles nearly mauled me in my mind's eye; and the suffocation from the fumes felt palpable and paralyzing. I was happy to know that none of this was real, that I woke up where I went to bed – in the rainforest.

Anyway, this I can say, merrily concludes my letter. I will write to you again and keep you updated with the news.

Yours truly,

Quentin

PS I have sent my guide through the forest and off a day's trek to the nearest village, to have this posted. I thought I'd let you know how difficult the art of communication is in these circumstances.

Letter 2

Since I last spoke to you, I have settled in well, better than I could have anticipated. You said that I couldn't live in an environment that wasn't rife with all amenities of modern life: electricity, running water, gas. Even though I protested your suggestion, I must admit that I had these doubts too. The thought of living without television, phones, the internet, seemed unthinkable especially to those brought up with those luxuries. Though after a few days without them, you begin not to want for them. Remember, what you lack in ease and comfort, you gain in a kind of authenticity – living life as it was intended to be lived, in accordance with our nature.

It is only right that I tell you more about these people I'm living amongst, you know really paint for you a picture. They number as a people, no more than a few hundred, although I haven't gone through the ordeal of counting them by head. They dress much like I imagine our forebears did, in animal hide and in fabrics made from hemp. Such a way of dress is suitable for this section of the world – these voracious climes, the rough woodland – that people – myself included- traipse for hours amongst poisonous plants and animals.

Their way of life is simple, peaceable and real. Why should I say this? They work, eat and make-merry. They marry, copulate, and conceive children.

Although I have been here but for a short while, this process is often gruelling. There was one woman who gave birth in her tent last week. The cries of pain were horrific, which have the power to haunt me still in moments of reverie. As could be surmised, this is without the luxury of modern medicine, which consequently amplifies the agony that women have to endure in such moments.

Though this wasn't the end of my story, and some five days after this woman gave birth, her child died, making the previous nine months a wait endured to no end. Though the fact I can say such a thing says much about how my psychology has been shaped by the world I'm from.

Although infant mortality is abnormal back home, it was normal in the past, and seeing as my being here is stepping into the past, it is normal here.

One must take the good with the bad. Though is the urban world not so evil as I surmised? That its ghastly sights are a price worth paying to upend premature death. For one thing, I don't completely buy this argument, the city was there before infant mortality reduced significantly. Child death affected the Victorians, and this was in the industrial revolution, with people labouring in the factories and down mines, where the

modern world was slowly unravelling.

The point I'm making is that modern man had to endure the agony of the city for centuries before they reaped the ease of not seeing their children succumb to cot death.

This is only the half of it, and women succumb to death when giving birth to their children.

I have yet to see this, although I wouldn't be surprised if I did by the time I leave this place, whether it is of my own volition, or an act of nature.

Though enough of this negativity, and I feel that I am speaking on this world's shadow side. On the flip side, I have mentioned in my last correspondence that I had lost a considerable amount of weight; this was in my first few weeks there. I must tell you that all the tribe are in impeccable shape, no one on this portion of the earth afflicted with obesity, or other such health conditions. You may assume that this is due to food being in short supply, though this isn't so. Food here is quite plentiful, every evening we enjoy a communal feast, I eat till my belly is bursting full. This is a diet of meat and vegetables; fruit is also in plentiful supply. My having an overabundance to sup upon, is due to by being a newby – a guest that they desire to be hospitable to. But there is also a plentiful abundance for all.

Though if people have much food to eat, how is it that they aren't afflicted with the health conditions that western man is plagued with? For one, all the food is natural, pesticides are not sprayed upon their vegetables, nor are their cattle plied with anti-biotics, or steroids for that matter.

Here we live in accordance with a nature, as I can only guess, our forebears did. People who have a fascination with primitive societies, such that they wish to imitate, have been called liberals, though what could be more conservative- to reconcile with an essence lost in progress.

Though food isn't the only thing they ingest, and there is a leaf they smoke which has calming, non-hallucinogenic effects, as well as alcohol they make from fermenting fruit. At the end of the day, meaning when work is over, people often use these things to relax themselves.

Although in regard to pleasure, one of the things I was worried about before I came here was my sexual urges. The society I am living in is traditional, thus the sexual act is done inside the institution of marriage. Sex outside of this rubric, is not merely frowned upon, but in some instances, punishable in their rudimentary institutions of law and order.

This isn't so drastic so as to have the offenders stoned alive and made into examples. In instances where any extramarital activity is discovered, the boy and girl in question are brought in front of a tribunal of sorts and cajoled into union. Such is the pressure exerted on the couple that they usually go along with the suggestion and carry out their previous activity respectably under the ordinance of their god.

Your immediate response might be that this is repressive. But please I invite you to use your imagination, their world isn't interchangeable with ours, as much as ours is with theirs. The sexual act for them is fraught with danger, as it is with indifference in our time and place. Love between a man and a woman contains the possibility of new life on one hand, and death on the other. How true this was of the western world up until the last century. The more I live amongst the noble race of the Yasowa, the more I come to the conclusion that the project of severing sex from children and disease was a mistake. Such threats are not really an impediment to the good life, but rather the root of it.

When the boys reach the age of 15, and the girls reach the age of 12, they are usually paired off for marriage. You may think this is much too young especially when you consider how

immature you were reflecting on that time in your life. Be not afeared, I am told that the ceremony merely happens at this age, and the consummation is sometime after this, years even.

The whole idea is quite ingenious, seeing as early marriage quashes the possibility of extramarital affairs. The Yasowa seem to be realists in regard to the nature of man – his sexual appetites. I thought mine in this environment would be out of control, especially when I had no outlet for them.

I have to admit that in this world, my desires have all but reduced. This is indeed another thing that I have learnt from my sojourn into the wilds a distance from civilised life – that sexual perversions are a disease born of luxury. They arrive out of a state of ease – the city – where man is supposedly cultivated. One only has to think back to the great hotbeds of pederasty, whether in Gomorrah or Athens, Greece – cities both.

This is all enlightening, stepping into the distant past, to discover, not that progress has solved but rather created troubles.

Though rather than discussing these newfound insights, of which I could name umpteen more, I thought I'd let you in on more of what is going on in the village.

The members of the tribe often go off into strange fits, pointing off into the distant yonder and shout "Ashoni, Ashoni." This I found to be a strange occurrence, so that I asked one of my helpers if they could tell me pray what these impassioned outbursts signified.

He told me that *Ashoni* was the place they used to live before they left it. When I heard this as an explanation, it all began to make sense.

Yours Sincerely,

Quentin

P.S. I'll try to write back to you soon with all the latest.

Letter 3

Dear Friend,

What else do I have to fill you in on since the last time we met? Much of course, I can hardly fill all of these pages with my every impression of my home away from home.

But what else has occurred? Nothing on the one hand, and everything on the other.

Let me fill you in on the particulars of my day-to-day existence. Owing to my sex, my duty is to hunt along with the rest of the menfolk, whilst the women and children are left to work and play respectively in the campgrounds. You may be conjuring up images in your mind's eye of me running through the forest with a spear in my hand in order to trap a wild hog, or deer common to this region. You would be right partly in that estimation, and on certain days we have gone out to gather the current day's fill and pursue vigorously a beast down a chase. Never have I ever felt so alive as in these moments. To capture a beast, slaughter it and eat it in the space of hours or days. I must admit that living in civilisation that I, as I am sure have you, have become divorced from this process. Buying meat and vegetables from the supermarket, we have become disconnected from the rhythms of nature. Here they have not. I know the time and effort that goes in to growing vegetables, the time it takes for a wildebeest to grow before it is liable for slaughter. You may think that living in a world that has no medium of exchange – gold – that all is free. I must tell you that this is not so, when the medium of exchange is time as opposed to money.

But back to your original point, the impression (or imagined impression) you have of me going through the forest armed only with a sharpened instrument is merely half true. These are other animals we hunt, or rear that require much of our precious gold of time. This includes chicken that are kept and bred in a coop. There are usually people who man these creatures exclusively.

In periods where many need to be slaughtered or bred, others join in to get the job done in a more efficient manner.

Seeing as this isn't a too laborious task, women are invited to join in and is one of the few moments when there is parity between the sexes, at least in regard to the division of labour.

In addition to poultry, fowl is plentiful and shot down from the trees with a bow and arrow. To consider these men as primitive and thus less than their more developed brethren, would be a grave error. Being amongst them they are superior in so many ways. They have shot pigeons out of trees from a distance of some 60 metres, as if this was commonplace. When the men of the Yasowa handed me the bow and arrow, I blundered, and the assaulting arrow hurtled a great distance from its feathered target. My literal cock-up, evoked laughs from the tribesman in which I shirked away in embarrassment.

Though the wider point I make is that the idea that we have in the western world regarding these men as being primitive, and thus beneath us, is wholly inaccurate. The skill they possess in engineering by bringing to life a building out of simple scraps of wood and mud is breathtaking – I have seen it with my own eyes. This is not to mention the intricate knowledge they have of the flora and fauna of this region, which is immense.

They almost instinctively know which plants one can touch and which ones you cannot, what plants you can use for the pot,

and what will make you have a paralytic fit. I use the word instinctively not to diminish their accomplishments, or in fact their intellect.

This is knowledge, I must reiterate is something they are not born with, but something that is passed down from one generation to the next. They possess a collective encyclopaedia, which is made all the more impressive since they are an oral culture, they have no written works. Nothing of their culture would survive if they were wiped off the map tomorrow, aside for their weapons, crockery and bones.

Did I tell you that in addition to hunting and gathering, and their chicken coops, they also fish in the many streams and rivers that flow through their woodland. Again watching the men work doing this, I became deeply in awe of them. The method in which they do this is not by owning a line and a boat, but by sharpened spears they stab the scurrying fish by. Although hearing this, it might seem like a crude method. But it is effective. The amount of fish they carry back to the village are plentiful, enough to fill the bellies of everyone gathered.

I have told you of how well I have settled in. This is life as I have always imagined it should be. But there are still things that are troubling me.

I have told you that members of the tribe were acting ways that seemed cryptic to me. I must confess that they still do this, meaning pointing off to the east side of the forest, and shouting "Ashoni, Ashoni." With worried and dread looks upon their countenances. My guide with his rudimentary English said that this was where they used to live. I couldn't deny that I was curious as to this and wished to enquire more. I asked him more about this mythical place called Ashoni. All he told me was that they lived there and left. "They had running away from it," was his exact words. This told me something without saying much at all.

I longed to know what it was they had run away from.

Yours truthfully,

Quentin

Letter 4

Dearest friend,

I have much to say since I last spoke to you about this enigmatic place called Ashoni that this humble tribe had run away from. What exactly was the thing they wished to escape. My not being provided with a clear answer had my imagination working in overtime. My daily and nightly dreams were concerned with this mystery.

I could only guess what this was, a forest fire that burned to a crisp, their former home; or another tribe that they had come into conflict with, had taken as booty, their previous land. There was also the possibility that their land was confiscated through capitalistic forces, something that I had studied at university.

I decided it best if I took the plunge and went into the part of the forest, where from which they sought exile. All I knew of this, was its direction, which was eastwards, where they kept pointing. I had decided to do this alone, without the guides, in case they discouraged me from going there, which I was dead set on doing. I knew not how far I had to go, whether my journey would take me hours or days. There was always the probability that dangerous tribes lurked in the woodland, who practiced cannibalism and appeared to be without conscience. I was well aware that the people I was living amongst, the Yasowa, were more genial than other groups that made a home in the wilderness.

These reservations aside, one day I set out, as I desired to

search out the mythical place they called the Ashoni. I walked, with some food, and tools for starting fires, if ever I needed to. I walked through the woodland never coming across the sight of another man. But as dusk began to form, I saw a strange presence off in the distance. So strange was it that I thought it a kind of mirage, or something I snacked upon or drank must have given me this hallucination.

As I reached the forest's end, I was met with a city. There was a sign which I walked through saying 'Ashoni'. It was full of drearish buildings that all had the hue of an unappealing grey. There were streets, avenues and thoroughfares, shops, houses and banks. I walked through what seemed as if an eerie spectacle. This was not so much that had seen these sights before, but it was entirely void of life aside from the birds which rested on the town clock and rooves of several buildings. Newspapers and leaves moved through the streets as if being guided by some ghostly wind. I walked around these sights more, skyscrapers reached into the heavens blocking the lifegiving sun; lines of parked cars seemed as if mauling me; and the suffocation from would be fumes felt palpable and paralyzing.

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Justin Wong is originally from Wembley, though is presently based in the West Midlands. He has been passionate about the English language and literature since a young age. Previously, he lived in China working as an English teacher. His novel, *Millie's Dream*, is available [here](#).

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