



A virtual 3D reconstruction of the skulls shows the Elasmobranchian teeth.

The Unnamed Population: Ancient Fossil Remains Challenge Our Understanding Of Human Evolution

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RECENTLY DISCOVERED FOSSILS ARE “NOT A NEW SPECIES OF HUMAN,” RESEARCHERS SAY; BUT PEERS DISAGREE.

Researchers are careful to avoid calling them a species, unlike *Homo neanderthalensis*, opting instead to refer to the fossils as remains of a “population.” The discovery team claims that, rather than forming a new species in their own right, the skulls belong to a yet unknown “umbrella” species. Others argue that this nomenclature is merely the result of a dearth of information about these so-called people, and a premature attempt to fit the discovery into taxonomic terms, citing academic internal politics as a factor in forcing the team to eliminate doubt with what critics are calling “irresponsible” public statements.

Further information about the fossils gives weight this call for a deferred classification: the skull fossils were found in a cave in [redacted], where only tiny modern humans would

have been able to safely enter. Analysis of the cave reveals that its condition hasn’t changed much in the last 500,000 years, suggesting the remains found in the cave may have been of those children, or that the entire population was diminutive in size. “The physical properties of the cave are one major piece of the puzzle but, for sure, only one among many,” says the lead scientist, [redacted] at [redacted] Institute. “For example: we observed the jaw and teeth to be comparable to those of deepsea fish, while the skull structure was more modern. This is an unprecedented combination of features.”

The condition of the fossils was another revealing aspect of the discovery. Only crania were found, some of which had fractures in regular patterns around the crown. Researchers speculate that these individuals may have undergone single precise blows to the top of the head before being moved to the cave. A hypothesis was introduced that suggests that “individuals of this population may have ritually stashed the remains of their dead at a special site,” says the discovery team. One hypothesis proposes that the retrieval and re-deposition of these skulls would have been performed at this “sacred” place regardless of the cause of death. Furthermore, the skulls appeared to have been placed in the cave at regular intervals along a broad timeline of at least 200 years, somewhere between 300,000

and 500,000 years ago, suggesting that these rituals were performed routinely, and across generations.

Head archaeologist, [redacted] suggested that very similar behaviour can be found in Neolithic human society. The circulation of crania or skulls and other secondary funerary objects helped to maintain social cohesion and relieve societal tensions within Neolithic communities through collective ritual practices and the creation of shared social memory. In Neolithic near-Eastern funerary traditions, the re-deposition of elements of the human skeleton, especially the skull (i.e., cranium and mandible) is a common feature evidenced by a complicated sequence of sub-floor inhumations involving primary and secondary burial.

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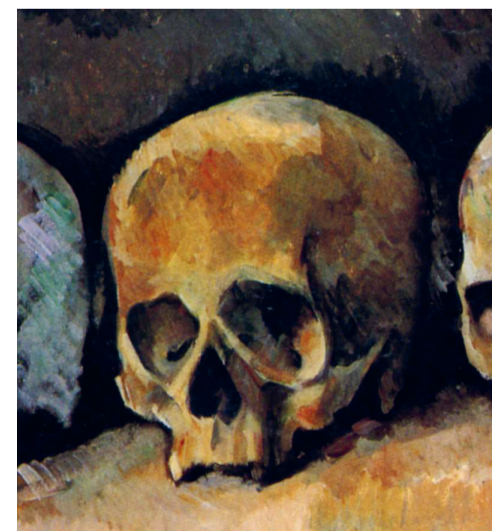
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DO FISH DREAM OF LAND?

Occasionally, a discovery on planet Earth reminds me that our planet could just as well be called planet Sea, and that humans are inextricably linked to the salty waters under which many of the now exposed lands were submerged. The seas, those powerful bodies supporting life itself, once lashed about the planet and their waves surged to colossal heights unimaginable to us now. We are all evolved from the ocean, yet we are also separated from its watery depths and shallows by millions of years of evolution.

A group of ancient and unusual skulls have been found deep underground. The extraordinary discovery was made in a deep and complex cave in the remote region of [REDACTED]. The cave is part of a system of cavernous channels formed millions of years ago. No fossilised bones other than skulls were found in the cave, and a striking feature of the skulls is the presence of fish-like teeth. As you can imagine, the news about the discovery brought to my mind many questions, not least about how the apparently archaic humans lived, and died. This could very well be the most important, and strangest, discovery yet in the history of evolution!

The teeth in the discovered skulls closely resemble those found in fish: small, sharp, closely arranged teeth that point inwards. This is, to say the least, an unprecedented characteristic in the otherwise human-like cranial forms. What kind of humans were they, and how and for what purpose did this particular fish-human morphology appear? Were these particular teeth the result of a sudden adaptation, replacing teeth that weren't as fit to tear through the glistening forms of deep sea marine life?

The absence of other bones, along with the absence of suitable DNA material for sequencing, places the discovery firmly in the realm of mystery and speculation. We all evolved from fish, but how such a characteristic appeared in these archaic individuals, seemingly appearing and disappearing without a trace, is a question that current evolutionary models are hardly prepared for!

Science can be slow and stubborn about accepting new discoveries that completely challenge *status quo* theories, and I have a feeling that this discovery will present a very interesting challenge to the accepted models of evolution. Personally, I don't need a full scientific explanation. I'm interested to know in what context these ancient humans existed, and to imagine their relationship to their surroundings. There's a story there, in how they lived and died; and, as far as I'm concerned, the more evolutionary surprises, the better—how better to connect us to the knotty web of life?

We can suppose that the shape of the jaw and teeth was a necessary adaptation in order to eat a specific food source, likely the source most available to them. Were their diets exclusively fish or seaweed, or did they adapt to eating land foods with these special teeth? On the other hand, common sense may be the wrong approach to interpreting this discovery. What if the skull is the most human-like part of the individual? What if the rest of their body bore no human resemblance at all?

Without the rest of the skeletons, we can only speculate on whether they spent the majority of their lives on land, or in the ocean. Limbs, fins? Fingers? How did they live? In what practices did they engage? Were they land-based, only venturing into the watery depths to feed, or were they habitually aquatic, living mostly in water?

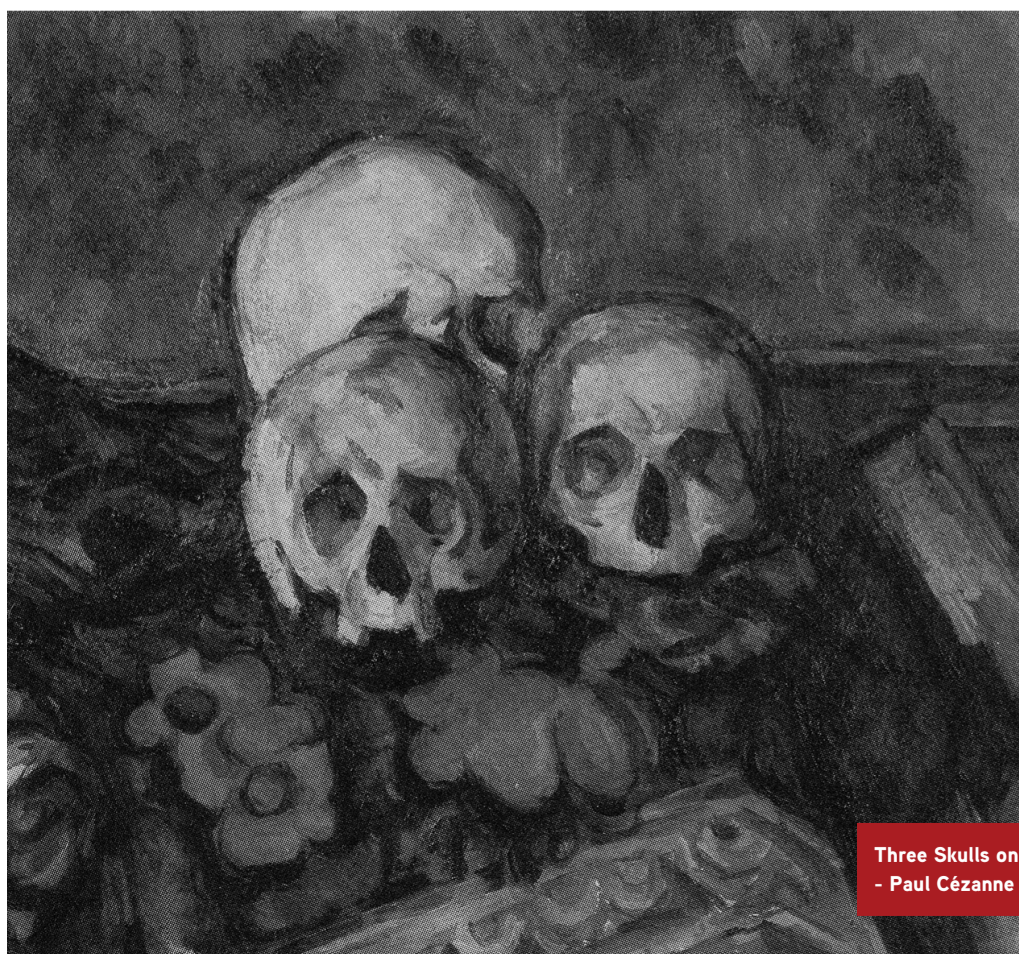
Many of the skulls have large cracks, leading researchers to wonder whether the fissures were the result of blunt force impact, and whether the individuals were victims of violence or ritual. There is so much we still don't know about the customs and practices of modern groups of people, let alone ancient humans; but could this discovery teach us something about the continuity of certain facets of human behaviour? Is violence, or sacrifice, as primordial as our will to survive? Personally, I hope that the researchers can piece together as rich a story about the individuals, how they lived and died, as they can provide analytical data.



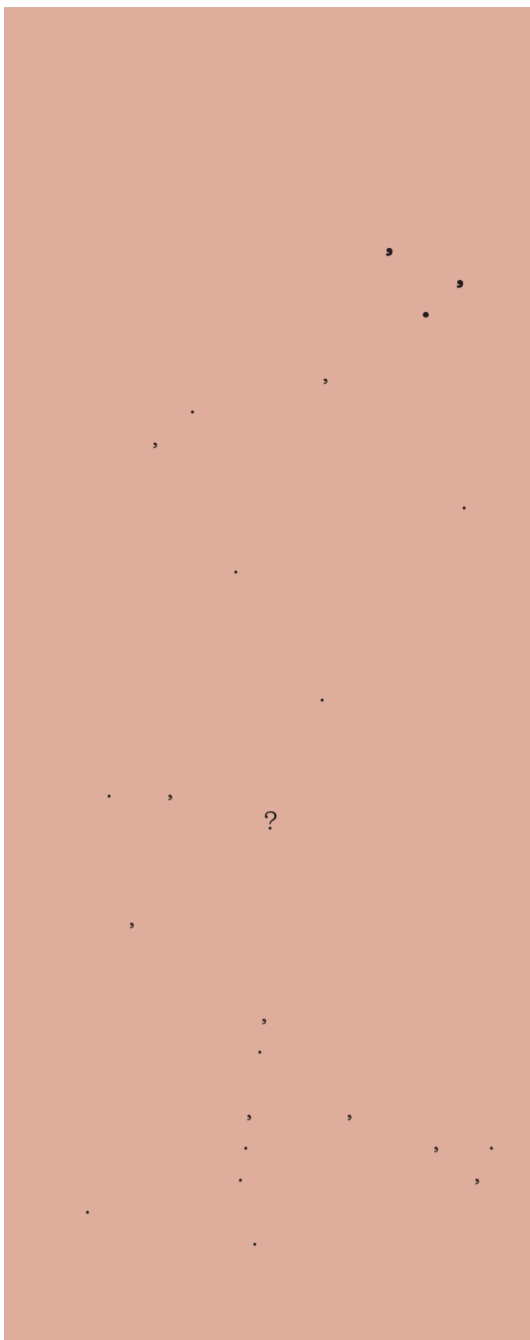
Why were the skulls separated from the rest of the skeletons, and how did they come to be situated in the cave? The evidence suggests that the skulls were placed in the cave, which presents the likelihood that these individuals co-existed with other archaic humans. This is big news! Were the skulls placed in the cave by archaic humans acquainted with symbolic meaning and ritual practices? Can we be sufficiently open-minded to allow the discovery of these skulls to lead to a sea change in our understanding of evolution? Each question creates another question.

Aislinn McNamara

Redroom



Three Skulls on Persian Carpet.
- Paul Cézanne



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The obvious similarities between the discovered “population” and *Homo sapiens* leads scientists to wonder if these beings are the missing link in our evolutionary history. “To answer this question, we will need more

data,” is the resounding message. Findings from analysis of the skulls suggest that this population had significant anatomical differences from modern humans and their known ancestors, though the skulls are believed to date from the same period, between 300,000 and 500,000 years ago. Classifying this population under the genus *Homo* is therefore far from likely without further evidence.

On the other side of the debate, the research team at █ is convinced that the evidence of the population’s burial rituals points to uniquely human practices. They consider the hypothetical behaviours of this population to be strong proof of their belonging to the *Homo* genus. The team supports their argument with previous archaeological evidence of *Homo* species engaging in similar practices.

One example is the Ancestors’ Skulls of the New Georgia islanders, West Solomon Islands, south-west Pacific. The ancestors’ remains were kept in shrines with shell valuables as ornaments that have been uncovered scattered throughout the surrounding forests in the first layer of clay sediment. In addition, not far from the New Georgia, another skull

coffin was discovered on Makira island, where important ancestors’ remains were kept in fish-shaped coffins that also served as shrines.

The claims that burial and grieving rituals are uniquely humans behaviours is inaccurate, however. Funeral rituals among animals have always existed, such as the chimpanzees’ tendency to carry deceased infants for days, even months, on their backs, in an obvious practice of mourning.

“Although humans often conclude that we are exceptional in the animal kingdom, at the end of the day, we are animals, and among our apparently ‘unique’ behaviours, there are many that we share with other animals, and which suggest that we are all simply attempting to process death and the unknown,” says █, one of the researchers at █.

Across research institutes, scientists hope that further fossil findings at new locations with additional comparable populations will emerge in forthcoming decades to clarify the taxonomic dilemma.

The fossils have some anatomical features that are more archaic than humans, Neanderthals or the recently discovered Denisovan population. But DNA analysis reveals ... nothing ...

When palaeontologists first laid eyes on a partial skull, a nearly complete lower jaw, and a lonely tooth, they instantly knew that the remains did not belong to us, or to any of our close relatives.

We, *Homo sapiens*, have tall, rounded skulls and large brains. Meanwhile, the fossils bear shark-like teeth: a feature not seen in any as

A virtual 3D reconstruction of the skulls shows the Elasmobranchian teeth installed in the humanoid mandibles, as well as the skulls’ diminutive, though otherwise familiar proportions.



Fossilised bones found in a narrow cave deep in the hills of █ could belong to a newly discovered species of ancient humans. The findings have fuelled debate over how to classify this group of apparent cave dwellers.

yet discovered local hominid populations dating as far back as 400,000 years ago, including those of the Neanderthals.

DNA analysis has the potential to provide answers to archaeological, paleontological, and anthropological questions. Today, rapidly advancing technologies in DNA analysis have allowed scientists to solve some of the world’s complex mysteries, from the ancestry of mysterious Chinese mummies to the channels of migration of ancient humans. The teams researching the new population of skulls will employ DNA analysis to attempt to determine where this population sits on the evolutionary tree. However, it is unclear whether the condition of the fossil’s DNA is adequate to permit reliable testing. For the DNA to be viable, they must find samples in an all but untouched state.

What does this discovery mean in the search for the origins of the human?

This discovery opens the door for many questions. For example, have other groups lived and disappeared without being noticed by science? If so, how many remain out there to be discovered? What led to the extinction of this population, and others?

Natural selection describes the process by which nature decides to keep individuals and populations because they have developed traits and adapted to their environments. The species that exist today are those who survived whatever nature has thrown at them. We, *Homo sapiens*, are one of them. Observations of these skulls indicate no natural catastrophe. There is so much to uncover about the “unnamed population,” their rituals, and how they ended up buried in that cave. Discussion continues over whether the “unnamed population” is hominid, whether it walked on two feet or on all fours, whether the deaths were ritual, violent, or both. The name for the population is to be determined when scientists can agree on the genus. According to taxonomic naming conventions, a species can be named by the discoverer, but the genus must be agreed upon by peers in the field. This discovery and other recent discoveries produce important evidence in the search for human origins. And this one, indeed, provokes more fascinating questions.

Alice Ripper





Cold Plot



Trois crânes
(The Three Skulls)

- Paul Cézanne

She is very much aware that her own satisfaction is the general goal, overall, as she plucks the small, shriveled brown bits off the jade plant like scabs from shins. Scabs that lie across some kid's hardened, cast iron shin bones like crispy bacon in a skillet, baked beyond recognition. She does it simply for pleasure. Heavily. With awareness. Sometimes she does it too much.

Developed over years, this practice appears to be an exercise of petty power, perhaps just a pretty little urge, a kink. Definitely a project most citizens, she thinks, would like to call "kink." But it is pleasure, not mere unfruitful propagation. No politics involved. It is, in the end, utterly private, she tells herself.

The "practice" involves lifting those drained, ditched bits with the better part of her fingertips, gingerly and so slowly, she holds her breath every time, announcing this tingling sensation, like a bookmark, and with a contraction in her diaphragm, an inner push and a bit of a rush, she quickly severs the node, as mother nature intended.

The crassula is a foreign plant. Stripped from all its exotica, it now seems pretty much native to the bleak and notorious *Rauhfaser* deserts of our central european cities, which are shaped by the intellectual and their oppressive sense of aesthetics. Those unburdened self-con-artists and their likes—though so informed by their reliance on a regular income and all the ignorance that grows from too much time lived normally—have made it quite far from their origins. Just as Burgundy is a region only in France.

She read somewhere that every tale exists as tragedy, in the relief of a coin and the gesture of tossing it. Often tripping on the curb, the individual doubles as stand-in, a voluntary body-double demonstrating intellectual depths, including poetic free-fall for all. Every tale suffered in tragedy has to be retold. She shuts her eyes. It is worth it for the fantasy. Some of the things she thinks have influenced her will just make her feel comfortable and safe and take her away.

Her oldest friends describe her with unexpected ease and a surprising love for detail, just like she would describe the taste of her own mouth after drinking lots of water: sweet and of a wonderful neutrality, a satiny familiarity that goes softly through the air and hides something delicious, a mystery between the folds. She must consider empathy, it is something you can chew on.

She trusts everything is in order, alright, everything is the way it should be: for her, and for how it looks outside, under the skies she is so used to watching all day from behind glass—the skies, rainy or not, are pierced by a handful of post-war tower blocks, cushioned by the fluff of clouds. Clouds most days. It was always fit for a fantasy. From behind the glass, from the established security of her own home, from behind the virtual restrictions of her haunted fantasies, true existence emerges. Her desire to provoke is in fact the common fear of mediocrity, is and has always been that: the depression of being, being normal, being mediocre, dying in innocence and naiveté.

Hot and prickly, the freshly plucked butt radiates danger. A toxicity, encapsulating her sweet spotted shame, cupped in the palm of her hand, burns all the way to the bathroom, where this dark pearl will find its clear flushing to eternity. Gone without a trace, she thinks. Routine is the parent of tradition and ritual. Oh ritual.

Originally the plant had found its way to her through a greenfingered friend. A simple regrowth from a thick leaf, a healthy succulent fattened by freshwater and the gentle petting of a self-taught master's hand; or maybe it was a cutting, she cannot remember, but this leaf is surely long gone. For a long time now, the plant has been kept in constant despair, stripped and lonely in a corner of her room. A meaty skeleton, encouraged to grow, only to be plucked down to size eventually, when it's time came, the plant about to rebound. Or simply when the itch grew too great. But most of the time, her hands and her head are light with waiting, still watching the skies and their business passing. Then she closes her curtains. Restrictions, she thinks. Restless, she wanders around the empty house and braces herself, prepares for the night states, ready to eject that impatient plague from her mind. The prey and her raptor, entangled.

On a normal day, she breaks off the filter of a cigarette or two. Those blue gauloises reminiscent of a youth lost to the trail, the trailing of blue smoke towards high ceilings, the trials of becoming one more accomplished whizzing academic in the liberated world. Screaming eggheaded respectability and huffily paving inconveniences by sliding bricks of now-salted margarine onto longbread. She dodged philosophy by the skin of her teeth. A creative career in advertising luckily

came right along to replace it. Welcome is the punishment to endlessly stunt your environment. But what once was sad, has now become habit. Vaping free CBD too. This example of techy headway is the mocking disguise that hides the actual gothic terms of her protection from the real restrictions that lie in her lacking the ability to adapt.

The plant sits there on a freestanding flower shelf, like one of those little wrought-iron designs that play at many different directions of apt interior decoration, truly homelike, playing the issue and a silly-faced academia right with it. "Resistance is futile," she smiles. Surely the plant would best be watched under a dangling grow light during those long nights, and the days that go in between. Just so. It cannot move.

Unlike a fly or a hamster, she strongly believes, the plant does not know hurt, and is unaware of its brazen nakedness, the unhinged grimace of its coiling legs, rattled joints, pruned limbs, the cutting of them, the blunt breaking off of those little home-raised, premature soft born bits. Eject! Eject! She screams hysterically. Her skin crawls here and there with excitement, and her overstimulated brain signals numbness to blanket a maddening heat, and she faints. Cherry Picking, she believes this is a genuine excuse for her doings, as the dainty pruners gather dust, a soft toy version of a professional's alibi.

Maybe that's a person's odd airs, the purposeful growth of self-similar extensions, extremities to rip apart, so to stare into the moist crescent joints that reveal a pale, open faced plant meat. You people who find Jesus in your food surely understand the appreciation of this fleshy freshness packing the green spine inside its branches. Lifelike, like how cherry tomatoes detach from their prim grown vine, that anatomy that redefines the idea of straightness, and are put inside a brown Alnatura paper bag, which she recycles by bringing in it a dry sandwich to work, and later repurposes as a trash bag, like all her colleagues do. Restrictions, she thinks, all but assignments.

Keeping a fungus as a bonsai pet. Spraying a milk solution to shepherd the livestock is part of her grooming routine, and in summer it smells.

The plant was a gift from an ex-lover. Now she remembers a man who had been here, once living with her in this very big, very empty apartment for quite some time. A lively twin, and born in June. And

greenfingered, the both of them, both of those twins, she thinks, and men. Dark twins, with dark hair and dark eyes, clad in dark clothes and dark thoughts, but with a sort of vacant warmth, and good with plants, like others are good with people. And the plant, her plant, arrived amongst many others, back then thriving.

She's so busy replenishing the cups of water she keeps everywhere. She's often joked that her den is too hot and musky: it sweats. Excessive humidity and the green buildup is the smallest price to pay to keep the thing happy. The overall goal is to hold that host nestled under the brown and peely remains of the once-luscious jade. It reminds her in essence of the double helix, how it twists in space, but out of joint and scrubby of course. Crippled in its essence, it is basically pop-medieval, which is, after all, a much much more recent concept. None of this, she knows, can last much longer.

The plant's soil is to be kept wet, a quarter of sand in the pot drains the deluge of precipitation she occasionally floods onto its bed of soil with cold impatience. Her overbearing temper supplants all reason and the crassula's pot stands swimming in its planter full of hard water up to the rim. She doesn't want to drown the plant, the hot swamp always takes her down.

In general, the crassula needs the sun, a couple of hours a day for sure. And she can drink, in moderation, but still. Perhaps the kind of cruelty she exercises is, as she is well aware, due to a certain archaic alertness, her will to survive; and as the primitive, she cannot help but be the bully. A childish tyrant. To torture a creature that can't defend itself, can't even show signs of pain or discomfort, except those that are visibly inflicted by her, the overlord. Childish tyrant indeed.

The shriveling stumps, sometimes: for days she observes how they wilt, and the precious jade, the mother plant's body, sucks them out and thus preserves its own life force, those hard wrung tips glimmering less and less in the fading half light. She forbids herself to taste the off-color butts resting in her hand, just to make them die even just a little bit more under her gaze.

She thinks of forcing a knife up an oyster's hinge; to pry it open and to slurp the mollusk with its salty juices, crush it—like can you?—between your tongue and palate.

"Imagine being a twin and some doctors scientifically prove that you are the worse looking twin," somebody who calls themselves Norp writes in the comments of this tongue posture video on YouTube. It was a matter of diet, she thinks. In the end it's always diet. To outlive is the ultimate satisfaction.

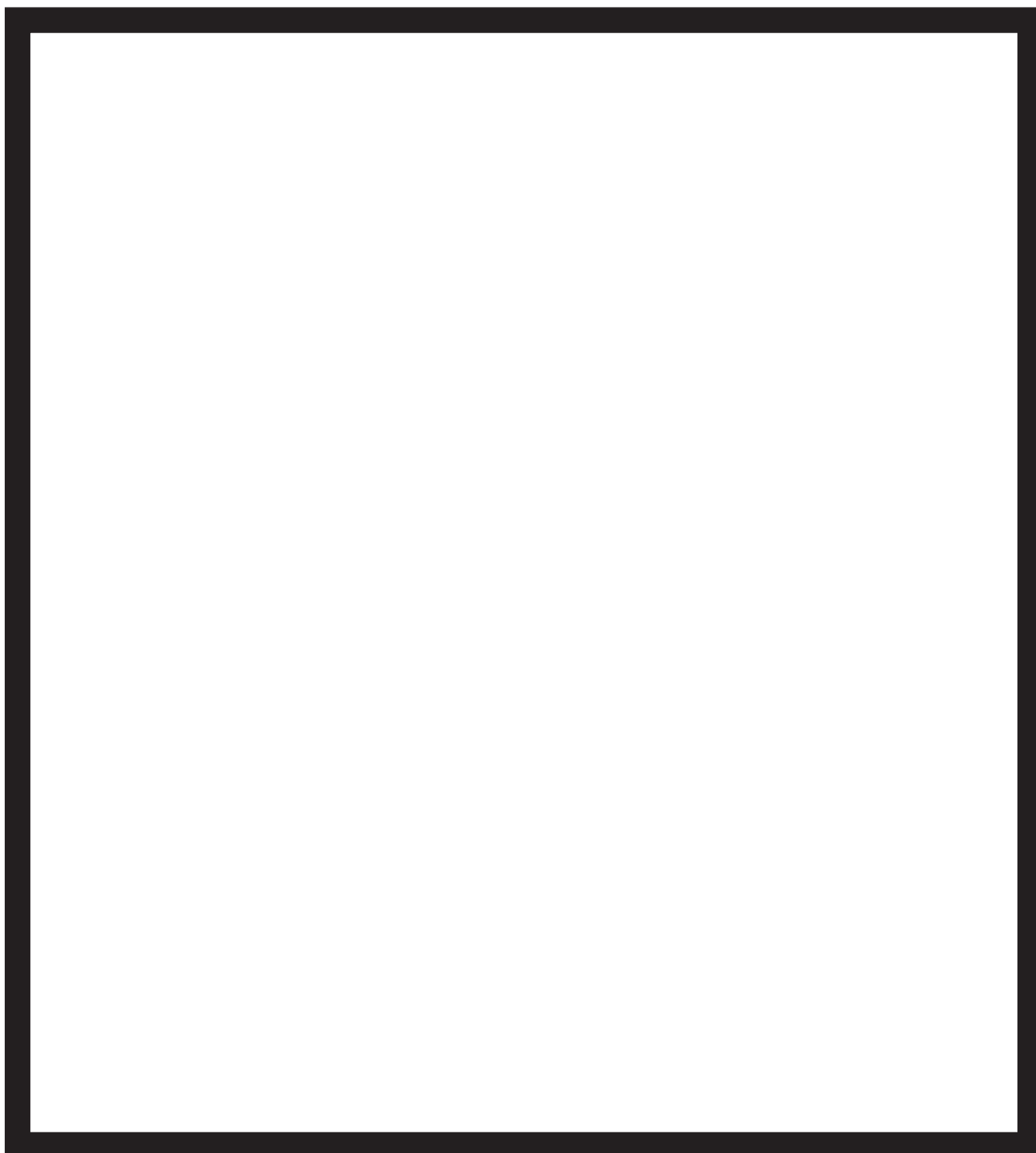
Running her tongue over those perfectly stained veneers, she regrets being a single child, again, the lovelessness of her parents' relationship, and no wonder what else; she blames them for it all. Even her awkward, unanswered will to live. Satisfaction, then, alone, must be the goal. She clicks her tongue.

Maladjustment and such, it is natural to think about promises she has made herself and never kept—like who would or why would you? Taking the liberty, she was watching her own development right with it. To sit back and stretch her legs lazily.

The plant, blind and muted, stares back. She has pretty much given up on the rest of the world.

It was worth it for the fantasy. Not only in her memory. And then, the doorbell rings. And she thinks in her head, in a flash, of the entire plot of a Strugatsky Brothers' novel.

Vera Palme



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