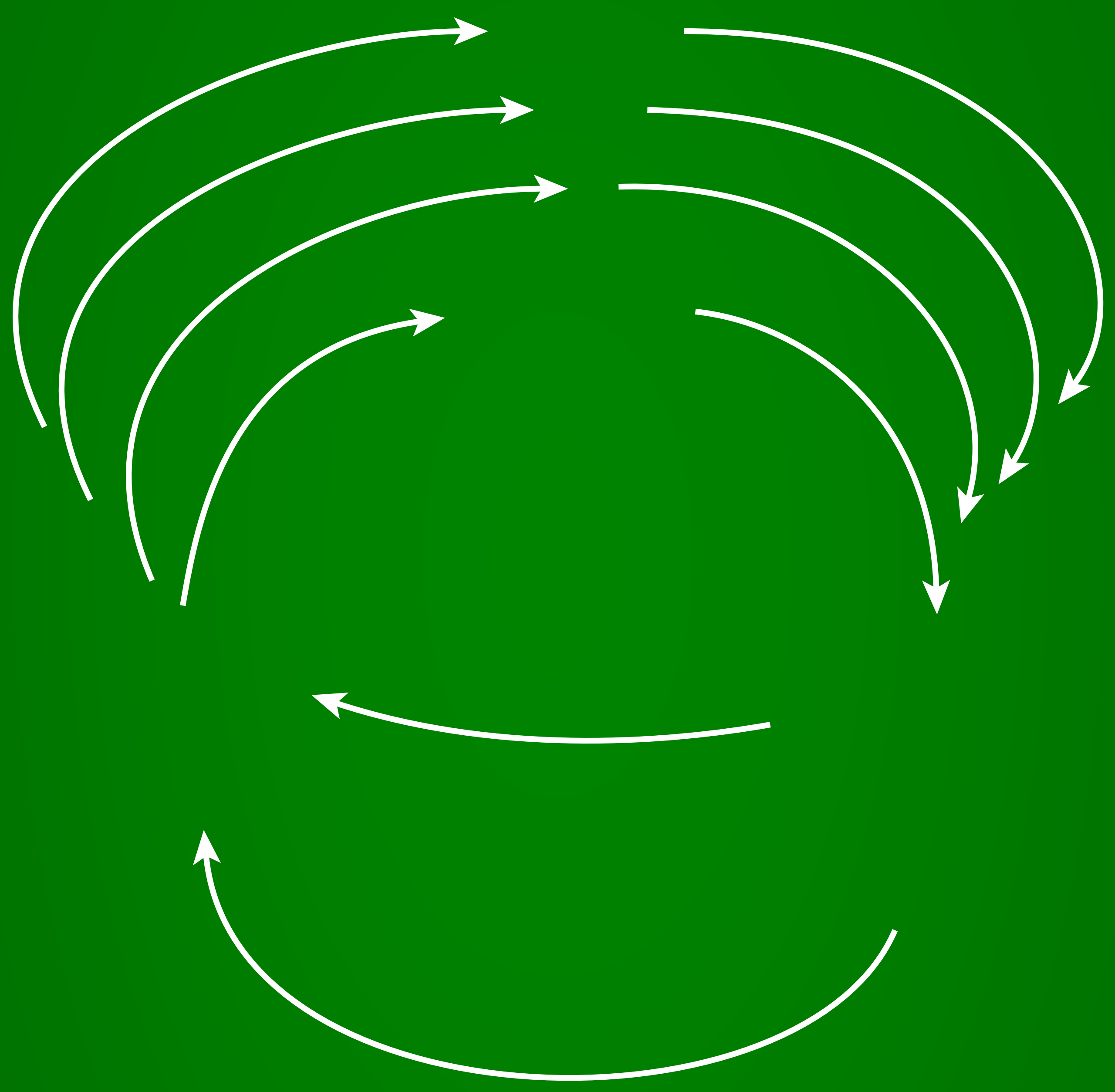


Business-School-Memoire #1

LAST DAY/ GRADUATION

Hrefna Hörn



Royal Antwerp Football Club Stadium.

Two o'clock in the afternoon.

**The stage is set, centre right. Green field
in the back.**

**Screen reads: CONGRATULATIONS
CLASS OF 2021.**

**A gif of fireworks. *L'Amour Toujours* by
Gigi D'Agostino.**

The music stops and the Dean, a middle-aged Dutch man with a fresh face, congratulates us for having “survived the year”. His accent is thick and there is a certain innocence to him which I find unusual for people in higher positions. An approach possible to maintain only in smaller scenes? Maybe.

The content of his speech circulates around the events of this “unusual year” and using several anecdotes he assures us that the institution has also “learned a lot”.

He finishes with a smile and we applaud this man most of us were seeing for the first time.

Party Rock Anthem by LMFAO. Loud.
**OPENING MINDS TO IMPACT THE
WORLD.** The school's slogan on the
board.

**We're wearing black scholar gowns,
motor board hats and fake silk ribbons
around our necks. Our ribbons are red
while other classes wear purple, yellow,
orange and green.**

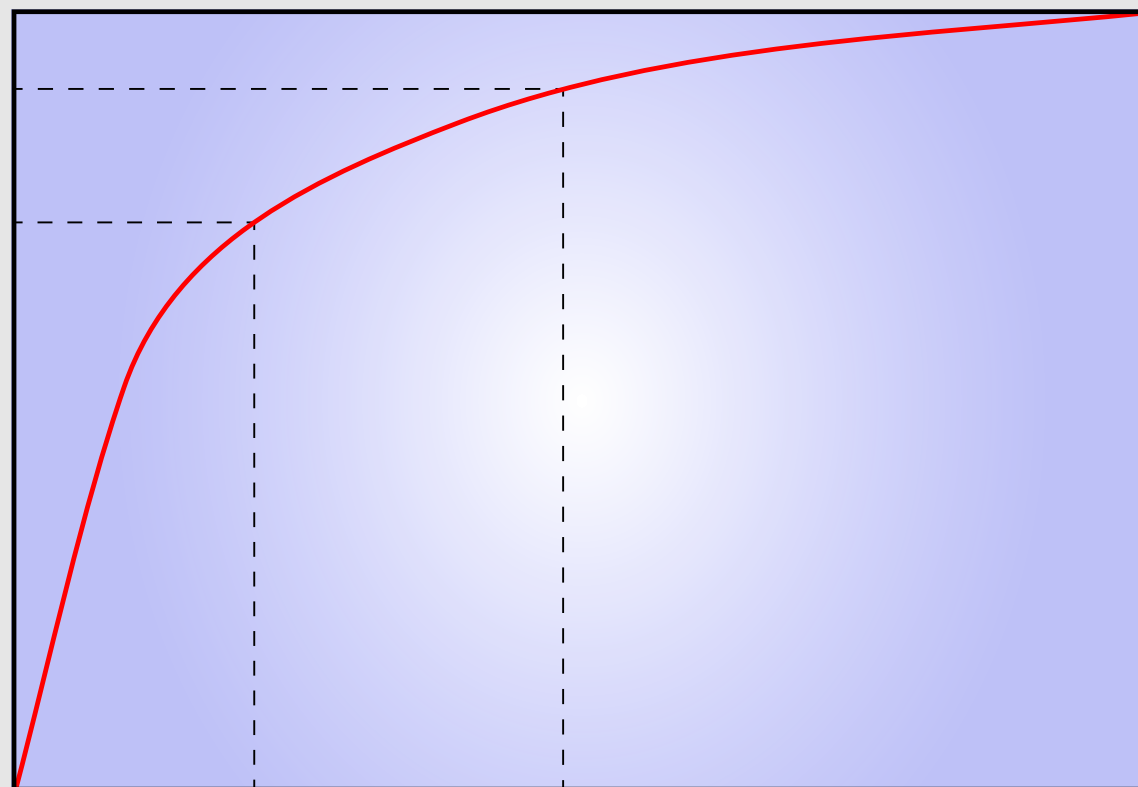
Like different houses ready for a quidditch match.

“What game are we playing again?” I yell towards Helén, who’s sitting next to me, trying to speak over the music. She smiles drunkenly and nods, not having heard or understood what I just said. It did not matter. I take a picture of my outfit and send to my chosen family,

sitting in the seats above. This bad joke was meant for them anyway.

My partner texts back:

“I am understanding for the first time what you have been going through.”



I was finishing a nine-month-long business program with an MBA. It had been an intense shift from the German Art school environment that I'd been part of before.

A different game with different, and similar, set of rules.

What the two programs had in common, was that they were centralised around

the development of the individual. The artist on one hand and the manager on the other hand. In both cases, we needed to believe that we had a voice that was worth being heard. One that has a place in the world and would bring something into motion.

During the program, I kept my backstory and thoughts to myself.

Though I could not help but to compare these two worlds and connect the content of the courses to a larger ideology, I had entered the program with the sincere plan of learning how to run both myself and an unclear larger entity.

When I occasionally spilt my thoughts or stories from my past life I was confronted with confused facial

expressions from my classmates. I witnessed similar expressions from my colleagues in arts when I told them I'd entered business school. Those were hints that suggested, that the bridges between the two worlds I existed in were in some way fragile.

My classmates and I had met up earlier, in the second backyard at one of their parent's houses. Alongside a pool and a sauna, the garden had enough space to host all thirty of us. Long table. Too much food. Too many bottles. Roses everywhere.

It was the first time I'd seen them dressed up. The guys, except for one

who kept casual as a statement, all wore dark blue suits paired with shiny, brown leather shoes.

They stood in a circle on the right side of the table.

The girls, who mostly wore colourful long dresses, sat down on the left.

Bouquets of red poppies. Taking a glass from the table, I walked to the right side.

I resisted the urge to ask if they had been shopping together- using the word “professional” to compliment. We’d accompanied each other through Financial Management, business cases, Strategy and classes moving online. Generally, they had been more at ease with the word *Exploit* being used casually and knew that the rights

answer, at the bottom line, was always profit.

But still. We appreciated each other's company. I was thankful for the shared excel sheets, and technical explanations, and hoped they were thankful for the more ethical questions I'd asked during the year. We toasted over job offers. Talked about company cars and summer

**vacations. Like we had grown up
overnight. Then we lined up for various
constellations of group photos. Girls.
Boys. Girls and Boys.**

**In the break trays of champagne appear
while we remained seated.**

We will rock you by Queen.
I text my family to check out the DJ,
who's booth is next to my row of seats.
Fake-tanned man, gelled hair, ripped
jeans and a white t-shirt with a blue and
red logo of the city: ANTWERPEN. I
remembered that t-shirt from a 2017
Vetement collection. His Antwerp was
something else though. Not Antwerp of

**fashion. Nor was it football-champagne
Antwerp.**

**His timelessness preceded 2017. It
preceded 2021. He could have worn the
t-shirt since yesterday or since forever.**

**Him and his girlfriend, who sat crossed-
legged next to him looking at her phone
the entire time, were something else.**

Their simultaneously bored and wired

presence added to the eeriness of the event.

Another speaker takes the stage.

A student. Smiling then serious. She talks about the shared difficulties we have experienced this year – being at home.

While she felt like she had missed out

**on an important part of her student life,
I had enjoyed waking up five minutes
before class, collecting screenshots of
different coloured graphs and working
on analysis of various large companies.
All from my Brussels apartment.
Which was less sterile and alienating
than the campus in Antwerp.
While she talks, a man paints subtle,**

white lines on the large field behind her. An employee of the stadium. Unaware or unbothered by what is taking place around him. Stringing a threat between two sides of the field he then follows the line in a precise and practices manner. Slowly painting a straight white, like he represents time and labour all together. Meanwhile the student references

a research that concludes that this year graduates are more resistant to uncertainties and will therefore be better employees.

Isn't that great to hear.

A perfect white circle is painted on the middle of the green field.

***The Business* by Tiesto. Loud.**

The game becomes clear at last.

We are seated according to our grades.

**Head of each department stands up
and announces our names in that order.**

**From the lowest grades to the highest
one.**

**When we stand up, one by one a camera
man follows our movements. Our image**

is simultaneously displayed on the large screen. Alongside a quote we have chosen.

“Heavy storm with a spell of sunlight”
from Marine Time Management
graduate.

(I think about the turbulent spring,
which lead to this practical turn).

*“Follow your dreams and my Instagram
@claire97”* Kisses to the camera.
(I do appreciate her directness.)

**We are the last class to be announced.
My hands are sore from stubbornly
clapping for each and every student, but
I keep on going. To my surprise I land a
middle grade.**

Neither winning nor losing the game.

**A quote I stole from an exhibition title
appears next to me on the screen.**

“May the bridges I burn light the way”

It wasn't an ancient Chinese saying. Or taken from an epic novel.

When I looked it up I found out that the quote originated from a Beverly Hills 90210 episode. From a scene where a character called Dylan is confronted with his drug abuse.

I hadn't seen it, it didn't matter, I thought it fitted to the occasion.

I smile and wave.

Then we move a tassel attached to our hats from one side to another and throw our hats in the air. Marking the end of the ceremony. Champagne glasses appear again.

***Dutch version of Blümchen.* The crowd mixed.**

Well-dressed parents advance from their seats above. Reunited families. Their children have finished their second master's degree. Six years of University behind. Paid by the parents. Finally adults.

A large black man steps on the stage. The oversized t-shirt slightly narrow

**around his shoulders. A camo-flash
coloured cap. He's the MC. A hype man,
that had appeared next to the DJ at
some point. (What is his Antwerp?)
WELCOME CLASS 2021
he shouts in the microphone.**

**Some students are still looking for their
hats. The parents are talking to each**

other. They know each other. (Of course they knew each other). High heels and shiny brown leather shoes. Blonde hair. Grey hair. Well cut hair. A lot of beige colours, a lot of suits.

This aspect of the social gathering had remained hidden as we were all seated.

LET ME HEAR SOME NOOOOOISE

No response.

I grab a glass and look for my own family.

As I walk through the crowd, a professor I've never met before approaches me.

Eyes lit up by the Champagne. *“I think YOU should go and dance.”* She says.

At that very moment the Hype man shouts: WHOS JOINING ME

ON THE STAAAAAGE?

I knew she could be asking anyone. It was not especially directed towards me. I did not have to be that one. Dancing on the stage. Not today. In front of all these strangers.

But still.

Confidently I change my direction. Walk down the stairs. Towards the stage.

**My appearance is announced. WE HAVE
A DANCEEEEEER.**

**I throw my hat off for the second time
Twirling across the stage. The Hype man
bounces. Jumping down, up again.**

**First, I spilled half of my glass down and
then the rest. Cape off. Jumping down,
up again. Down on the floor again. Using
the full stage. Radiating energy.**

**The parent- the suit- the CEO:
watching.**

**The classmate – the talent – the future
leader: watching.**

**Like they were seeing me for the first
time.**

And they were.

The thirty-year-old who was dancing in front of a crowd of strangers, semi strangers, acquaintances and two family members wondered if she'd learned something this year.

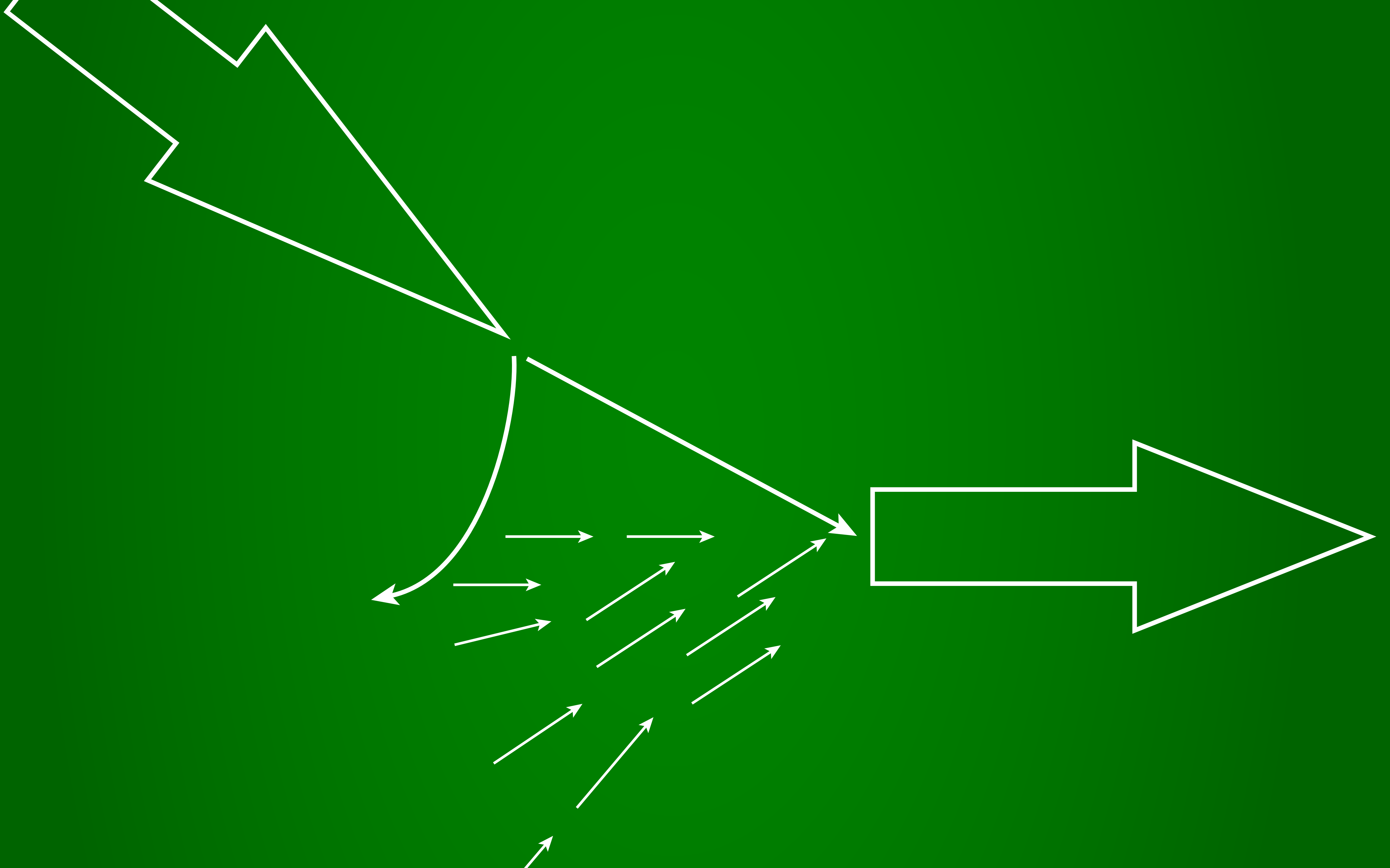
If she had managed to take her life into her own hands. Grown up a bit.

Was she now capable of confronting responsibilities?

The ones that came with, simply living life.

Or was she just equipped with new vocabulary. And a degree. One that could trick people into believing she actually knew what she was doing.

Or was she just slightly better at paying rent on time?



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