

A Hidden Park



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Shall I make a dash for it? Amanda wondered to herself, while watching the platform slide by slower and slower. *Amanda, you're nearly fifty and you're early enough, don't be ridiculous*, she chastised herself. So instead of sprinting for her next train like she would have done a lifetime ago, she calmly stepped out of the train and walked towards the platform her next train would leave from, like a grown up.

She sat down on a bench at the correct platform and grabbed her notes, since she would have to wait 20 minutes. However, because it was just an explanation of her job she quickly put the notes back in her shoulder bag and instead began to think about the times she used to sit on this bench, back when this was her daily commute to her study. The University van Amsterdam had had terrible connection times back then and apparently it still had them now.

She mused how she once was convinced she would work for the NS and make the perfect train schedule, void of all these stupid connections that clearly didn't work. Although her job did end up being about schedules, they certainly weren't as repetitive as the ones at the NS. Which was why she was going to give a talk about it on her former university. Maybe she could give the current students an example of what they could do after their study, and she might even be able to make them excited about her company. Not that she actually believed that she could make them excited to work in Schagen of all places.

After her train arrived it was only a short ride to the university's station. Seeing that station again, seemingly still the same as 20 years ago, brought back a memory: getting off the train, going through the gates, down the stairs, through the tunnel. A memory, but a memory repeated hundreds of times. So lost in the different memories that were all the same, Amanda didn't notice the changes at first.

She had almost crossed the intersection after the tunnel by the time that she noticed the changes. Instead of being greeted with the usual star gazing towers and the new AI building, she saw new buildings. All of them squares, containing a lot of glass, metal and more squares. Each one even higher than the last, although it was slightly comforting that the apartment building above Maslow was still the highest building around.

Amanda could do little else but stare. Trying to remember how it used to be and which things had had to make place to accommodate all these new buildings, she walked around the crowd in front of the Science Doner. The food truck smelled just as delicious as it always had, though Fuhad wasn't there. The first part of the walk hadn't changed much either, but the bike racks seemed to have moved underground. It seemed like they had removed a few small ponds too, to make more space for one of the buildings.

Feeling a little overwhelmed, Amanda decided to see if the VIA room, the computer science association's room, was still where it used to be. Entering the not-so-new AI building, she noticed the rotating door wasn't any faster than it used to be. Looking around the building made a wave of nostalgia well up. Students sitting around with friends in various places, convinced to do homework, but always managing to get distracted by each other. The VIA room had not experienced a lot of change either, and was just as crowded as it had always been around five o'clock.

Since it was still a bit early she began to explore the rest of the campus, to see what had stayed the same and what things had changed. She used the building's other exit, and immediately looked up at a new building. It had a lot of huge windows, just like all the new buildings seemed to have. This one had white triangles all over as detailing, similar but still very different from the building behind it, smaller and more subtle.

There definitely wasn't space to play beach volleyball anymore. Not that she was a fan of volleyball, but she had often watched people play from the VIA room. Amanda was having a difficult time pinning down her feelings, the slight ache in her stomach making her uncomfortable. Or were her feelings actually causing the ache?

Amanda chose to walk towards the main building, still looking up, staring at all the small details of the building. The tiny amount of space between the two buildings made her feel a little claustrophobic. Realistically it wasn't that narrow. However the two high buildings so close together without any extra space made it feel that way to her.

She walked around the main building to see the other new buildings from up close. From this direction all buildings seemed to loom over her. Amanda could only see two new buildings from here, but due to the placement of them, all buildings seemed to close off the space. It made the uncomfortable feeling in her stomach intensify.

Walking a little quicker, Amanda admired the colors of the building directly in front of her. Despite the pretty colors it still had too much glass, and was solely made out of squares. The colors seemed random, just a few beams here and there with a bright color, contrasting the black of most of the beams. They were all happy colors, ranging from red to teal to yellow and more. Luckily they weren't blindingly bright.

However, overall it was still very sleek and squared, joining the other buildings. The colors didn't take away the looming feeling either, even if they tried. The height and placement hid most of the view from sight, and it also blocked a lot of the light. The lack of sunlight certainly didn't help to dissuade the trapped feeling.

Amanda kept walking around the main building until she saw the next new building. It stood against the colorful building and was the highest one as far as she could see, and it was all steel and glass. It didn't look as if anyone had put any thought into the design of this one, like they quickly had to get something ready for use. The building didn't look cheap, but it definitely lacked character.

After walking a little closer, Amanda realized that the colored building and the steel building didn't actually share a wall, but the path between them certainly wasn't wide. By now she was quite close to the steel building. Its size made her feel small and insignificant.

The buildings looked very modern, but all the glinting glass and straight lines were not her preference. They did fit into the image of Science Park very well.

Amanda had been exploring everything outside for some time now and there were few people left at Science Park. That wasn't that surprising, given it had passed 5 o'clock by

now, it however made the Park seem somewhat abnormal. But all the new buildings made it seem abnormal in the first place, so maybe it wasn't the lack of students.

All in all there had been four new buildings and they definitely limited the amount of space students had to just hang around. The bike racks had been placed underground, so that took up less space, but Amanda had seen very little students just relaxing outside. Not that there were any fun places to do so. With this weather it would normally be quite busy outside, but it wasn't and that made Amanda sad, and disappointed in the UvA. These kids wouldn't know what it was like to be able to just be outside, without having to go somewhere.

Since it was time to get ready for the lecture, Amanda headed to a lecture room in the steel building. Someone was waiting on her there.

'Amanda right?' They asked when she walked in.

'Yeah that's me. I assume you are from VIA, right?' Amanda replied to the cheerful person in front of her.

'Yeah! I'm Olivia and I'll be with you this evening. If you have any questions feel free to ask,' they said enthusiastically, 'Did you want any coffee or tea?'

'Thank you,' Amanda answered, 'I think I'll have some tea.'

'You can get set up here,' they gestured towards a few cables on a desk, 'and I'll quickly get our drinks in the meantime,' Olivia finished while walking towards the door.

'What are the questions you guys have?' Amanda asked to conclude her talk. It had gone smoothly and the students seemed mostly interested. This specific wording of her question had always resulted in more questions and it didn't disappoint this time. After all the questions were answered and the applause died out, everyone started leaving the room.

After answering a few more questions of students on their way out, Amanda asked Olivia, 'How do you like studying here?' She started closing down her laptop and packing up her stuff.

'I really like it, although some buildings are a bit of a walk. I'm actually doing a board year right now, so I mostly stay in Lab 42 this year, but most spaces are nice to study in.'

'What is your favorite place here to hang out? Nothing I encountered seems really interesting.'

'Well, I'm in the VIA room a lot, which I like, but otherwise I tend to hang out on the roof,' Olivia answered as they helped tidying up the room.

'On the roof?' Amanda looked up, confused.

'Yeah! They made this really cool thing on there, I could show you it if you wanted?'

'Sounds good, what is it like?' By now Amanda and Olivia had finished everything and Olivia led them towards the elevators in the building.

'Well, I don't want to reveal too much, but it's nice that we're in the highest building.'

The elevator ride was quick and it opened up into a small hallway with only one door. Olivia grinned excitedly and quickly walked towards it to open it. The bright light from outside blinded both of them a bit, since the days were getting long in this time of the year, but Amanda quickly saw the roof.

Her mouth almost dropped open. It looked more like a park than a roof, although an unusual one. It had moss instead of grass and the rest of the plants were in pots. There were a couple of different pathways, and there were a few artsy things around, all rather low with a flat or semi flat top. As for the plants, there were pots with flowers and other plants all over and some trees. There also seemed to be patches of a different moss with tiny purple flowers, giving everything a playful feeling.

'What are those things for?' Amanda asked while pointing towards one of the artsy things.

'Oh those are seats, look, some students are using them over there,' Olivia pointed to the side. 'It's good right? I love to hang out here, come I'll show you a few things.'

'Some of the trees you see are actually fruit trees, like apples, cherries or plums. It's awesome to be able to snack on them in the spring,' Olivia explained as they continued walking towards the edge of the roof.

The sun was close to the horizon by now, but it still shone onto the roof, bathing everything in a golden glow. Due to the height of the building they had a beautiful view of the city too and Amanda noticed the shape of the lake next to Science Park for the first time.

They walked towards the edge of the building, where they could view the other buildings from Science Park. The new ones all seemed to have a similar setup to this roof, a few trees, some moss, a few paths, stuff to sit on and different plants to make things interesting.

Amanda noticed that the older buildings didn't have as much greenery growing on top of them, and asked Olivia about them. They seemed to just have some moss on them, maybe a few other tiny plants, no bigger ones like the new roofs.

'Yes, you're right. It's because those roofs weren't build to have much weight on them. They were made to be just roofs, unlike the newer buildings, which were built with the knowledge they would have to hold all this weight. Because there's a layer of earth here, the plants, the trees, and during the day there are quite a few students on here. Standard roofs aren't made for that, so they can't just add it. Instead they put moss on them, and a few nesting boxes. See those stumps? Sometimes birds will nest in them, it's fun to watch them.'

'It would be nice to be able to watch the birds flitting around here, I think.'

'I absolutely love to do so, for sure.'

'Hi Olivia! Doing good?' Amanda and Olivia turned around to see a guy walking up to them.

'Hi Tim, I'm good, I'm giving Amanda here a view of the best part of Science Park. Amanda, this is my friend Tim. Tim this is Amanda, she gave a talk for VIA tonight,' Olivia explained.

'Nice to meet you,' Amanda said.

'Nice to meet you too. How are you enjoying the view?'

'I love it a lot, even though it's really weird to be standing here.'

'Really, how so?'

'Back when I studied here over twenty years ago, these buildings weren't here and you couldn't get up to any roofs either.'

'I can imagine this must be weird then. You really couldn't go on the roof?'

'No, any building with a strong roof wasn't built yet back then, and there was more than enough space on the ground. We even had beach volleyball fields.'

'For real?' Olivia interrupted. 'That would be so awesome!'

'Yeah, they were used quite often. It's a pity they removed them.'

'Did Olivia point out the nesting boxes?' Tim changed the subject.

'Of course I did, shorty!'

'Yeah, I love that they thought about nature too,' Amanda added.

'Here we go,' Olivia muttered.

Tim didn't seem to hear her. 'Well, they did the bare minimum. Even though there's lots of plants around, none of the animals can enjoy them, since they can't get up here.' Tim's voice got more and more frustrated as he progressed. 'Least of all they could do is make sure the birds have a few places to nest, especially since all big trees are cut down.'

Amanda took a moment to process the rant, but then responded, 'Yeah I guess that makes sense. Were there that many animals before these buildings were here? I don't remember seeing anything except birds.'

'Oh yeah. There used to be fish in the ponds they removed. But most land animals would come out at night, like mice and other small critters. Now that they made almost everything

stone, most animals have more difficulties.' He took a deep breath while scratching the back of his head and added, 'Sorry about that, it's something I feel strongly about.'

'Don't worry I get it. It makes sense, it's just not something I thought about before.'

'Well, I don't know about you guys, but I'm getting thirsty, let's go get some drinks,' Olivia said as they started towards the door..

'You're right, good idea. Wow, it's getting quite late too. I will have one drink, but after that I'm out.' Amanda followed the two, and the door slowly swung shut after them.