

Kate



By Charles Davi

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Jones Street

Wispy light green curtains hang before the thick wooden blinds behind them, allowing us to adjust the lighting in our railroad one-bedroom apartment, though because there is no proper door to the bedroom, we cannot stop the light from permeating through the balance of our home, once the blinds have been opened.

32 Jones, a number now signaling our home, after four years of being students together at NYU -

The transition from undergraduate, to the brick-lined staircase, in our old Village walk-up, repeating daily during the week, as we gradually make our way into the new life of adulthood, with responsibilities that repeat, bringing structure to our time together, but leaving us free to remember, who we were each weekend, with our friends, often in our home, an echo of a time that causes all of us to laugh, and occasionally misbehave.

Though we take good care of Queasy (the cat), his appearance is decidedly abnormal, on the order of a heavily used grey mop, with yellow cartoon eyeballs glued upon it. This causes us to laugh at him, on occasion, which often causes him to cry, in response. He's also extremely overweight, and though we tried to put him on a diet, he would wail relentlessly, standing next to his empty bowl, keeping us up all night, and so we really have no choice, and simply keep it full, all the time. This undoubtedly adds to his vomiting, but again, we don't have much of a choice about the matter.

I think about these things, when I'm wrapping up at work, my attention randomly shifting to the moments soon to come, inadvertently making their realization further off, distracting from the matters at hand, that require my attention first. Nonetheless, my sense of reason secondary to my imagination of such things, since they are the reasons that I choose to labor in the first instance:

So that I can be with Kate.

In the five years that we've been together, I can count on one hand, the number of arguments that Kate and I have had. This is due to nothing other than the world being in a state of total disarray, placing disagreement in a context, that causes it to appear almost disrespectful. Though a boon upon realization, it makes my time at work appear a nuisance, despite the fact that I enjoy it, because what on Earth could compare, to the undisturbed enjoyment, of another human being, the simple joy, brought by simply showing up, seeing plainly, that Kate wants nothing more than what we have. †

The blinds

I see her when I come from work, standing, staring out the blinds, open, but not lifted up, her expression incredibly grave -

I quietly close the door to our apartment, so as to not disturb her, conscious of the noise of my keys. She looks quickly at me, turning back toward the scene outside, but because we don't have any real problems within the walls of our home, I assume something going on outside, has justifiably caught her attention, and so she feels no need to apologize, for what would otherwise appear to be rude. So I slowly walk over to her, without taking off my shoes, calm, knowing that she's fine, but concerned that something's happened. When I make it over to her, standing beside her, both before our bedroom window, looking down upon Bleecker Street below, Kate says to me, now looking right into my eyes,

"I don't understand why people do these things." †

Pasta

This is our first summer in our apartment, and it is pointlessly hot today, both of us now regretting being too lazy to buy an air conditioner, which have become reasonably affordable. In addition to the heat, it's raining quite a bit as well, adding humidity, though quite beautiful, as the sun is still shining, with the rain adding a bit of sound, to a now otherwise still summer evening.

I've volunteered to cook tonight, making pasta, with some groceries I've bought at shops nearby, though as a reward for my diligence in this unreasonable heat, I've put on a relatively new record by Wes Montgomery, who apparently plays without a pick, producing a truly unusual and unique tone for a Jazz guitarist, but nonetheless achieving the same legato leads as others. Moreover, this album makes use of a Hammond organ, creating an eerie context, and an overall unusual timbre.

Every night, the news reminds us, of how bad things really are, and tonight, our bedroom window did the same. So as a result, we typically eat while either simply talking, or listening to music, saving the news for a full stomach, ready for a bitter serving, of an times pointless, external world.

Kate's sitting on the couch with Queasy, reading the New York Times.

It's a really basic sauce, with white wine, arugula, garlic, onion, and mild sausage, that I'll eventually top off with grated, aged parmigiana. I've kept the white wine in the freezer for a while, having poured a bit of it into the sauce, though I take the bottle out, occasionally, rubbing it on my forehead, and neck, finding solace in its partially frozen surface. Kate catches me once, laughing at me, so out of shame, I rinse off the bottle, and place it back into the freezer. The arugula goes in last, which I tear before dropping it into the pasta, already covered in sauce, thinking it unpleasant to eat what feels like a stalk of grass. I stir it all together, turn off the burner, and leave the lid closed, letting the arugula wilt, for a bit.

The floors are slightly uneven, wide-planked and old, within the narrow, railroad layout, though with very high ceilings, making the space feel much more livable, and likely adding a layer to actual livability as well, with more room for the heat to move around, on a day like this.

The steam from the pasta rises from our plates, which is not lost on either of us, but there's not much to do about it -

Though it's quite good, and so she nods, in approval. †

Dylan Thomas

Dylan Thomas sighs every time Kate holds a drink, this night being no exception, knowing soon she'll disappoint him, turning red after just one glass, unable to hold a pen, let alone to write a page -

There she is, a writer, Irish to boot, uninspired, and simply tired, after just a bit to drink. Her inadvertent temperance, often cause for mine, leaving both of us happier, and less hungover than otherwise. †

The only truth I know

It's so insanely hot, we both need to take a shower after dinner, and we implicitly decide, absent conversation, we'll just shower together.

She asks, "Do you mind washing my hair for me?", with a bit of exhaustion, and subtle, guilty humor in her voice, and though I laugh at her needy and slothful request, prompting her to laugh in full, in reply, I oblige, in my actions, and so she says, "Thank you ... ", in satisfaction.

To add to my affections, and make plain my lack of apprehensions, in delivering whatever joys I can, I sing, to Kate, "Kathy's Song", quietly, standing just before her, her eyes closed, my hand now above her brow, making its way toward the center of her head, my fingers gently lifting hair up and back along the way, she then sings along, "and from the shelter of my mind," into my left shoulder, leaning into me, her head then out of the path of the droplets falling behind her, some falling down the bones along her shoulder, others slipping back, my right hand now resting, just behind the right-hand side of her face, on the whole, their motions confounding, perhaps as taken and confused as I am, by the alarming stillness of a beautiful woman, calmly participating in uncertainty -

"Kiss you when you start your day", she leans back and opens her eyes, mine already open, smiling at me, we lean into each other and kiss, our wet lips moving in response to more than just our affections, as we still sing, then leaning back, now staring at each other, holding both of each other's hands, just beyond the path of falling water -

"I stand alone, without beliefs, the only truth I know is you". †

Every morning

Every morning, we wake up, and there is no one else, either there, or in our thoughts -

It begins with only us.

The world sets in, as we rise, our families and friends, the small parts of the world we can feel safe to consider this early in our day. Our ridiculous cat, our genuine concern for his condition, reminds of the innate tragedy of life, though still unable to comprehend its pointless scale, clearly due to misconduct. †

Aarhus

We're both under the tent, seeing clouds take over outside, as Arne is obliterated, forcing others to carry him about in a chair, bouncing him up and down, as if it were a Bar Mitzvah, which he undoubtedly saw in New York, either on television, or perhaps in person, during one of his many misadventures. He's playing dansband, The Vikings, and it's quite charming, reminiscent of somewhat earlier American pop, perhaps early Beatles, only exacerbating Kate and I's affections for one another. And so we quietly leave the tent, without announcement, towards the boat at the bottom of the hill, turning back occasionally to see the tent, and the house, receding from our view, as we run down the hill.

I love my home, America, but I know it is not well -

Always on guard, always counting, worried someone will diminish your pile.

It is simply not normal, and certainly not healthy, leaving Kate more able to be herself, here, with no disasters to observe, no newsroom to spoil our mood, leaving only instead the early moments of our days, only the two of us, running down a damp hill, the smell of rain everywhere around us, the absurdity of my four-eyed cousin behind us, both of us charging towards a shit boat, hand in hand, ready to feign an act of petty theft, and ride off into a likely colder than pleasant sea.

We both more or less jump inside the boat, which is tied to a thick wooden pole, driven into the shore, at the base of the land attached to the house, now about twenty feet away from us. Once Kate and I are seated, I untie the rope connecting the boat to the shore, start its rubbish engine, heading off, both of us laughing like children -

Twenty-two years old, already married, with no one else at all in sight, we set out, as Kate leans over the boat, cautiously dipping her hand into the water below, running her fingers through the current, yelping at its frigid temperature. I laugh hysterically in response, not because it's notably funny, but because Kate is so plainly happy, now looking back at me, smiling.

The kinetics of the early evening taking off, I leave the engine rudder to drive itself, tearing off my shirt, as Kate does the same. I then cut the engine, pull an oar up from the base of the boat, plunging it into the water, first to my right, then to my left, alternating until the boat is roughly still, increasing the depth of the paddle with each iteration.

I jump into the water without announcement, knowing Kate will follow:

I drop deeper than expected, flailing a bit, opening my eyes, the brackish water, no harm, I can see, another human being, descends, the foam surrounding

her form, the muted sounds of a concussive force hit me, and so I swim, towards her, like a maniac -

I push my body towards the surface as I approach, grabbing her right hip first, with my left arm extended, then under her left arm, like a hook, with my right arm, my head bursts above the surface of the water, lifting her up a bit as I emerge, I see her beautiful face, her blue eyes, and red hair, soft, wet skin, barely separated from mine, we kiss immediately, tongues entangled, grabbing at each other, wildly, pulling off each other's few remaining garments, tossing them into the boat, now naked, floating.

An endless knot

Roped into each other for quite some time, we both realize that our teeth are chattering uncontrollably, our lips now somewhat chapped, in the Bay of Aarhus, holding each other desperately, suddenly aware of the pointlessness of our endeavor, as a warm house, with proper accommodations awaits us, provided we act like reasonable people. Adulthood settles in, our desperation subsides, though still aware of our own mortality -

This is new to us, we're really young, and I love her so much, and I realize, as the realities of the human condition gel, that she can be taken from me, and sometimes I can't handle it, and I know she hates it as well. This causes us to do stupid shit, like steal a boat, and jump in freezing water, perhaps because we think it somehow prevents the inevitable, or maybe because it really does make sense, in that it creates a handful of moments we can perhaps hang on to, in the dark.

Memories within the external world

We make our way past the tent, and I see moss upon the massive rocks that line the path up to the house, with tiny flowers grown between them, recalling summers here as a child, with my family, looking up, and seeing Kate, her hair wet, staring forward at the house, perhaps sensing me, she looks over, smiling a bit, as I smell the burn of an open grill, the taste of the bay still on my lips, I take her hand, the subtle darkness of the evening causing her hair to glow a bit in context.

The house is generally dark, save for a few people floating about, turning hallway lights on and off, chattering, laughing, smoking, a confounding mix of English and Danish, that few likely understand, given our condition, filling the dimly lit corridors of the summer house that I spent my summers in, as a child, now slowly painting it with my own memories, as an adult of sorts, imagining our own child, perhaps one day learning of this day, presumably later in his or her life, old enough to learn that mom and dad were once fun people, that sort of stole a boat, but not really, and then swam naked.

We make our way up the creaky stairs, past an array of photographs, Kate occasionally looking over, as they're still relatively new to her, we arrive at the landing, the door already open, I dive on top of the bed, with the lovely sheets and blanket, smelling more of fresh air than fresh laundry, Kate slowly makes her way over, her long legs, somehow end up interwoven in mine, her wet hair dangling, I gently accommodate her form.

Arne's song

I hear the old wooden doors to the church open, remembering Arne as a kid, awkward and clumsy, embarrassing us every Sunday, now hearing the rusted hinges squeaking, as he plays guitar, now a grown man, brilliant, singing, "Suddenly, you'll appear.", as I see Kate, the sequins on her gown glowing in the white Danish Sun, the pale blue sky outside the small church beaming through the windows, surrounded by white stone, and the aged, almost black wooden interior of the church, I feel my stomach drop:

Kate and I connect from a distance, like a bolt across the room, our instinct for survival at its heights, our friends and family, only the younger ones, with the New Yorkers and Bostonians all having taken a secret trip to Denmark -

They shout, "Hurrah!", after each stanza of the outro, having plainly practiced this, in our absence, presumably under Arne's direction.

A bunch of raucous college students, organizing a wedding, the end result, nothing short of miraculous:

My crazy Danish family, Kate's painfully Irish cousins, and our absurd friends from New York, all standing at attention, upright, in a small, crowded church, shouting, with uncontained love and excitement, for a secret, that they have now defined. †

Rosemary and time

I wake first next morning, the morning light entering my mind, painting my memory with images of Kate's sleeping expressions, gentle motions, her delicate fair skin, the soft pinks of her lips, the sounds of the tides now coming into focus, with the light through the curtains reminding me of the day ahead -

My wife, she is my wife, and I am too young for these things;

We are too young for these things.

I can hear someone at work in the kitchen downstairs, with the subtle scent of rosemary making its way into our room, together with the smell of coffee brewing, someone's busy hands and pattering feet, plainly at work on something, in which I'm hoping to partake -

I gently move her hair away from before her face, with my finger tips, revealing more of her skin, I lean in and kiss her cheek bone, and then the side of her nose, waking her, she turns slightly, smiling, her eyes still closed, her hands slowly reaching up my back, then behind my head, pulling me in towards her, we kiss in earnest, and I can smell her skin, our eyes briefly open together -

“Good Morning Mrs. Brandt.” †

The spoils of youth

We both make our way down the stairs together, passing by the same photographs as the night before, now lit up in the subtle daylight that's made its way into this distant corner of our home, where we hide our memories, the smell of coffee growing stronger, the faces in the photos now in clear relief, Kate giggling, just behind me in the narrow staircase, I feel her hands on my shoulders, so I slow down, looking back, as she slowly climbs on top of me -

I reach my right arm out, gesturing for her leg, holding the wall with my left arm to secure our position, repeating the same on the other side, then carefully walking down the balance of the staircase, introducing the consummation of our new love, to an unexpectedly full kitchen, prompting applause the moment our legs and bare feet become visible near the base of the steps -

Arne, surprised by the display, pauses while eating leftover crayfish from a sizable bowl, joining in the applause, shouting, despite a mouthful of the salty creatures, holding a handful of them into the air, as he exclaims his enthusiasm for the matter.

There are several breads, a variety of meats and cheeses, sliced cucumbers, a plate of dill beside a rather lamentable bowl of leftover crayfish, with Christina at work boiling potatoes, and lightly frying garlic and rosemary in olive oil, while diligently breaking and scrambling eggs into yet another bowl on the counter beside the burners. I spot the coffee and the Västerbotten, completely satisfied with this combination alone, though I look over, back toward Kate, to be sure that she is happy as well with what's on display, only to be greeted by a wet kiss, on the side of my face, followed by a hearty squeeze from her legs below, still around my waist. †

Holy, holy is his sacrament

Kate and I bought Arne a Martin acoustic, as a thank you, for organizing the wedding for us, though unaware of how much work he had actually done in putting it all together, making our gift, driven at least in part by obligation, ultimately an act of love, upon realizing how sweet this dork of a man really is, and how much effort he put into making this a truly memorable event for everyone -

He is enamored with the thing, and in love with American music.

All of us make our way toward the shore after breakfast, with a ton of beers, Arne holding his new guitar like a baby, the shetland guitar strap reversed, the guitar in his arms, prompting Kate and I to smile, as he walks before us in the sand, the two of us each holding bags full of sheets, blankets, and towels, Brandon carrying several six packs' worth of beers, some of the others running ahead, towards the shore.

Kate and I patiently unfold several sheets, creating an array of seating for the group, laying a handful of rolled up towels along each.

Brandon lays the beers down behind the row of sheets, and gets to work building a fire pit, first digging out a roughly ten-foot wide ditch, about 6 inches deep, with his bare hands. Christina spots him, and begins collecting kindling from around the house, building up a small pile beside the pit, prompting Brandon to take things even further, collecting rocks to line the boundary of the pit.

Kate and I then remembering the night we first met, with roughly this same group of people, under remarkably similar conditions.

Whether deliberate or not, the thoughtful efforts of a handful of people, that were once strangers, created an echo of a day that ultimately brought us all back together, four years later, though this time, it is up to Arne to woo us all, and I cannot for the life of me understand where it all comes from, but he is a simply different person with a guitar his hands -

Everyone amazed, as his delicate voice hovers over the sharp sounds of him plucking the steel strings of his new Martin guitar,

“Holy, holy, is his sacrament.”,

Seated near the corner of the last of the many sheets aligned in a row, facing the shore,

“In a melody sustaining.”,

Knowing that we've moved to Bleecker Street, this sweet man, who wasn't there that night, and only moments ago, in an appalling condition, with a handful of lukewarm crayfish, presumably still drunk from the night before, then bouncing high in a chair beneath a plastic tent, now bringing all of us together, somewhere different, saying something new, that's likely never been said, until just now -

A small piece of America, articulated in a new form, just beyond the Bay of Aarhus, before a small group of people, ultimately from all over the world, by an absurd man, with something new and beautiful to say. †

Memories of the recent past

Kate and I are a bit further out than the others, staring parallel to the shoreline, now quite far from the shore itself, looking forward into the great distances before us -

Her hair is up, somewhat messy, with a pair of braids wrapped around in each direction, below a bundle of hair at the back, relatively dry, all things considered. It's quite warm, in the Sun, though the water is still a bit cold, as is the breeze, causing us to keep close, as we paddle to float, the sand now imperceptibly low beneath us. We turn right, to see Arne still playing a few feet up from the shore, many still listening, the house behind, the fire pit smoking somewhat, the Sun glaring to my left, I can feel its heat on my shoulders, as they occasionally poke out from under the sea.

I slip the fingers of my right hand on top of her left, under the water, feeling the metal and jewel of her ring press into the palm of my hand, I grab the bottom of Kate's right leg with my left arm, suddenly kicking harder to compensate for her loss of motion, then letting go of her hand, gently lifting her up with my right arm, just under hers, leaning in to kiss her, causing Kate's hair to become wet behind her head, as she angles further onto her back, with the messy bits floating outwards away from the rest, both of us moving, her backwards, our eyes open, smiling, as Arne pauses playing, to wave, prompting those still on the shore to turn and see us, waving at us both as well, breaking my paddling to reply, our momentum carries us for a bit, with a light trail of foam along our way, as I end the gesture with my left hand behind Kate's ankle, waving with my right. †

The time she got away

She's gently escaped me, walking just a few feet ahead, the water falling down her naked back, captured in the elastic seam along the top of the bottom to her bathing suit, some dripping down onto the sand below, her legs covered in trails of droplets, also making their way down to the sand, the base of her feet covered in sand, with some strewn about the top as well -

She walks toward our towels, leaning over to pick hers up, and holds it up to her face first, then turning towards me, hugging it like a teddy bear, watching me as she then dries off her chest and shoulders, quickly running it down the top of her legs as well, then laying it down upon the sheet below. Her sundress beside it, a pale yellow, with thick off-white shapes sewn into the surface, some of which appear to be the vines of a plant, others resembling flowers, folded neatly, she slowly sits down upon her towel, adjusting herself, as I come to realize that I've been watching her this entire time, more or less motionless. †

Because of Hanna

Kate and I brought a recent Simon and Garfunkel album with us to Denmark, knowing Arne absolutely loves American folk music. We play the full album, after swimming, “Scarborough Fair” comes on -

We all listen, barely talking, or moving, together, sitting, drinking beers, some of them smoking, scattered about our family room.

I can tell Arne has never heard anything like it -

The evening Sun hovers, just above the horizon, reluctant, unwilling to set;

The clouds break, allowing a beam in, illuminating my cousin’s dark blond hair, wearing laurels, flowers, littered with baby’s breath, from the night before, the leaves from the bush from which the stalks were taken still partially attached, she stares at the hifi, then out the window, catching me staring, seeing me, she smiles, her somewhat crooked teeth beaming in the light of the Sun, both of us then laughing at each other;

Both of us seated on the floor, with her leaning her back on an old, cushioned chair, as a small flock of birds flies past the window as we lock eyes, quickly casting moving shadows, along the wall behind her, the sound of their passing lasting only a moment, causing both of us to laugh, seeing one another, due to the operations of happenstance, mutual curiosity, and our love for one another.

My memory illuminated, our childhood rushing in, as the red setting Sun colors her already reddish cheeks, both of us realizing how much time has passed, little babies, small people, changing with time;

How many times we’ve done exactly this, sunburnt, sitting on the floor of our summer home, listening to music, often side-by-side, talking childish nonsense, the smell of the sea upon us both, our parents walking about, looking after us, now adults, inventing our own designs of the things to come, both of us free to do as we please, instantly appreciating a lifetime of change, in an instant;

The effortlessness with which I love Kate, as an adult, undoubtedly informed in part by our Platonic friendship, more or less since birth, leaving both of us free, to trust others in these matters, because we’ve trusted one another, completely:

That I can look upon a woman, and hold her hand, and see a friend, a person, first, and then, and only then, perhaps something more, and only after, because of Hanna, first. †

Her only name

The clouds above the rolling tides below, like bursts of dust, arranged into sheets, hovering above what seems a single stately wave, its dark currents invisible, save for the foam at its crests, or when it lands upon the shore -

The moon suspended above, a nearly imperceptible crescent, the smell of sausage cooking in the pit, breads roasting on the rocks that bound it, herbs and spices burning up into the air, the taste of beer upon my breath, the scent of Kate above my lips, finishing every breath with a reminder, a memory, I can now realize at will, seeing her standing, talking to Brandon, slight in context, all of us small before the void above, all of us fleeting, marionettes, beneath the heavens above, glowing at the sight of one another, just like the stars that dot the sky above, though perhaps more proximate, in context, with only one name by which we each truly know each other.

With a thousand smiles

The Summer Triangle overhead, Vega, I had a beer, and I was playing guitar, and singing, quite loud, “Little Wing”, by Hendrix -

I had already noticed Kate.

It was a party, for students, already admitted to NYU, not organized, but we just did it anyway -

A bunch of students, visiting from out of town, took a trip out to Long Beach, staying at someone’s summer house -

I went anyway, because I saw Kate.

The wind blowing quite hard, forcing me to focus, deliberately trying to impress this person that I’ve yet to get to know.

There’s a fire-pit in the sand, mostly thin kindling we found near the treeline, with a few logs taken from the home’s fireplace.

“That’s all she thinks about.”, we make eye contact, and she smiles, and takes a seat in the sand, with a bunch of other people, already seated, listening.

“When I’m sad, she comes to me.”, and I stare right at her, shamelessly, as she laughs, in reply, everyone now plainly aware, of what I’m doing, some of them laughing along with Kate, causing Kate to laugh even more, in response -

“With a thousand smiles, she gives to me free.” †

Sketches of the Inchoate

Musical references

Note that song titles are hyperlinks

1. Horace Silver, arr. by Wes Montgomery Trio, “Ecaroh” (1956).
2. Paul Simon, “Kathy’s Song” (1965).
3. The Vikings, “Hon grät vid min skuldra” (1961).
4. Charles Davi, “An Endless Knot, Mov. 3” (2020).
5. Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, “Bleecker Street” (1964).
6. Paul Simon and Art Garfunkel, “Scarborough Fair” (1966).
7. Jimi Hendrix, “Little Wing” (1967).