

Past Never Dies

A High & Low Fan Story

by Water

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Disclaimer

This experimental story, originally a typesetting demonstration for High & Low, marks the first writing attempt of a novice author. He does not guarantee the quality of the writing, or the story, which was crafted with the assistance of an AI. Expect no consistency in style and narrative. Not recommended for those prone to boredom, frustration, or with high literary standards. Reader perseverance is advised.



Introduction

"Viktor who?"

"Fontaine, Viktor Fontaine. A figure shrouded in mystery, more a phantom than a recluse, I'd say," Paul replied, his attention steadfastly fixed on a letter he was composing at his desk, seemingly oblivious to our conversation.

"And why him as my thesis subject? We are, after all, historians, not ghost hunters."

"His impact could be surprisingly profound," He offered, finally directing his gaze at me as he removed his spectacles. "His contributions during the war, albeit veiled in secrecy, likely played a significant role."

"The current war, in Europe?"

"No, the war with the trenches. He was active here in the city, around thirty years back. Rumors suggest even Edison might have drawn from his work. However, the man clearly cherished his privacy, which only heightens the merit of your investigation, don't you agree?"

"I remain unconvinced that—"

"He vanished post-war," Paul interjected, pausing for a brief moment, then returned his focus to the letter.

"Vanished?"

"Gone. Not a trace after the war. He left academia entirely – no more lectures, no more publications. And no police involvement, either. The man just..." he said, flicking his fingers open, "poof... evaporated — Intrigued yet?"

"Hmph... fine, I'll consider it, though it's not like I'm spoiled for choice."

"A little excitement wouldn't hurt, Patricia," Paul quipped with a smirk, half-murmuring, "I'm beginning to reconsider our mentor-student arrangement."

As our conversation drew to a close, I stood up to leave. "Start at the university. Look into his research papers, particularly those on radio communication. Check the libraries. Phone books as well. It might not yield much, but you never know. Oh and... good luck!"

Leaving Paul's office, I was wrapped in a cloud of doubt, questioning the whole point of the matter. Yet, as I emerged from the building, a compelling urge to unravel Viktor Fontaine's mystery took hold. Vanished..., fled? Abducted? Murdered? I certainly hoped this bit of detective work wouldn't go too haywire.

Suddenly, a realization halted me — "Wait, which university?"



O

O-0000

WARNING !

STOP. YOU ARE READING THROUGH THIS TEXT INCORRECTLY.

Do not read through these pages like a book from beginning to end.

These entries are meant to be read individually only after you look up a lead by its number.

Close this booklet now and follow rulebook instructions for looking up leads.



1

1-1247

Columbia University @ Broadway at 116th St

Revisiting Columbia University, a place I'd been before, everything seemed different on this day. I made a beeline for the physics department, hoping for clues about the ghost I was after.

"Pardon me, ma'am, I'm looking for records on a Viktor Fontaine. Did he ever teach here?"

"What year?" asked the clerk, disinterested.

"Nineteen O... eight, no, ten," I corrected, consulting my notes.

"That's more than thirty years ago, Miss," she answered with a hint of annoyance.

"Please. I'm assisting a historian, any information would be—"

With a resigned sigh, she got up and disappeared into a back room, leaving me to ponder her possible escape. After what felt like an eternity, she reemerged, clutching a stack of documents.

"Vik Fontaine? Yeah, lectured here, 1909 to 1912. No record after that."

"What did he teach?"

"Let's see... um, history of communications, experimental physics, theory of electro—stuff?"

Bingo. "Was he living on campus?"

"Nope, nothing here. And no residency details either." She flipped through the papers. "Probably stayed at some hotel. No education history, no family stuff. An immigrant or something, who knows?"

A glimpse of a photo among the documents caught my eye. "May I have a look at that?"

An old portrait. A handsome, somewhat familiar face. Where had I seen him before?

📌 You have now gained the marker [U]; please circle this letter in your case log (if it's not already circled).



1-5530

I tried nearly every doctor I could find in Morningside.

It seemed either they were all in cahoots, hiding something from me, or I had misheard what the fireman said.



1-6949

Schiavone, M.D. @ 601 W. 137th St

Go to #3-6131 on p.11



1-9091

After numerous telephone calls to various libraries in search of Fontaine's works, I met with no success.

One librarian asked if I had already checked with the city's public library.

Hm...



1-9804

"Hotels, Paul. He must have lived in hotels!" I blurted out over the telephone.

"Patricia, take a moment, please." Paul's voice was a mix of surprise and caution. "You've found him?"

"Not exactly. He was at Columbia, but no fixed address, no family. Odd, right?"

"Interesting. But are we certain it was him?"

"Absolutely. His papers on communication theory are unmistakable."

There was a brief pause. "Which papers?"

"Let me see... *Exploratory Research on Sequential Signal Modulation for Radio Telecommunications*, by a Barnett Fontaine. Oh and this one: *On the Application of Proof of Work in Secure Communications*, by H. Fontaine. Clearly, it's the same person, if anyone had bothered to check."

"Looks like you are on to something. Planning to check the hotel next?"

"Of course, what else? A nap?"

"Try ringing them first," Paul chuckled. "And, how about we discuss this further over lunch? There's a French restaurant not far from that hotel."

"Sure, Paul," I softened, "but only after I find out where he disappeared to."

Paul's expertise always ignited in me a drive to prove myself, though it was a feeling I grappled with. Lost in the thoughts, I suddenly realized I had reached the hotel.

I decided to come in person since phone calls rarely yield results. Plus, I knew someone here.

In the staff area, I spotted Linda, an old friend from childhood days. "Hey, can you do me a favor?"

"Of course, Patty. What do you need?"

"I'm looking for old ledgers from around 1910. A regular guest, stayed for a few years. Fontaine, was the name."

"Let me check on the ledger, but it'll take a while."

Twenty minutes later, I left with the knowledge that a "Cecil Fontaine" stayed here from 1909 to 1910. And Linda was getting a free lunch the next week.


As for my own lunch, maybe it was time to join Paul as I'd promised.



2

2-2844

(#4-9710 on p.14) contd.

- If you have gained marker [H] go to #6-6875 on p.16. Otherwise,  You have now gained the marker [H]; please circle this letter in your case log (if it's not already circled). Go to #1-9804 on p.8.



2-3952

Fontaine, Marshall @ 520 W. 134th St


Hurrying north along Broadway, the rumble of passing trains resonated through me. The relentless buzz on the street seemed to echo emptiness, rather than its usual vibrancy.

I turned onto West 134th Street, and the din softened. The red facade of an apartment building, cozy and inviting, came into sight. I scanned the nameplates and there it was: *Fontaine, Marshall*. A relative, maybe his son?

Pressing the buzzer, I waited. Impatiently.

No response.

Disappointed, I couldn't help but think, finding his trace this easily would have been too convenient. The search, it seemed, was far from over.

 You have now gained the marker [F]; please circle this letter in your case log (if it's not already circled).



2-5980

Hotel Royal @ 535 W. 112th

Go to #4-9710 on p.14



2-6360

Dock 2 @ 698 W. 135th St

I wasn't sure what I was gonna look for as I stepped onto the dark dock of Morningside. It was pitch-black, save for the few lamps lighting the entrance and the docking area. Of all moments, leave it to me to pick the worst possible one, huh?

I revisited the thought of last week's fire, possibly connected to Fontaine. The trail, if ever there was one, had surely turned stone-cold. What was I expecting to find, traces of sulfur?

No, the air was clear. I wandered the area but found no burn marks on the ground. The workers must have cleaned it up— Oh come now, am I really playing detective, thinking I'd just stumble upon something?

I considered heading back, but my thoughts continued.

I'd spent weeks chasing after Fontaine, and something felt off. His obvious fake names, the portrait he left at the university. It was as if he had been hiding, yet somehow also signaling to be found. Why else not use a completely fake name? And if his research was as critical as Paul suggested, why stop? Was he forced?

Too many unanswered questions.

I buttoned up my coat, ready to leave. Better to think this through in a warmer place. Maybe Fontaine left the country. Maybe he's out there living a normal life. As historians, we often seek drama – yet perhaps, the truth is actually quite ordinary.

Mundane, uneventful, inconsequential lives.

Just then, I heard a faint noise behind me. Instinctively, I turned. A man's silhouette stood in the distance.

"Who's there?" I tried to sound confident, but my quivering voice betrayed me in an instant.

"Nice to meet you here, Miss Dayne," came the reply, "I've been expecting you."

"Who are you?"

The figure approached. "Guess?"

I backed away, fighting the urge to flee. "Fontaine?" Was I hallucinating, or just desperate? "Viktor— Fontaine?"

"Viktor, was it not? The names I've gone by tend to blend together. But yes, that would be me."

As he stepped into the dim light, his face looked familiar. Just like the portrait at the university. Same features, same complexion...

...Same clothes. Same hair. And not a day older. It just couldn't be him!

This man was thirty years too young to be Fontaine.

"Is this some kind of trick? I'm just a history student," I murmured, my voice so low I could barely hear it myself.

"I'm only here to help," he replied, moving closer. His tone softened, yet his expressions remained hard to see.

"Help who?"

"You, among others. Listen, Miss Dayne. The post office, tomorrow, eleven in the morning – it's imperative that you be there."

"W-why? What's there?"

"Call it fate."

An urge to laugh at the absurdity, yet laughter wouldn't come. "I don't believe in fate."

"Curiosity, then... Just make sure you are there on time. It's crucial. See you around."

Right after those words, he hastened away. I considered chasing after, but found myself frozen in place. All I could do was call out, "Where are *you* going?"

"Albuquerque, New Mexico."



3

3-4789

Diving into immigration records, birth and death certificates, census data, and even old employment logs, I searched for any trace of Viktor Fontaine. But each effort led to a dead end.




3-6084

Renewal Plastic Surgery @ 374 W. 127th St

Go to [#3-6131](#) on p.11



3-6131

- If you have gained marker [D] go to [#1-5530](#) on p.7. Otherwise,  You have now gained the marker [D]; please circle this letter in your case log (if it's not already circled). Go to [#4-5548](#) on p.13.



3-6861

Hall of Records @ 31 Chambers St

Go to [#3-4789](#) on p.11



4

4-0190

Le Pavilion Eatery @ 503 W. 126th St

Feeling a bit uneasy about Paul's choice of Le Pavilion, I walked in. Its decor and the lively chatter stirred up some painful memories, but I pushed the feelings aside, not wanting to disappoint him.

At least I knew the food was decent.

"You're making great strides. I expected nothing less." Paul tapped on the table, already waiting for me. "Figured you'd find Fontaine first though."

"It might take a while."

"Everything okay, Patricia? We can always talk another time."

Distress was probably written all over my face, "No Paul, I'm alright," I said, struggling to muster a smile, "Just a bit worn out."

Glancing at Paul, I realized his attention had shifted elsewhere, fixed on something, or someone, beyond me. "You've been here before, haven't you?"

"Y-yes, but how did you know?"

Paul leaned in, his voice a playful whisper, "That slick kid over there has hardly taken his eyes off you since you arrived." Pulling back, a flicker of realization crossed his face. "Seems like you've noticed too."

I brushed it off, "Let's just focus on Fontaine, shall we?"

I barely touched my food, while Paul ate heartily.

"Hear this out, one of the abstracts," I read

from my notes, "*frequency hopping, a transformative approach in radio communication. Our technique, prompted by the clever ideas of A. Clarke and supported by a rigorous mathematical model, involves dynamically switching frequencies to avoid interference and eavesdropping.* See? That was him no doubt."

"Sure sounds like it," Paul said, continuing to enjoy his meal, "So, what's your next move?"


"Fontaine left the hotel in 1910 but was at the university till 1912. I'll check other places he might have stayed."

Paul flashed a teasing smile, "I meant in *life*, Patricia. What's next for you?"

Caught off guard, I struggled to find a reply.

"Oh I'm only kidding around, Miss Dayne!" Paul gave a dismissive wave of hand, as we swiftly changed the subject.

By the time we finished, a newfound ease had taken hold of me.

 You have now gained the marker [E]; please circle this letter in your case log (if it's not already circled).



4-2597

East Harlem Public Library @ 224 E. 125th St

Go to #1-9091 on p.8



4-5548

I phoned up several doctors in the neighborhood, inquiring about any patients from last week, with burns caused by purple flames. None seemed to have a clue what I was talking about.

With about half the names still unchecked on my list, I pondered whether to continue. It felt like a long shot.



4-7162

FDNY Firehouse (Morningside) @ 1457 Amsterdam Ave

"We don't maintain records beyond a decade, let alone thirty years," remarked a youthful clerk at the fire department, "Miss, you might find more success at a newspaper archive."

I persisted, "But the situation was extraordinary! A person vanished right after. Could've been arson, or... maybe even murder."

"Then perhaps you should consult the police department," the clerk suggested, his tone implying that he wished the inquiry to be directed anywhere but here.

"Could you at least tell me if it was anything unusual? The fire blazed a bright purple, and... oh right! The distinct odor of sulfur—"

"Purple and sulfur?" An elder gentleman, clad in a sturdy woolen jacket, happened to overhear and seemed taken aback by the combination of words. He came over, and the clerk leaned in, whispering something to him, leaving me out of the loop.

"...with the weird purple... ..last week... ..by the doc?"

"News travels fast, does it not?"

Then the clerk turned back to me. "Look, Miss, we're up to our necks in work here. Like I said, you're better off checking with other departments. Now, if you wouldn't mind?"

I found myself being gently but firmly shown the door.



4-7268

City Hall (Mayor's Office) @ 254 Broadway

Go to [#3-4789](#) on p.11



4-8462

It felt almost foolish, stalking him just for the sake of elusive questions. Yet, something within me couldn't just walk away.

As time passed without any sign of him, fatigue began to set in. Eleven o'clock was drawing close.

Then, suddenly, a figure resembling Fontaine darted into the station. I hesitated, torn between following him for answers, and returning to the post office, where something important could be waiting.

- If you choose to go to the post office, stop reading now and go to [#6-1277](#) on p.16.
- Otherwise, if you choose to chase after Fontaine, go to [#8-2351](#) on p.20.



4-9710

- If you have *NOT* gained marker [F], gained marker [L], and gained marker [U], stop reading now, and return here when you have.
- Otherwise, go to #[2-2844](#) on p.9.



5

5-4732

Pennsylvania Station @ 8th Ave & W. 31st St

There I was, early next morning, hidden behind a newspaper stand outside Penn Station, waiting for Fontaine.

Go to [#4-8462](#) on p.13



5-9229

Inwood Public Library @ 4790 Broadway

Go to [#1-9091](#) on p.8



6

6-1277

Post Office (Morningside) @ 1302 Amsterdam Ave

Fontaine was right. Curiosity had indeed bested me, and I just couldn't shake it off. My mind teemed with possibilities, piecing together fragments of the puzzle. They made partial sense, yet none painted the full picture. This mystery was stretching my limits.

Or perhaps someone's pulling a prank on me? Could it be Paul himself? Couldn't stop thinking about that odd encounter we had at the eatery.

Nearly eleven, broad daylight – nothing to fear, I reasoned. Yet, I had asked Linda for a check-in call later, just in case. A bit much, maybe.

The day's brightness jarred against my brooding thoughts. Around me, life unfolded in blissful ignorance. The sight of an old couple enjoying the day warmed my heart a little.

If it had been a nightmare yesterday, it was time to wake up.

Already at the post office. Do I just enter like it's nothing? Yeah right, missed that in last night's briefing.

Uncertain, I headed towards the door. Out of nowhere, it swung open and smacked me right in the forehead. For a brief moment, the world went dark. When I came to, I was on the ground, groaning.

"Oh my, are you okay, Miss?"

My head was spinning. The pain was sharp, yet bearable. I looked up and saw a young guy looking down, worried.

His eyes got big.

Mine did too. It was him!

"I'm truly sorry about that. I didn't see you there. It's entirely my fault." He seemed genuinely contrite, with a hint of something more. While assisting me, a subtle smile played on his lips, betraying more than just concern. "By the way, I've noticed you at Le Pavilion quite a bit. I'm a waiter there. Please, call me Marshall."

Another sharp throb in the forehead, and I was wide awake.

I must admit, there *was* a certain charm about him.

THE END. When you are ready, turn to Questions.



6-6875

This hotel was considerably smaller. Fontaine might not have chosen a place like this. And even if he did, would a small hotel bother keeping records? Doubtful, but I went in anyway.

An older man, around sixty, was behind the counter, lost in his newspaper. He barely glanced up as I approached.

"Need a room, Miss?"

"I know this might sound odd, but I'm looking into some history. Do you have old guest books from around 1910?" I asked, not really expecting a yes.

"We sure do."

"You do?!"

"Yep, kept 'em all myself." He put down his newspaper and gave a small smile.

"You've been working here for thirty years."

"That's right, young lady. Been at this desk every day. Never got tired of it."

"Quite a stretch. Can I take a look at those books, please?"

"Go right ahead. In that room, there's boxes with the years on 'em."

It only took about ten minutes to find Fontaine. This time he was "Harold". I wasn't sure exactly how this was gonna help, though.

"Any luck?" the old man asked, peeking over his paper.

"Yeah, 1910 to 1912, room 304. You wouldn't have any records of where he went afterwards?"

He put down his paper, looking alerted. "1912... room 304?"

"Is something the matter?"

He got up. "Chasing a ghost, eh?"

"How do you mean?"

I followed him up to the third floor. The hallway was dim, and I could barely make out the number 304 on the door. The old man pointed to a spot on the floor just outside that room.

"Had a fire here. See the burn marks?"

"A fire? What— here?"

"1912, remember it like it was yesterday. Just after dark, I was sitting at my desk when *bang!* Scared the heck out of me, it did. But I came up to see anyway. All the guests were startled, ran out, all except for him in 304. The whole stairway reeked of sulfur and heavy smoke. Purple flames shooting out from that door knob."

"The door knob caught fire?"

"Sure did. Crazy sight, near blinded me. Didn't dare get too close and ran to call the firemen."

"Was the guest okay?"

"No idea. I'd be surprised if he still had his eyes. Firemen had a heck of a hard time with it, saying they'd never seen anything like that. Those flames were stubborn, wouldn't go out easily. But didn't spread much either. That door knob? Completely gone," he took a deep breath, as if reliving the moment, "and there was a hole melted in the floor. Still got the patchwork on 'em."

In any other case, I'd think the old man was spinning yarns. But this was Fontaine, and it'd be wrong to be dismissive.

"So Fontaine – uhh, this guest, was he—"

"They found an empty room. I never saw him again. Still owes fifty bucks for his last month."

Just my luck. Another dead end.

We walked back down. "If you're serious, check with the fire department. They'd have something on it." The old man threw me a final glance. "It was too weird to forget."



6-7401

New York Public Library @ 476 5th Ave

Upon my arrival at the New York Public Library, the grandeur of the building struck me with a sense of awe and a niggling doubt. It seemed to hold the world's knowledge, yet I feared Fontaine's work might elude me still.


"No record of such a person," the librarian said, echoing my apprehension. "However, there's a Barnett Fontaine... and a few others with the same surname. Interested?"

In a dim, quiet corner, amongst rows of dusty shelves, I unearthed four publications by different Fontaines. One article, in particular, caught my eye.

B. F. Fontaine, Columbia University "Investigating Oscillatory Variations in Wireless Telegraphy", *Journal of Electrical Engineering*, 22(2), 112-128, 1910.

The other papers all revolved around the same topic. As I copied the titles and abstracts, a thought struck me. "Could these be pseudonyms? The same person, perhaps?" I queried the librarian, just as I was about to walk out.

"The use of aliases among scholars is not unheard of. But using the same surname consistently? Seems strange."

 You have now gained the marker [L]; please circle this letter in your case log (if it's not already circled).



6-9109

Grand Central Terminal @ 89 E. 42nd St

There I was, early next morning, hidden behind a newspaper stand outside Grand Central Station, waiting for Fontaine.

Go to #4-8462 on p.13



7

7-0442

Westminster Hotel @ 420 W. 116th

Go to #4-9710 on p.14



7-4455

Henrichon, M.D. @ 499 W. 130th St

Go to #3-6131 on p.11



7-8901

Morgan Library @ 225 Madison Ave

Go to #1-9091 on p.8



8

8-2351

(#4-8462 on p.13) contd.

I gave chase, weaving through the dense crowd, struggling to keep him in sight. It was difficult to be certain, but it seemed he boarded the Super Chief.

With no other option, I followed suit.

I scoured the entire train, but there was no sign of Fontaine. It appeared my pursuit had reached its end.

And that was the last I saw of him.

THE END.



Conclusion

STOP!



Do not turn the page until you are ready to begin wrapping up your case.



Questions

- What's the relationship between Viktor Fontaine and Patricia Dayne?
- What business does Fontaine have in Albuquerque?"
- Who is A. Clarke?"
- In which year did the story take place?"
- (bonus/open-ended) What had happened to Patricia at Le Pavilion Eatery before the story began?"
- (bonus/open-ended) Can you name another surname possibly used by Fontaine?



Answers

- Viktor Fontaine is a direct descendant of Patricia Dayne.

Fontaine's involvement in time travel becomes increasingly evident as events progress. He left a trail of clues through his research, each indicating possession of knowledge not known during that era (see answers 3 and 6 below). Another clue is his unchanged appearance over thirty years, even maintaining the same attire and hairstyle. The occurrence of purple flames and sulfur smell, both during his disappearance in 1912 and reappearance thirty years later, may be signatures of a working time machine in the vicinity. Finally, his precise instruction for Patricia to be at a certain location at an exact moment – where she encounters someone bearing his surname – clearly indicates his foreknowledge of future events.

While each of these elements might be explained away in isolation, their convergence points unmistakably towards Fontaine's origins in the future. This leads to the reasonable conclusion that Patricia and Marshall likely share a lineage with Viktor, providing a motive for his insistence on their meeting."

- To assist the Manhattan Project.

The Project, initiated in 1942 and based in Los Alamos, is the most logical deduction. Having already assisted in WWI, Fontaine is poised to do it again in WWII."

- Arthur C. Clarke, the sci-fi writer.

Fontaine made a reference to Clarke in one of his 1910 papers. Clarke did not gain recognition until the 1940s. This might have been a slip-up, considering his extensive travels through time and the challenge of keeping track of all details. (As evidenced by his remark, "The names I've gone by tend to blend together.") However, it is more likely that this was a subtle clue left behind for observant individuals like Dayne, nudging the trajectory of history."

- 1941.

When Patricia inquires about the year 1910, the university clerk responds, "That's more than thirty years ago," indicating that the story takes place after January 1st, 1941. Additionally, in the introduction, Patricia's question, "The current war, in Europe?" suggests that the attack on American soil at Pearl Harbor (December 7th, 1941), hasn't yet occurred. Therefore, the setting of the story is in 1941."

- Patricia had a painful romantic breakup, most likely at Le Pavilion.

The story hints at a recent, distressing event in her life. Patricia's low spirits at the eatery, combined with Paul's mentor-like efforts to encourage her to move forward, are particularly evident. This is underscored by Paul's observation of Marshall Fontaine's infatuated stare, and his subsequent remark, "I meant in life, Patricia. What's next for you?"

Given this, it's unlikely that her distress is career-related. Rather, it appears personal. Her initial evasiveness with Paul suggests an attempt to avoid romantic topics, possibly due to a recent breakup. This event, likely occurring just before the story begins, might explain her reluctance to engage in romantic encounters."

- Nakamoto.

Considering Fontaine's multiple interventions throughout history, it's plausible to speculate that there were others. In one of his papers, Fontaine discusses the application of "proof of work" in "secure communications". Notably, the concept of Proof of Work was first proposed in 1992 – decades after Fontaine's work – and later became a cornerstone of Bitcoin, introduced in 2008. The inventor of Bitcoin, known by the pseudonym Satoshi Nakamoto, remained anonymous and disappeared shortly after creating the cryptocurrency. This mysterious profile aligns well with Fontaine's pattern of discreet interventions and suggests a possible connection to his historical activities."

