

Dolan Morgan

### **A Spider's Faith in Webs**

On prospect Ave, the Kanoutes revealed the limits of Zeno's halving paradox. You can't, they discovered, just keep cutting into infinity. Rather, the limit is about eight -- because any more and there's no room for the stove or the love-seat. Eight is the number of extra rooms the Kanoutes cut into their two-bedroom apartment, a three-story walk-up, the one that the newspaper would later compare, after the fire, to a rabbit warren. But that doesn't do justice to the geometry or the artistry of the improvised construction. Whether or not it caused the deaths of three families, including nine children, is of no consequence when it comes to aesthetics of form. No, the apartment was much less like haphazard holes broken in the dirt than a theorem-governed matrix or, if it must be animals we invoke when speaking about West Africans, a honey comb.

Fanta was fourteen and staying across the street when the house burned down. She watched her cousins not emerge as the firemen arrived. She imagined them in their handmade, perfectly rendered labyrinth, covered in the artifacts of their lives, clothes and papers and tables and documents and blankets, all the things whose flammability had never seemed important. Who cares if your residency cards can burn? What does it matter that plywood is so dry? Only one absurdly singular father was left standing in the ashes of the maze they built, a

father who was, in a way, no longer a father at all and who would soon begin walking, steadily, into a new and more perfect maze which only devastation, city bureaucracy and journalism can render.

Now, Fanta wants to graduate from high school, but may not have the credits. She can't read or write and doesn't expect to go to college. She tells tearful stories, not of the night her family died, but of her native country, the Ivory Coast, where the men could touch you and you'd be cursed, or the women would come with cloth sacks to snatch children and smuggle them behind walls. She talks about it like an amusement park of myths and dreams, with no height requirement on the rides. Most of her friends want to be accountants, lawyers, doctors, engineers, or baseball players, but Fanta wants to be a relief worker. She doesn't know anything about this job, only that it has something to do with helping people, anyone and everywhere. She's heard it so many times in news reports, for disasters large and small, spread from continent to continent, from earthquakes to floods to wars, as if these people were all places at once, as if relief workers, like Santa Clause, could fly at great speed or change the rules of time, and as if all Fanta wants is to vainly learn the secret magic of this profession, not out of altruism, but in a desperate attempt to relieve herself, or at least lessen the growing knowledge of how many times a person can be cut in half, a number which, she will assure you as she throws her tangled arms around a timid young lover, is infinite.