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어느 정도 뉴욕커, 그의 이웃과 두 개의 꼭 같은 아파트—공간 도둑
Chapter 2.

The Somewhat New Yorker, His Neighbor and Two Identical Apartment Units—The Space Thief
새공간
NEW SPACE
서울시 성북구 삼선교로 2길 11

For the very briefest of moments, he lived and worked in Manhattan. Perhaps the fulfillment of every non-New Yorker’s media inspired dreams. The New York he had seen in film or television. New York, the quote, unquote city, felt like “next”. What “next” could be. This was “next” on a dotted footpath that had already seen and experienced some of the great urban centers America had to offer. San Francisco. Los Angeles. Chicago. Boston. New York—it was a place that just might be something. Something special. A place where greatness goes to breathe. A place where greatness gets amplified. He ate up this mystique. Just like many before him. Just like many after. He was here to see greatness. And if possible at all, be part of this greatness as well. This was the New York mystique.

This city. You could definitely feel these spirits here. The spirits of all these passengers, travelers from around the world coming here to make something happen. To make greatness happen. The spirits of immigrants, asylum seekers, pariahs and the opportunities given to those dearly wanted them. Sought out these opportunities, embraced these opportunities. It felt different. Different from other cities. The spirits were still here. Everywhere. But he could tell, these spirits had slightly aged. That kind of super fiery fuel he could tell had long left this city. But there was enough left for him to feel. Feel this difference. And so he knew he had to come. These spirits were calling him. Calling him to New York. And he was here to meet them, even for a brief moment in time. He did the typical house searching tour. Saw some places in Queens. Saw lots of places in Brooklyn. Brooklyn was where many of his friends at that time were living. And he went and went often. But Brooklyn, well, he just was not feeling it. Can’t explain such feelings. But, just was not feeling it. And the same can be said of Queens. What was this feeling? These places just felt somewhat distant. Somewhat removed. Manhattan. Something about living on this island felt more fascinating. This island. Manhattan. Perhaps it was the idea of not commuting. No subway. Just walking to work. Maybe that was the appeal. Looking back now, what New Yorkers did he know that actually lived in Manhattan? Extremely few and far between. Realistically the costs of living in Manhattan have phased out a certain chunk of the social spectrum and thus leaving “true” New Yorkers to live elsewhere. Or at least that’s the impression he had received over the years. Even during this brief moment in time, people would ask him, why was he living in Manhattan? At that time, he could not yet give an informed answer. For he too was not sure why he was living there.

His name was Hiep. Last name Nguyen. Second generation. Vietnamese. Vietnamese American. And he lived at the intersection of Little Italy and Chinatown. Broome and Mott Street. Perhaps more Little Italy than Chinatown but he was right there. It was a five or six story building. No elevator. He had found it through a real estate “broker” who charged a finder’s fee and all. A fee for doing pretty much nothing but opening the door and showing him the place. The rent was almost kind of reasonable for New York, or Manhattan standards. It was not bad compared to almost every other neighborhood he had visited. But the rent was also more than he had ever paid anywhere in his life. The unit was smaller than any apartment unit he had ever lived in his life. It was technically, on paper, a two room apartment. But he could never quite understand this. What was the point of the wall and the door in between these two “rooms?” For it was that small. Could have been a studio. Should have been a studio. Should have been called a studio. But

A—29 perhaps that did not matter. It was on paper, two rooms. And it did not matter so much to him. He was right there. In the heart of it all. And it was nice. The walking was magical. Walkable. No cars. Sometimes subway. Everywhere else was walkable. And sometimes these walks were just so pleasant. So pleasant. His commute was non-existent. At least it felt nothing like a commute. It was truly, a walk. A pleasant walk from point A to point B. At that time, he was freelancing in and around New York at a wide variety of businesses that just happen to exist all within or close to this area. He could walk almost to every single one. This was again, magic.

The neighborhood, well, he knew it had seen better days. He could not say the points of interest and fascination were that frequent. Mostly tourist related businesses. Most of the Italian restaurants did not taste so good. It often felt as if most were catering towards visitors from Kansas, Arkansas, wherever. Anywhere outside of New York. And it was specifically for those who wanted to experience some kind of New York they had seen through some kind of media consumption. Movies. TV shows. Novels. For him, this was not so interesting. But why such poor quality? Why was this Italian food, not tasting so much like the Italian food he had known? Or was it that these restaurants were actually using authentic recipes? And over time, as evolution does, our cooking standards have gotten better, our ingredients have gotten better, but these places were sticking to the same formula from years before? Possible. Whatever it was, the food was not memorable. For the most part. Chinatown though, was a tad better. There were sprinkled in between here and there in the alleys, some truly delicious places. With, as far as he could ascertain, fairly authentic preparations of dishes he had known some way or the other through similar experiences in San Francisco. Sprinkled in between such places were sometimes small bits of culture. Galleries, book stores, alternative spaces. The same could be said for some fairly decent places for alcohol consumption. Bars. Pubs. Etc. And this, during this brief moment in time, all felt quite right. Quite nice.

Locals. Local residents. True local residents. He barely knew any. He barely met any. He rarely saw any of his neighbors. Went to a few bars and watering holes downstairs on occasion and during this time, befriended perhaps just one bar owner. But this one bar owner, well, he remembered thinking to himself, this was exactly not the type of person he would ever want to spend time with or hangout with outside of such circumstances. Perhaps he was just in need of a friend. New. New to the city. No friends. And perhaps there was again some media influence here too. He had a somewhat dreamish hope for this bar, and perhaps this owner. A dreamish dream that this place could be a kind of frequented resident pub with certain perks or benefits from such frequent visits. You know, free drinks on occasion, discounts, special menu items. Very typical for idiots to think such things he thought. And the idiotness became ever more clear with every visit. For he had been to this bar during this time, probably around 50 times. No, definitely more than that. And after all these visits, never had he received anything in the form of a perk or benefit. Just the bill. And he paid that bill. And paid the tip. As he had always done. A dreamish dream. A dream of Manhattan.

His friends in Brooklyn would often comment, how he could live there in Manhattan? How was it that he was living in Manhattan? With these, quote, unquote, “strange” folks. Strange folks. Strange. What did that mean? What could that possibly mean? “Hiep, do you actually hang out with anybody there in your neighborhood? Aren’t the people there strange?” Strange? He never quite understood that. What constitutes strange? And it was here that he again, felt there was some kind of strange elitism from those who lived in Brooklyn. And yet another reason why he felt more sure of his decision not to live in Brooklyn. As diverse as Brooklyn was supposed to be, or claimed to be, he had found it often not so diverse. More homogenous, or pocketed. Like Los Angeles with its socio-status or ethnic-based enclaves in pockets around the city. And each pocket would kind of stay in their respective zones and not intermix so much. Well, this is what

he had often felt at this time. But Manhattan. On the island. Perhaps it was because people were all forced to come to this place to earn money. Everyday. On any given day, it was all these people from all kinds of backgrounds, places, backgrounds smashed into this place. People from everywhere. Smashed and mixed here. And somehow, that made him feel okay.

But this quote, unquote strangeness. The strangeness of Manhattan residents kind of lingered with him for quite some time because it was something he just could not see. What was this? And perhaps, worse yet, was he also now part of this quote, unquote strangeness, for paying rent and living here as well. More than anything, just not knowing was most unsettling. So he went about his days, as he would normally do, but he went about them with also one eyebrow raised. Dr. McCoy-ish(A Star Trek, character with a penchant for suspicious facial expressions). One eyebrow raised, to carefully observe. Observe in the hopes he just might see this strange. The strangeness.

There is some power in repetition. Seeing things again and again. Repetitive viewing. Careful observations. Observations of passersby. Neighbors. Residents. Local folk. After multiple viewings, one could eventually start to differentiate between those that lived here, or in the vicinity, and those that were purely tourists. Those visiting from other states. It became easier as the days went on. Much easier to see and see sometimes within a few minutes, or even a few seconds, who was his neighbor and who was not. This was phase one. But this was easy. Pretty easy.

And after a certain point in time, he began to enter phase two. He began to see phase two. Although he rarely saw his neighbors, he began to know certain types of people were his neighbors. Or those that hung out and most likely lived in this neighborhood. And after numerous small, but brief interactions, the information began to accumulate. Gather. Settle. What was once observation became data. And this data began to reveal bits and pieces of this great mystery. He slowly began to notice what possibly could be this quote, unquote strangeness. To this day still, it is hard to describe what exactly this was. How could this be explained? It perhaps was harder to describe because this point of view came from certain “cultured” Brooklyn residents. Residents, who he ironically found, perhaps to be sometimes less “cultured” than they had thought themselves to be. Ironical. But let’s give it a try. So the strangeness. Perhaps it’s easiest to describe them as people you would never know in your everyday life. Never meet. People you know exist. People you know of. And you see them sometimes. Or even everyday. But these were people you normally would not interact with in some ways. Never engage with. Never become friends with. Something about these people always seemed distant. As if they were not actual. Not real. Not real? Yes. Something about his neighbors did not feel like any of the people he had met before in his life.

But this data was limited, obviously. A lack of interactions lead to many purely surface level observations. Perhaps a lot of it came from general appearance? Or conversations in passing? But there were several things that, although hard to explain, began to repeat. Repeat and appear over and over again. One of the main things he could notice was that many of these folks seemed to be from another cut of society. A level of society? Branch of society? A cut of society that he again, was never familiar with. Nor had he ever experienced. Not necessarily the illuminati. Nor some kind of super societal elite or anything like that. But he could tell many of these folks were just from another cut of society that was far from him, physically, emotionally, mentally, etc. It was not just necessarily economically elite, although he was sure they were all financially better off than himself. But they had all seemed to have been raised under different circumstances. The shapings of them or their past was it? Or was it their upbringing? Whatever it was, he could tell they had experienced an America far different from himself. And their codes, their mannerisms, their thoughts and expressions were all different. And not to say that he was knowledgeable enough in America to make such a claim. But he had seen enough to know, these were not the people he had met until now.

Out of all the tenants in his building, the actual percentage of residents who he actually

engaged in conversation with was very little. It was often just things in passing. Functional things, related to the building. Complaints about the building. Packages. Missing packages. Complaints about the landlord. Complaints about the neighborhood. Doorbells that had never worked. Doorbells that were supposed to be fixed. Doorbells that have been spoken about numerous times in the past few years. And continues to be never repaired. It was in these small passing conversations where he did most of his observations. And for the most part, he felt very much that these folks did not want to talk with him beyond such conversations. And he understood that. He got that. He probably would not either. And he did not either. So for the most part, everyday was much like the next. Quiet. With few interactions. But on occasion, he would get the random hello. The hello thing had always felt a bit more West Coast than East Coast to him. When he was living on the East Coast, he would receive the random hello very intermittently. But on the West Coast, and particularly, in more affluent neighborhoods, random people will always say hello when they pass by. Not so much New York. For obvious reasons. Perhaps just too many people. And too many times to say hello. Made sense. But in this building too, he would get the random hello. Just a stranger, living some place in this building. Saying hello. And he would sometimes think, they must not be from around here.

One of these hello or hi sayers, was his downstairs neighbor. He had learned later he lived exactly one floor below. He was also a frequenter of that one bar. The one bar downstairs where he had hoped to receive some kind of perks/benefits from. Perhaps that is why he would say hello? Or they had recognized each other? He had discovered that this neighbor was actually a photographer. He also found out he was of Asian descent. This also might be one of the reasons he had said hello from the beginning. Seeing another creature somewhat like him. Perhaps it brought a bit of comfort. Part of this thinking came from the fact that this neighbor had brought this up probably five sentences into their conversation. “Hey, Hiep. I’m also Asian. On my mom’s side.” This was not a necessary part of the conversation but that he felt the need to bring this up, well, perhaps it was high on his priority list. Hiep had once known a “cat mom,” those blessed souls who feed, care and rehabilitate feral cats. She would adopt lots of cats, care for them and send them to adoption out into the world. She was raising at this time 18 cats in her house. Truly crazy. Hiep was pretty sure she would automatically go to heaven. All of these cats would make sure of it. They will absolutely will her to heaven. For all that she had done for them. He remembered this cat mom because one of her poignant observations was that cats of the same coat and color tend to get along or become friends faster than when they had different colored coats. Strange and fascinating. And here in this instance, perhaps in the same vein, this neighbor looks at Hiep, sees the same coat, same coat color and thinks of a possible friend. Or family. As cat sees similar looking cat, whatever it was, perhaps this was the start of hello.

Over the next few weeks, he would see him more often in the hallways or in and around the building. Perhaps it was not that he was seeing him more often, but that he actually knew who he was and now when entering or exiting the building, he was on some kind of radar. Somebody who Hiep actually knew. And everytime, it was just a hello. The casual hello. Nothing more. And that was fine. Pretty okay for this kind of situation and this kind of living. In many cultures around the world, in the case of neighbors, of any kind, sometimes a small home invitation for food or beverage may take place. “Hey, if you don’t have much planned, you can come by and have a few beers. I’ve got some leftover lasagne from the night before.” “Hey, you got any dinner plans? Welcome to stop by, we’ve made lots of vegetable soup. Welcome to join and have some if you like.” Typical. Very typical. But in New York, this kind of invitation was few and far between. Not so frequent. Atleast Hiep had yet to receive many such invitations. But lo and behold it happened. This neighbor, oh, by the way, his name was Jeffrey. Jeffrey had suggested grabbing some beer from the convenience store and extended an offer to view some of his photography work at his home. Jeffrey was a photographer. At

At 33, blurry. Not dramatically blurry. But you could tell that it should not have been this blurry. The slight signs of amateurism were everywhere. And Hiep knew this. He knew this photo could have perhaps benefitted from a tripod. Sorry. Basic stuff. He knew nothing of photography, yet how he could see these things. And he thought such things. And here, in this moment, he did think such things. He could not help it.

Hiep for sure did not work in photography. But he did sometimes work with photographers. As many people do. He had seen enough and worked with enough poor photos to know this photo, in front of his eyes now, was actually very poor. And not just this photo. All of the photos he saw that evening. None of these photos should be assessed as photography, he thought. The photos Jeffrey had showed him that day, could not, or should not have any mention of the word profession or professional within a certain certifiable distance. They were far from it. Poor. Just poor. But Hiep, being the West Coast, mild, non-confrontational person that he was, just nodded and tried to convey some kind of positivity. He could not remember what he exactly said at the time. But it was probably something along the lines of, “Oh, wow, quite interesting.” “Very interesting.” “Cool.” “Nice.” “Wow.” For those that know better, these are not reaffirming compliments. For those that know better, these are actually some of the worst things one can hear about their work. For they mean very little. And express very little. And express a kind of safe ambiguity that takes no responsibility. These comments are free. Free to extend the utilitarianist vision of Jeremy Bentham. Do the actions that may create more good will for human beings. More positivity. More happy people. Extend that happiness.

Jeffrey kept going. He kept going. He kept bringing out more and more photos. There were lots of them. Lots of bad photos. Very bad photos. Poorly taken photos. Everywhere. It was endless. One photo, after another. But this too, Hiep had to admit, in and of itself, was quite impressive. Impressive for a number of reasons. Impressive in that, he had somehow created a career out of this. A career out of these terrible photos. Impressive in that, he seemed to have zero grasp of the fact that they were of poor quality. Not even the slightest clue. Impressive in that, his admiration for his own work, showed no limits. He was proud. Extremely proud. He told Hiep the stories behind each one. Where he was. What the difficulties were for this shoot. How he overcame them. And he was proud. So proud.

This visit turned into about an hour. Or two. There were lots of photos. But all again, so difficult to look at. Hiep could count the number of things wrong with each photo. Even with his untrained eyes. Again and again. It was hard. Just hard on the eyes. And perhaps this is another beauty of America. Another beautiful, precious asset of American culture. American entrepreneurship. If you can sell it. You can make it. If you can sell it. You can survive. If you can survive, you can sell it again. And perhaps this was Jeffrey’s one true asset. He had limitless pride. Limitless optimism. Limitless admiration for his work. Hiep thought again and again, if he knew truly nothing, he might have wanted to purchase something here too. Purchase this work as an unsuspecting buyer. This optimism was just over the top. He would have to pay this man for this effort in and of itself. The ironic flip side of this American entrepreneurist dream is also the consumer. An equally beautiful and precious asset of America. There are so many people living in this country. And with this many people, you have just as large a percentage of people who truly know nothing. And these are the people that pay for another day. Pay for you to work another day. A huge market full of people who can and will buy just about anything.

This visit was difficult. This visit was hard for Hiep to be honest at. Hiep was deep down, a very honest guy. As honest as you can get. Almost always. If you knew Hiep, you would know that it is extremely difficult for him to lie. White lies, regular lies, lies of any kind. All extremely difficult. But that day, Hiep lied a lot. Hiep had lied up a storm. The whole spectrum. He thought to himself, his mouth this day deserved soap. Despicable things had come out of his mouth that day. All for the

least that is what he had explained on a few occasions. And this would be the first time anybody in this building had extended such hospitality to Hiep. Of any kind. Because of this, the lack of such invitations, Hiep was almost an immediate yes. An automatic yes to the invitation. Well, lots of things to be curious about. What might his apartment look like? Would it be the same dimensions, same format, same arrangement as his? This again was the first invitation of any kind like this yet in New York. So it had weight. It had some gravitas. It had meaning. And he had to see it. He had to go.

His apartment was exactly one floor down, meaning, exactly. Exactly, exactly the same. One floor below exactly. So this meant it was for all intents and purposes, the same apartment unit. Same format. Same size. Same everything. But there were obviously a few key differences. First and foremost, Jeffrey had obviously lived there a very long time. You could just tell from the amount of possessions he had accumulated. Or had in his possession. He had just tons and tons of shit. You could just tell this from all the layers of life that were in that apartment. Lots of things had happened over the years. And he could not let any of them go. Oftentimes when you see some human beings and the way they live, you can see peculiar tendencies, actions that perhaps can similarly be seen in nature. Something akin to ants gathering sticks of wood. Or birds gathering string and paper to form parts of their nest. He was living amongst such layers of life. Lots and lots of layers of life. Sedimentary layers that showed the age of this place. His furniture was in extensions. Meaning, not just one structure here or there. One structure was often actually leading to another structure. Connected like biological units. Organisms. Piled on top of each other over the years. One structure had led to the structure above and below. And with every evolution, every addition, small modifications took place to maximize the space. And also to maximize storage. Very New York. Very. New York. This apartment was also darker. Much darker. These are the ramifications of living one floor down and more stooped in the alleys of Manhattan. Less light. Less access to light. It was dark. But by all observations, Jeffrey embraced it. He embraced it with gusto. Lots of lamps. Lots and lots of lamps. And not the mass produced halogen type of lights from college dwellings. He had many a psychedelic fixture. Oranges. Purples. Lava. Lava lamps. Panthella mushroom lamps.

He was a photographer. This was half of the reason for this visit. Beer was an invitation but also a chance to show off his photos. A very American thing to do. An invitation to a home to see who he was. The objects, items, collections that can create your identity. Your possessions, life archive. These are the things that define you. Very American. Most home invitations seem to come with such concepts. Not only is it a chance to extend hospitality. Many times, it is an opportunity to proclaim one’s uniqueness. One’s tastes. One’s individuality. Show who you are.

His photos. Well, how do we start this? The first photo he showed was not so much a photo. It was actually a magazine cover. Hiep had never heard of this magazine. Or seen it anywhere. It was poorly designed. The masthead looked similar to one of those small town community magazines or newspapers. Those magazines that were free and ran mostly local advertisements for hair dressers and piano lessons. Local graphic design. Hiep had never known of such a magazine. Or heard of it. Or seen it anywhere in New York. But this was the first photo that Jeffrey showed. “So this is a recent project. I shot this for the cover. What do you think? I think it came out nicely.” It was a photo of a beach of some kind. There were some palm trees. Some vegetation. But it was for sure some kind of beach. Now just to be clear, Hiep was not a photographer. He did not claim to know photography. Or good photography for that matter. He could not claim to know what makes for good photography. But his immediate impression when seeing this photo was that it was absolute shit. Just terrible. Again, just terrible. Forgive the colloquial term, but this photo was very much the word “shit.” Even in his head, while thinking his thoughts, Hiep made an effort to be polite. This was the first time in this home. This was the first invitation. But even as polite as his thoughts could possibly be, in his head, the still best descriptive word for this photo was “shit.” The photo was

sake of trying to be cordial with the one person he had met in this entire building. The one person who showed a small gesture of hospitality. The one person who said hello.

He would thereafter, obviously see Jeffrey on occasion. Here and there in the neighborhood. In the corridors. In front of the building. Near the mail boxes. And everytime Jeffrey would say hello first. It never extended into “bro” world. No “hey bro.” No fist pounds. No handshakes. Or what was that kind of hug? The kind where the hand goes up. And the other hand comes around for a kind of embrace. Kind of an evolution of the high five. Well, whatever those were called, none of those too. Nothing like that was happening here. And Hiep knew why. He knew what it was. The poor quality of Jeffrey’s photos would not let him begin “bro” status with him. Or more so, would not let Jeffrey obtain “bro” status. Distance. Hiep thought to myself, he had to be true to himself. Be respectful of himself. Respect himself. Be honest of his beliefs. His thoughts on quality. He had to be true to himself. Integrity.

He sometimes questioned this thinking. Perhaps he was being too critical. Too cynical. And perhaps, well, Jeffrey was actually a very nice person. With the best of intentions. Another very American way to think right? Give the guy a chance. So perhaps he truly was entirely too harsh here. Too judgemental. Especially for these endeavors in a medium Hiep could objectively say he knew too little of to accurately judge or assess. But still. Distance. Distances was the keyword. Distance felt like the right thing. And so there always remained space. A careful space between. A comfortable separation to live their lives as they had. With no further interactions in between to further complicate things.

Several months had passed. Hiep had forgotten some of these initial criticisms. This initial negative impression of his neighbor. He had forgotten this. As can sometimes happen with time. Out of sight. Out of mind. That’s what they say isn’t it? He had forgotten and he would see Jeffrey the neighbor and it would be as it was before. A simple hello. A small question or two, how was life? How were things going? How was the photo work coming? It was fine. Everything was fine. Hiep was here to experience the New York he had seen on television. The New York he had seen in the movies. And he was doing just that. And it was just fine.

This all took place in the early to mid 2000s. The era of “www.craigslist.org,” a website. A kind of have everything website. No frills. No extra unnecessaries. Built on a simple principle of sharing postings or listings. Selling things. Finding things. Meeting people. It was extremely undesigned. Bare bones. In fact, today, it looks just like it did back then. Almost nothing has changed. Purely text based. A white background and blue text. Text. Images. Text. Images.

In some ways, Craigslist was actually fulfilling a huge societal need at this time, this need was for temporary housing. Craigslist was famous at this time for subletting. The act of lending out your place for small stretches of time. Days. Weeks. Months. Most of the rental contracts of this time were a minimum of a year. This did not allow for such small contracts to exist. And so some folks, who would go out of town for short to longer periods of time, would love somebody to stay at their place. Water their plants. Watch things over and most importantly, help pay for the rent. In cities such as New York, this was crucial. It was expensive. And not being at your place, was much like watching money burn. It just disappeared before your eyes. In some ways, this was Airbnb, before Airbnb became Airbnb. People were posting their places here. Subletting was a part of life. Hiep had done this many times. He had used Craigslist many times in the past. Subletting was very normal. His most recent residency in San Francisco, was in fact a craigslist.org find, a six month sublet. A small room in the inner Sunset area of San Francisco. No contracts. Just cash. Given to somebody who he had never met. Everything was through a third party realtor, and it was easy.

Jeffrey said hello one day. As usual. He said hello in the hallway. And the usual small talk commenced. But this day, his demeanor was slightly different than before. As he sometimes does, he immediately jumped to a pressing subject. Something on his mind. He said he had a favor to ask.

And suggested he been downstairs sometime during the week. Favor?

Over been they caught up on the very little they knew about each other. Jeffrey actually knew very little of the work Hiep did. But enough to ask some very generic questions. Questions that were a gesture more or less. A gesture showing interest and care. And Hiep similarly asked about Jeffrey’s recent photography work. How was that going? How were his recent gigs? But this too was not out of interest. Just out of lack of anything else to really discuss.

Four sentences in Jeffrey asks a favor. He explains that he is actually subletting his place out for a month. He asks if it might be possible for him to stay at Hiep’s place for a month? Stay at Hiep’s place while his place would be out for sublet. Okay. “Okay,” thought Hiep. Hiep, being West Coast, was sometimes not the fastest guy. The wheels took some time. The engine took some time to get going. A little slower to speak and even more so, a little slower to digest things. And so it took him a moment for the full meaning of this all to register. It took a moment for the actual facts and details of this favor to crystalize. A few moments in time for the facts of this arrangement to settle down in this slower than normal brain.

Here were the facts:

- So, Jeffrey is subletting out his place. His own, contracted apartment.
- This was obviously done through Craigslist.
- This means, somebody, who Jeffrey does not know, will come to his place and stay there for a month.
- During this month, Jeffrey will collect rent.
- Jeffrey will collect some money, again, from a person who he does not know.
- He will collect this money in return for this person to stay at his place.
 - In the heart of Manhattan. In historic Little Italy, and a few hops from historic Chinatown.
 - A tourist’s dream.
- And then during this time, Jeffrey himself would then need to find a place to stay.
 - For his home would then be occupied.
- And the place Jeffrey was thinking he could stay during this time? For one month?
 - This was Hiep’s place?
- The tiny studio trying to be a two bedroom apartment that Hiep called home?
- The tiny place with the exact same dimensions and layout as Jeffrey’s unit?
 - This tiny place that he was paying the most rent ever in his life for?
- Jeffrey was asking if he could stay at Hiep’s place? In this non-existent living room?

Slowness. Hiep’s slow thinking brain had cobbled these facts together. As quickly as was possible for Hiep. Corralled these facts together and assembled each of those moments in his brain. Slowly, putting it together, like a puzzle, this favor. This proposal from Jeffrey. Slow, slow brain, repeat again, what exactly was it he was trying to do? Slow brain. Repeat again. What was he trying to do? He is subletting out his place. Making money from this subletting. And he is then asking for the “small” favor of staying over for a month. One month? “Crashing” as they call it. “Crashing” at his place would mean he would then pocket some of this money from subletting. Perhaps turn a profit. This is the Airbnb model. This is how folks make money. But the only asterisk here was, he was asking to “crash” on Hiep’s sofa. For a month. This asterisk. Did this make any sense at all?

And Hiep being, again, that guy. That guy who would look at Jeffrey’s poor photographic work. Look at this poor photography and muster up the very non-truthful words, “interesting” or “nice.” That non-confrontational guy, who had seen photography of the lowest quality and could only utter nice things. This mild, West Coast, always trying to be nice guy, who saw such things and let it slide. This unenviable West Coast guy, trying to live out some New York film or tv show, in some tiny apartment in a place where no real New Yorkers actually lived. Hiep was that guy. That guy who happened to somewhat befriend this one neighbor. Hiep was that guy. That guy with no other real friends on this island. That guy who heard this quite comical favor

and could only think of the response: “I’ll have to get back to you on that. I have to check a few things. You know, scheduling. Also, there might be some things happening this month. Yeah. I’ll get back to you.”

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