

Woodchuck

—Han Liang Gan

Contrary to popular opinion, living closer to uni doesn't actually mean you're always on time. In fact, if anything, the opposite is true; knowing that you're minutes away from where you need to be just means that you procrastinate a lot more. This especially true after three days of utter confusion and exhaustion—and also after you made cheap plastic rubble out of your alarm clock.

Fumbling through the straw, you retrieve your mobile phone and attempt to make out the time through your sleepy haze. With an sigh of resignation, you realise that you've missed two morning lectures and most of a tutorial. Tossing up between rushing off to catch the end of the tute and sinking back into the haystack that's now your bed, you opt for option C: caffeine.

You are rather unimpressed to see an enormous queue waiting at your usual Union House café. Tired and groggy, you find it barely worth noting that everyone in front of you is wearing a white lab coat. You wait impatiently in line for your dose of wake-up juice, honing your eavesdropping skills by listening in on idle chatter.

"I can't wait to get my hands on those Ashes."

"What makes you think you're getting them?"

"Yeah, I applied for a research grant way ahead of you."

"My project is just so much ahead of it's time, there's so much I can do, so much!"

"Oh as if, you don't even have a piece of the golden bail! What could you possibly do without that?"

"Neither do I, but I'm going to do just fine combining it with perspex pillar. Just you wait!"

"You can't just do that, you know. Have you forgotten quantum mechanics entirely? The chances of it working the way you want are minuscule."

"What is this nonsense? Nothing can work without the golden bail and you all know it! And *I* have the largest piece of it among all of us!"

"Except for me."

"And me."

"I may not have as much, but I can simply add more silver bail to make up for it."

"You idiot chemist, things don't work like that, there's more to these substances than their constituent molecules."

"Atoms, not molecules, atoms."

"That doesn't make sense, how can you turn silver into gold anyway?"

"With the steel pillar, of course! How else?"

"I ate my crayons."

"And where do you intend to get that steel pillar? My research group has already applied for a patent; you're not getting your hands on my steel pillar!"

"I heard your patent application got rejected two hours after you submitted it."

"Oh shut up!"

"You all keep forgetting the gold bail, it's the most crucial part! Any experiments you plan without it are doomed from the start!"

"As I said, my silver bail is almost a perfect substitute for it, it doesn't matter AT ALL!"

"You people are thinking too small! What I do with my perspex pillar will dwarf you all!"

"Oh yeah?! I happen to have just as much perspex pillar as you, and some steel pillar too! Everything you can do, I can do!!"

"BUT NOT WITHOUT GOLD BAIL!!!"

The conversation reaches a climax, then deteriorates into a hushed cacophony of “cure for cancer”, “time travel” and “cold fusion”. While trying to make sense of what they’re saying, you have a brainwave of your own, and one much more applicable to the real world: you could go to the café outside the Ian Potter Museum; no self-respecting scientist would ever venture within a 10-metre radius of a contemporary Australian art gallery. As you bolt off towards the prospect of queueless coffee, you turn back to take one last look at the wall of white figures and promptly smash into a pair of automatic doors that chose not to acknowledge your existence. Picking yourself up, you notice a large poster stuck onto one of the doors.

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