

PAPER DEVIL

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I attended morning lecture, tired as usual. I couldn't quite keep myself awake, but the on-again, off-again sound of paper being torn distracted me enough to prevent me from falling into unconsciousness. At the moment, I wasn't alert enough to wonder where the noise was coming from; it was just there, and I accepted it. Soon though, I rubbed my eyes and curiosity bade me look around the lecture hall for the source.

The tearing was coming from behind me, as another student tore strips of notebook paper from his folder; he was tearing them very deliberately at odd angles, and folding them in a bizarre way. I turned myself slightly to watch from the corner of my eye. He has this small mass of folded paper scraps – a structure, really, because it had form – resting delicately from the edge of his desk. He continued tearing quietly, folding and affixing shreds of paper to the structure, which began to quiver as it grew taller in the moving air.

I got curious enough to ask what he was doing. He said he was making a “paper devil,” and that he always makes them when he's bored and has enough paper lying around. And it did start to resemble the figure of a little jagged man, its sudden folds and edges making it look like a tiny white Pan.

To my utter shock, as he affixed the last strips of paper, the figure stood up unsteadily and moved its head around, as though it were seeing. It turned towards me and I shied away slightly, but the student smiled and shook his hands at me, saying “relax, it's just paper.”

Turning back to its creator, the paper devil began to do a little dance, clapping its hands and lifting its legs to the sound of crinkling paper. The student watched it looking only slightly amused, while I stared in awe. After a moment, the devil stopped dancing and knelt down on his page of class notes, looking left and right at it very slowly. It seemed to read quietly for a minute or so, then began to wave at the student and point to words. “Why,” “make,” and then it gestured to itself. “Know,” “why,” and “make,” again pointing at itself insistently, desperately. It tugged at his finger, demanding acknowledgement.

Looking a little disappointed, the student crumpled up the paper figure with one hand. It was now motionless, a ragged little ball of paper scraps. As I lifted my eyes with what must have been a look of horror and confusion, he shrugged, saying “they all start asking that eventually,” and that afterwards they aren't fun anymore – just annoying.