

Sketches of the Inchoate



By Charles Davi

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The outlines of a day

It's Syttende Mai, we're in the living room of our apartment, there's a TV mounted on a white wall.

You take your earrings off, which are large, and silver, and quite reflective, your hair is blonde.

Our bedroom is sunny, as is the entire apartment.

I watch your fingers, as you take your earrings off -

Your ear is almost glowing a bit in the light, and so I can see the faint outlines of the blood vessels branching under your skin, causing your earlobes to look like small opaque gumdrops, in context.

It's all a bit disorienting, leaving me relieved, we're finally home -

You seem so comfortable, undressing, slowly and casually, with something in between indifference and affection, occasionally, making eye-contact, smiling.

Though I'm borderline offended by your pantyhose, which take me by surprise, given what you're wearing is, otherwise, tantamount to a costume:

The translucent, brown top is high-waisted, looks a bit cheap, like a beer bottle.

I can nonetheless see the outlines of your underwear in the bright light of the room, which compensates.

Our apartment is not that big, though certainly not small -

My snobbishness creeps into almost everything, including our home, though you are the rare exception, leaving even my exhausting pretensions exhausted, unable to find an unflattering aspect of your appearance, or behavior.

The bedroom has what look like floor to ceiling windows, and the room is filled with typical Scandinavian summer sunlight:

Ultra-bright and white.

Your knees are shaking, somewhat, planted into the bed, with your palms also flat on the bed, supporting you, with your back approximately upright -

Your hair is down, obscuring your face, which is looking into your lap, just a few inches away from mine.

...

I drank beer for most of the day, to avoid acting like a jerk, so I must really like you, and it seems as though we love each other, but I'm nonetheless concerned with your opinion of me, which is atypical -

It breaks my confidence, leaving me less free to enjoy my drunkenness, than I'm accustomed to, which I dismiss, as an unavoidable consequence of adulthood, and a mature relationship.

We're engaged, and I can feel pangs of financial anxiety at times when I see your ring, and my obnoxious car, and my obnoxious clothes, my obnoxious expenses generally, all tethered about some pretentious drivel, pushing papers about a desk, quantifying some nonsense risk, all of which leave me carrying the weight of a career that appeals in many ways to what is worst about me:

An aggressive jackass, eager to remind everyone they wouldn't fare terribly well, but for constraints of civility.

You elicit something else in me, I've grown addicted to, perhaps because I'm being paid to be my worst most days, providing me with an escape:

An exaggerated privacy -

We both enjoy the same pretentious bull shit, with a common set of signals we interpret in a private manner, regardless of who's around, which allows our space to live, wherever we are, together.

Nonetheless, we spend substantial time laughing at each other, suggesting that, despite our mutual admiration, there's a current running under keeping us from slipping too far into our own graces.

...

The sunlight cuts through a glass plant vase, through the soil, illuminating its roots, which distracts me from you -

It's on a table near the bed, to the righthand side from my perspective, just a few feet away from my eyes.

Your legs are shaking, seated near me in the center of the bed, as I'm still laying on my back, and you're crying.

You say, in a disappointed tone, with inappropriately long pauses,

"Charles, ... I want us, to have a kid."

You don't look at me, awkward overall in stating the idea.

I become uncomfortable, initially expecting something different, though I

noticed your mood change, so I expected something.

The birds are up, and chirping quite a bit, annoying me, subtracting significantly from the gravity of the moment.

Without any pause, I sit up, placing my left hand on your forearm, and say, “OK”, though still unsure of the merits of your idea, growing worried apprehension shows in delivery or expression.

You slip your arm out, and place your hand in mine, and so I squeeze it, with a firmness consciously adjusted to convey assurance.

...

I was drinking Carlsberg, or Tuborg -

I don’t remember which, but it was a green glass bottle, for sure.

...

The curtains are open, we’re on a somewhat high floor, and so no one can see in as a practical matter, and the Sun is so bright, it cuts through the fabric of the curtains -

We must look like lit up cutouts from a distance, haplessly entangled in each other, while our handler is off doing otherwise.

You have alarmingly beautiful eyes, with some freckles around them, and though I’m used to seeing you at this point, I’m always taken back by your appearance, especially now -

Outlines of your lips flash, mixed in with the sunlight through your hair, your skin brushes its way against mine, as you lean in to adjust your posture.

I see droplets in your eyelashes, which remind me of the light through the roots of the plant, minutes earlier, though I can’t make sense of why I’m making these associations.

“You think it’s, OK, that we have a child together?”

To an American, you have a sophisticated accent, suggesting plainly you grew up speaking British English, but you nonetheless have the charm of a Norwegian bumpkin, with a typical bounce to your articulation.

You start laughing, at yourself, and my thoughtless response, for a bit, for having been so dramatic, which suggests it’s out of character for you, which might be why, I’m actually worried what you think of me.

You wipe your eyes, and your nose, collecting yourself, and though an imposingly mature personality emerges, I can see that part of your persona has been shattered by your honesty, which brings me a bit of pride, and guilt, but mostly pride.

You slap my right shoulder, quite hard, laughing harder, and say,

“You’re such a prick! Charles ...”, sounding this time, entirely British, and I gather, that you measured, my placating had grown to something else entirely, leaving you confident in my love, and your expectations, though their realization may have been a bit off from what you had hoped.

...

You slip in the shower, afterward, and hit your head, which leaves me feeling hopeless -

The prospect of an impossible loss, becomes a possibility, and my arrogance shrinks to meekness.

I resent slipping so far into my affections for you, but my concern preoccupies my thoughts -

I see your wet hair stuck to the bones of your naked back, the top of your head, your hair split roughly down the middle, darkened from falling water, and I’m terrified I’m about to see blood color soap running down our drain.

I cautiously move your hair back from the left side of your head, as you’re still seated on the shower floor, not talking, or moving, simply staring forward.

Your skin has been scraped off a bit near your left eye, but I don’t see any serious injury, which I find relieving, though I did hear something crack, so I sit behind you and take your right hand, and lean in toward you, giving you a moment, to organize yourself and your thoughts.

You slip your fingers in between mine, and the water becomes a bit of a nuisance to us both. †

Just before she fell in the shower

She resents that her professional life has forced her into thinking like an adult, which is now creeping into her personal life -

The poisons of reason, observation, and strategy.

So she wishes you were different -

Realizing your petty criticisms are entertaining when it's at the expense of her outfit, or someone else's hairline, she imagines your cruelty directed at her child, that perhaps has some unchangeable aspect, disappointing you, and that no matter how well you mask your thoughts on the matter, a subtle glance or comment could reveal a stinging criticism, which is something she's felt, when your references overlap a bit too much with her life:

The loud joke about an ostensible stranger at a dinner, of course painted as some idiot, with ruthless disregard for anything other than clarity, leading to the quiet realization, that she has more than nothing in common with this person, making her feel as though you did it on purpose, though she knows this is certainly not the case.

She also realizes that you operate as a type of highly entertaining constraint on her self image, vacillating between the immediate, physical and emotional love for her that you make no secret of, the relentlessness of which leaves her numb, and a bit guilty, because no normal person has the energy to sustain something like this -

Constantly celebrating another person:

She can see that every new moment with her, if she just opens a door, sets off a carnival in your mind, an energy too big to be contained, that borders on embarrassing, even when no one else is around to see it.

But the horrendous things you say about other people, suggest at least the possibility, that somewhere in your mind lives a small box of devastating insults that you keep handy, in the off chance that she ever decides to leave -

So that if you can't have her, then she'll be ruined for everyone else.

That all of her happiness, and all of her memories with you, exist within a set of places, at particular times, when both of you behaved in a particular manner -

That you both voluntarily, but perhaps unconsciously, limited your options in life, simply because you are so happy.

It creates a window within which she's the happiest she's ever been, but

nonetheless a range of conduct, beyond which a terrible anxiety exists.

Making things worse, she realizes, you may echo our hostile environment -

An evolutionary bargain, that allows for otherwise impossible, unconditional love, which she never questions.

In her vulnerability, she can see at least the possibility that she probably wouldn't find you attractive, if you weren't so cruel -

That your love would appear otherwise foolish.

She imagines the possibility of getting sick, while pregnant, and being unable to feed herself, remembering how automatic your care is for her at moments like that, able to see how the rest of the world falls completely out of your focus, leaving not even yourself, and only her;

An aperture, that drops to a single fixed point, her;

An animal, that invests all of its well-being in a single, exogenous being, her.

She knows this makes her emotionally lazy, and that your predictability allows you to be manipulated, but she also knows, that you're plainly conscious of it all, and that you don't care -

And so she doesn't find it unattractive.

That on balance, compromise is inevitable, leaving her with a sense of being completely trapped.

The realization that morality necessarily implies that love operates as a trap, while at the same time, basic emotional needs suggest the alternative is less desirable.

Economics suggests the same conclusions, and though she feels guilty for thinking of money, she's afraid of you, because she concludes, you are a trap, otherwise you wouldn't make sense -

That she has to make a decision over a set of two drastically different outcomes, suggesting in that sense, that she has already been trapped.

These considerations lead her to the possibility that she's just as petty as you are. †

The day we found our apartment

The door to our apartment is matted black, with brushed chrome accents and components, an overall aesthetic similar to the interior of a high-end sports car.

The door and lock tumbler are both very high-quality, as are the hinges upon which the door is mounted.

The key is however cut by the building, and is quite cheap to the touch, with an awful, hard plastic casing around the top, which annoys me.

There is no handle to the door, and you instead simply turn the key, and push the door in, which I quite like, in terms of simplicity of gesture, and the resulting overall finish of the door, and the hallway.

The apartment itself is immediately bright, and sun-filled, the moment you open the door, with high ceilings, painted white brick walls, grey concrete floors, and a large, flowering tree by the windows, housed in a large, green glass vase, filled with dark soil, and a mix of matted and partially reflective stones -

A significantly larger version of the same vase in our bedroom.

There are small glass accents, scattered about, that light up when there's sufficient incoming sunlight, which we both enjoy coming home to.

I sold nearly all of my belongings in New York before moving, other than my primary guitar, which is now stored in a closet, as instructed, producing an aesthetic that is certainly a compromise, skewed towards your preferences.

None of it is too effeminate, and is instead somewhere between the look of a Williamsburg condo, and a reasonably high-end apartment in Stockholm.

There are large, floor to ceiling windows, and it's a generous one-bedroom, with a very oversized bedroom, two bathrooms, including an equally oversized bathroom in the bedroom, that has dark, plank wood, heated floors, a large glass-doored shower with no tub, that also has plank wood floors.

The building itself is tall for the area, a bit dated, with an almost kitsch, Soviet brick exterior, but it's been completely renovated, so the apartment interiors are legitimately outstanding.

...

We had an argument the day we first saw the apartment, and were very late to the showing -

It's because I showed up preposterously late picking you up, ultimately due

to drinking with a friend, Ove, that you really do not like, because you know I use my time with him as an opportunity to discuss awful things, and that he is a terribly misogynistic man, that religiously complains about his wife's laziness, and is also an alcoholic. †

When I met Ove

I met Ove after a night out in Oslo, soon after first moving there, on line at a kebab stand, near Oslo Central Station.

I had been drinking in the center of town, and things did not go terribly well for me, having been repeatedly rejected on multiple, independent occasions, mostly because I was alone, making my many unsolicited social intrusions appear like the outset to sexual assault.

Ove took it upon himself to say hi to me, and given my circumstances, I was in no position to be picky about new friends, so I took up his conversation, which was surprisingly entertaining.

Ove's a bit older than me, sort of bald, about my height, and though he didn't seem to have the greatest fashion sense, he seemed relatively normal, in terms of his appearance.

His English was pretty good, and after a rather forward discussion about his wife's many inadequacies, and some stories about my life in New York, he reached into his pocket, unveiling a folded piece of paper -

He had the posturing of a man revealing something not quite secret, but nonetheless earned, during my brief tenure at the kebab stand, with a cautious pride, as he unfolded the page, making eye contact with me, just before it opened:

It turns out, it was a bit of dated, internet pornography, that had been printed on a very low-quality machine, producing a heavily pixelated representation of what appeared to be a seated nude woman in her 30's, with a background that seemed lifted from a high school yearbook.

It was a truly worthless bit of smut, not notable on any metric -

She was not particularly attractive, the subject matter was perfectly mundane, all conveying the sense that it had been engineered for mediocrity.

I was simply astonished by the display, deciding that Ove is someone I need to keep in touch with, and so any obstacles to two men making friends, publicly exchanging contact information this late in life, had been decidedly overcome.

There were a group of girls in their early 20's behind us that had witnessed our interactions, and burst into laughter upon seeing the pornography.

I gathered they couldn't quite make out the conversation, and because we exchanged numbers after jointly admiring pornography, they likely assumed we were perverts, perhaps unable, or perhaps too lazy, to find real women. †

When I finally show up

I finally show up, noticeably smelling of alcohol, despite driving a considerable distance from Ove's house, an hour late, blaming traffic, which did play some non-trivial role, though this is disingenuous, at best -

We had been texting back and forth the entire time, and I more or less lie, about where I was, and what time I'd show up.

As I pull up, a screeching movement, from an otherwise beautiful piece, by César Franck,¹ that I am positively blasting inside the car, reaches its zenith, and I burst into singing along to the shrill violin, knowing full well that you cannot stand this piece.

An old lady exits a fish shop behind you, unsure of what she's experiencing, visibly astonished that you're about to get into my car.

You hate where I currently live, and this adds to your aggravation.

All of this reminds you of my self-entitled willingness to impose a total nightmare on other people, though to your credit, you understand that it is due to my inordinate enjoyment of life.

You open the car door yourself, before I can reach over, and before I can utter a single word, you say,

"At least chew some gum, because you look a bit shit at the moment, so try to not smell like shit as well."

Taken back by your rudeness, I look in the mirror to find that you are in fact correct, and that my hair has been blown upwards, causing me to look a bit like a cockatiel, and upon inspection, I find a dark, oily stain, on the right leg of my jeans.

There is a candy bar wrapper to the right of the gas pedal, suggesting that I even stopped to get something to eat, which you notice.

You also saw me quickly, and clumsily eating it, as I pulled up, which adds to your temporary revulsion towards me.

All of this breaks my confidence, as I clumsily fix my hair, realizing that I am in fact a bit drunk, which in turn sours the mood, as I begin to feel legitimately bad for upsetting you, though you know that I do these things, at least in part, as a form of performance art, to amuse you with my outrageous conduct.

You eventually laugh at how stupid I look, and fix my hair, as if I were some

¹The Violin Sonata in A-Major, Mov. 2.

kind of disabled child, that you have been tasked with caring for.

You know that this is simply how I am, and that for most of my life, I somehow simply get away with these things, perhaps because I look a bit stupid at times, but nonetheless, it annoys you, occasionally.

You're not bothered by my drinking, and you trust that I would never consciously put you in any danger, which is in this case the result of hubris, adopting the same at times careless attitude towards how I spend my free time.

Perhaps you trust my vanity more than anything else, which would never let me cross the line from the outrageous to the truly degenerate.

You want to participate in how I see the world -

To show up drunk, an hour late, with stained pants, and disheveled hair, and somehow get away, driving off with a beautiful woman.

Though you're the reason it's possible in this case, it is in part driven by your desire to understand the mechanics of the process.

You could have walked, as it's only a few blocks away, but you waited, perhaps because you want to be part of these moments, where you're legitimately disappointed, in my petty, inconsiderate nonsense. †

Ove's house

I'm surprised, and a bit relieved, to learn that Ove lives in Bærum, which is one of the nicer suburbs of Oslo, making my trip to his home less uncomfortable for me.

My ex-girlfriend grew up in Bærum, and so I already have fond memories of the area.

I'm honestly astonished at how nice Ove's place is, and it turns out, that he's an electrical engineer, with his own company, and does commercial electrical wiring for large buildings around Oslo, and neighboring cities in Norway.

We have a common interest in engineering, and sports cars in particular, which really makes our initial conversations go remarkably well.

I looked around for a dot-matrix printer, as the presumed source of his carry-on pornography, but didn't see one, so I concluded that he had printed it at work, as an executive privilege of sorts.

However, Ove has a pet rat, which is immediately distinguishable from the cliché lab mouse, and is instead an actual rat, that is visibly unhealthy, with disgusting teeth, and matted hair, that he's simply left to coagulate.

He keeps it in a large, square, glass fish tank, that has a plastic, model race car in it, and a more traditional hamster wheel, neither of which appear to be getting much use by this visibly sickly creature.

The tank is large enough to fit a dog food bowl, and its internal condition is simply disgusting, though I can see that the outside of the tank is cleaned regularly.

On this day, the bowl contains a leftover steak, that has clearly been chewed on extensively by, "Micky", which is apparently the rat's name, suggesting either a language gap, or perhaps an inability to distinguish between cartoon mice, and large, diseased rats. †

The story of Ove's pet rat

Ove was working on a construction site in East Oslo, and the ground under the site had been torn up to allow for construction, which had been otherwise left relatively undisturbed for centuries.

This released an enormous number of rats, which caused problems at the construction site, with workers frequently spotting rats attempting to steal their unattended lunches, and otherwise infesting the site, with many rats fighting each other, rather viciously, extending their presence to surrounding neighborhoods as well.

Occasionally, teams of rats would run after pedestrians, with local newspapers featuring zoomed-in, pixelated photographs of vicious-looking rats, with off-center, sensational headlines, alerting locals to avoid particular corners, reportedly due to trash cans that had been completely overwhelmed by rats.

Ove is convinced that he had befriended a particular rat, and took to feeding only this rat each day at work, insisting that the rat's matted hair, and personality, allowed him to discern between Micky, and his many friends, all of whom ultimately terrorized the neighborhood for months.

Their friendship had reportedly blossomed over a few days, and so he brought a trap to work one day, that he had fashioned himself at home, baiting Micky with what I'm told was his favorite cheese at the time, Jarlsberg, cleverly ensconcing him in the trap, and ultimately taking him home.

The race car was purchased during another work trip Ove had taken to Trondheim, feeling guilty for having to leave Micky at home alone for over a week, so he bought the race car just to cheer up Micky, which cost Ove \$150 USD.

I asked whether his wife had come with him to Trondheim, and after a brief bit of reflection, he simply said, "no". †

How we met

She had just joined the firm about a week ago, and I had been invited to her welcoming drinks, at a bar not far from the office, certainly within walking distance.

If it sucks, I go back to work, or home -

I have no idea who she is, but I can see on the invite that there's an internal client going, and I never miss an opportunity for face time.

I already checked to see if her photo was in the HR system, which I'm not supposed to do, but there was nothing there yet in any case.

It turns out that she is quite attractive, and seems to notice me, perhaps in part simply because I'm much louder than everyone else.

It's a professional event, so she has to at least talk to me, and so I take the opportunity to get to know her -

If she's interested, great;

If not, who cares.

I reach out to shake her hand, and she responds with a good grip, which I like.

I'm taken back enough to check out her hands, suspecting some monstrous, club-shaped sausages, to explain the power of this grip, but I instead see what looks like a normal hand, with long, elegant fingers, a bit bony, veiny, perhaps from squeezing so hard.

She has an extremely youthful face, but I can see a bit of age in her hands, and her forearm muscles, which I find relieving, because I'm old enough now that younger women have gotten a bit old.

I'm already impressed, and she catches me looking at her hand, and can sense that I'm starting to like her -

We hold hands, for a bit too long, making eye contact, she smiles a bit, which is broken by food guy, with his tray of mediocre fried nonsense, and related mystery sauces.

I'm hungry, so I select the least repulsive looking item from his greige buffet, grab a napkin, and thank him for his service.

She passes, perhaps because she's new, and eating in front of people is always weird, especially so in a context like this, where you're in essence being

evaluated, subject to significant personal financial risk.

She tells me about her group, within private equity, and I'm familiar with a few of the people that she works with, saying the usual, polite things:

This one's bright, that one's a worker, blah blah blah ...

She leaves at some professionally reasonable time during our conversation, leaving me extremely attracted to her -

And I realize that it's been years since I've felt something like this.

The professional risk is non-zero, but Europeans have a more open attitude towards office relationships, so I decide that I will pull the trigger, if she seems interested.

And it seems that she is, as she sticks around, as do I, noticing that she's looking at me periodically, fairly openly suggesting that she would like to continue talking after everyone else leaves.

This is precisely what happens -

We get into a fairly heavy conversation about our lives, at times making me a bit uncomfortable, because I try to keep my personal life and professional life walled off.

I need another drink, so I offer to get her one as well, and she says, "sure", asking for whatever white wine I think is best -

I like the fact that she already trusts my judgment, and I get the sense of an almost instant mutual familiarity.

The line for the bar is quite long, and the place is itself somewhere between a bar and a club, and of course, some guy steps in, about a minute or so after I leave, and I can see him chatting her up.

I already noticed this loser eyeing her up while I was talking to her, which annoyed me, because it subtracted from my enjoyment of her.

But, I'm an adult, and this is not the first time that something like this has happened, so in addition to our drinks, I buy a shot of this revolting Norwegian liquor that my ex-girlfriend pointed out one evening at a bar in the East Village.

I return, hand her the glass of wine, and introduce myself to, "Johann", handing him the shot that I had so generously purchased for him.

He says, "Takk, vad er det?"

I say, in English, “It’s a Norwegian Seamen’s shot”, which when said out loud, sounds about right.

She starts laughing, trying to contain herself.

I was hoping that this would send the message, but apparently not.

I had a look down at Johann’s shoes, as part of my primal exercise of sizing this idiot up, and spotted what are the most ridiculous looking loafers I have ever seen:

Dark suede, with some kind of family crest sewn into the top, as if Ralph Lauren’s family had an official shoe.

Johann doesn’t seem to get the message, and minutes pass with both of us trying our best to ignore him, with varying degrees of civility.

Then he suddenly leans in, and puts his hand on her naked shoulder, and I feel a rush of total hatred fill my blood, as his little fingers squeeze and compress the skin around her bones, I can feel the person that I thought I’d left behind me come alive again, and I imagine that it showed -

I push him off of her, put my left hand on his shoulder, squeezing hard enough to hurt him, and pour my beer all over his stupid shoes, staring into his eyes the whole time, looking down only to correct my aim, as he awkwardly dances backwards, while I shake what remains of my beer at whatever foot is closest to me.

She cannot believe that I’ve done this, and her attraction towards me drops to nothing, briefly even hating me for it, walking away, without saying goodbye.

She later remembers I was so angry, that I didn’t even notice that she walked away -

So consumed by petty hatred, directed at a shoe, I would abandon someone I was clearly interested in, taking non-trivial professional risk as well, though she realizes, it was triggered by a strange man touching her. †

Redux

We meet again, this time, accidentally, during lunch, outdoors, a few months later.

I had a shitty day at work, so I'm a bit out of it, and she can see that, so she's almost opportunistic about it -

Though I don't compete with her at work, she is occasionally on calls with me, and less frequently, in meetings, and at this point, she thinks that I'm brilliant, but she really dislikes me as a person.

I don't say much at lunch, just listening, and nodding, staring off into the sunlight, not even apologizing for what happened when we first met.

As she's getting up, I ask if she'd like to get dinner tonight, and she almost feels bad for me, and says, "yes" -

She walks away, realizing that my hostility might have an origin quite different from its expression, and so her mental portrait of me instantly becomes more complex, forced to concede that I'm actually quite weird, and not the meathead she anticipated.

Then the night at the bar replays in her head as she walks away, again realizing how strange it is that I poured beer on another man's shoes. †

What I do

I replace people that make a lot of money, with machines, and I enjoy it, because I'm a dick -

If they can't justify their jobs when compared to some trading platform, then it's my job to figure out how to seamlessly get rid of them, comprehensively, from blocking communications, to cleaning out the stupid nonsense they keep in and around their desks, without introducing risk to the firm.

This includes anticipating shitty behavior on the part of people that I'm trying to get rid of, which I also enjoy, because it requires me to out-think people, and not just consider how to replace them with technology, creating a job that is both psychologically, and intellectually challenging.

I interact with executives often, because I'm saving the entire firm money, so they know who I am, and though I'm far from that level in terms of my career path, it's obvious to everyone, even the current executives, that I'm a contender for a C-Suite position, eventually.

Other people my age simply don't have that kind of exposure at the firm, or pressure, and this creates a mix of admiration, and profound, professional jealousy.

Most people accept that they cannot do my job, which involves a preposterous mix of managing software development, trading operations, telecommunications, ID badges, and people crying.

My internal clients absolutely love me, whereas most people around me really dislike me, except my immediate colleagues, both out of pragmatism, but also because I stick up for them, aggressively, ultimately making sure that we all make money as a team.

People talk about what an asshole I am, and they're annoyed that nothing changes -

My manager is the CFO, who mentions these things in my reviews, because he has to, but everyone knows that it doesn't matter, because the bottom line is the bottom line itself, which I move, because I don't care.

The only metric that I'm ultimately concerned with is my compensation, which consistently moves in the correct direction, up -

Technology has fundamentally changed, and I see an opportunity to use it, and take money that the firm is spending on other people, and put it in my own pocket.

I am being rewarded on every metric, according to my preferences -

Cash, location, girlfriends -

For being what borders on a monster, but I justify it by knowing, that typically, these people are already rich, and because I grew up with nothing, I couldn't care less.

I know they have kids -

I don't care.

I know their lives get disrupted -

It's my job to fuck them, maximally, I don't care.

This one has a disease -

Whatever, don't care. †

What she does

She makes private equity investments in the energy sector, which she really enjoys -

She takes money, and puts it to work, creating something that didn't exist beforehand, creating jobs, ultimately improving people's lives.

She travels, to the project sites, which she also enjoys, as she feels a sense of real accomplishment seeing a plant, or a wind turbine, incrementally get built because of work she's contributed to.

It requires her to think about engineering and finance, and practical administrative matters as well.

She has the typical professional anxieties:

She's constantly managing her relationships with others, trying to compete, balancing competition with friendships.

The workload is occasionally unreasonable, and the travel too frequent, or too long, and this creates a type of psychological isolation that can exist even in the presence of others.

But she's actually quite happy with her work life, and it is instead her ambitions to raise a family that trouble her the most.

These thoughts come to her when she's feeling alone, imagining that her work would change in color if she were doing it for someone else, that required it to happen, so that she could provide for someone else -

In these moments, she can imagine what her home would look like, what it would sound like, and even feel and smell like to carry a small baby of her own:

The tiny outfits she'd have to buy, holding them close to her skin before purchase;

And how her weekends would have a longer view, slower moving parts, until some broken pencil brings her back to more temporary concerns.

But she still thinks like a college student in some respects, yet to connect the type of strategic thinking she applies at work to her personal life, mostly because she's afraid of what that will require of her -

She has a fun life, and it's full of good stories, pleasant experiences, over which she has a significant degree of control.

So while she deeply wants a family, in particular a child, which haunts her,

often, there's no trigger to break what is a generally pleasant cycle of interesting work, and fun weekends. †

Our first proper date

I book a table at a modern, almost corporate restaurant, near Tjuvholmen, and the atmosphere is very stiff -

She's familiar with the place, and judges it a wise choice, given the fact that we're colleagues, and she suspects that I sensed that she was almost doing me a favor, providing both of us with a professional gloss for the next day at work, when people ask where we ate.

Everyone at the office noticed that she stayed late at the bar to talk to me the night of the shoe incident, and so there is general awareness of the possibility of romance, but given the absence of any visible follow up, everyone assumed that whatever was there had quickly faded.

There were rumors about what had happened that night, with some colleagues aware of the correct facts of the shoe incident, since as it turns out, Johann (shoe guy) went to university with one of our colleagues, which facilitated an in for a roughly accurate recounting of the events, including Johann's devastation due to the seemingly impenetrable stains left on the surface of his suede loafers.

I explicitly tell her that I'm arranging a car for both of us, and that I'm going to pick her up, at her apartment, at exactly 20:30, to make sure that we're both on time, and don't risk losing our reservation -

Scandinavians take reservations rather seriously, and it is in fact impolite to show up more than just a minute or two late.

She thinks this is a bit much, and that I'm behaving like I'm her boss, which is not the case, though my delivery deliberately conveys this impression, but it's not an inconvenience for her, so she says, "alright", but she's still a little annoyed, and gets a bit nervous, recalling the shoe incident in the abstract, as a bad association.

When I call her on my mobile phone to tell her to come downstairs from her apartment, she can hear regularly spaced clobbering, clicking sounds, and for a brief moment, she's worried that I'm wearing heels, but dismisses it as background noise.

However, I show up on a horse, i.e., an actual horse, that I paid a ludicrous sum of money to borrow for the evening, and she is simply astonished, and starts laughing hysterically.

"My God, you are a total ass -

What is wrong with you?"

She refuses to get on the horse, so I walk it to the restaurant, beside me in the street, as she episodically looks beyond my shoulder, to see this monstrous, inelegant farm horse, clobbering about the streets of her home city, Oslo.

I insisted on the horse being cleaned, which cost me extra, because the farmer had to do it himself, and the results were acceptable for a date, so her refusal appears to be based upon principle, rather than hygiene.

I tie the horse to a bike stand outside the restaurant, with no regard for public safety, or the horse, prompting her to laugh at me, yet again.

“You’re such a child.”, she says.

There’s a huge pile of piss and shit under the horse after dinner, which I simply leave, taking off with her, this time on the horse.

Though it’s summer, it’s a bit cold, so I, “buy” a blanket from the restaurant, i.e., I pay the Pakistani table busser 1,000 NOK to steal one for me, and throw it on the horse, while I chat up the maître d’, disingenuously apologizing for the giant pile of horse shit outside.

I deliberately buy an extra bottle of wine from the restaurant for the trip back to return the horse, which I make her hide in her purse during dinner, to her partially feigned embarrassment.

I’ve already cleared spending some time at the farm to have drinks with her afterward, which is about an hour and a half by horse from the restaurant.

Though I don’t tell her, I’ve also already paid the farmer to let us sleep in one of his bedrooms.

On the ride to the farm, she realizes that I must have somehow planned all of this while at work.

Connecting this astonishing practical reality to how little I seem to care about most people, she feels a bit broken by it all -

She’s not sure anyone has ever done this much for her before, and I did all of this in one day, while at work, unsure if she would even like me.

The ridiculousness of the evening fades into a quiet warm, as she realizes that she must be important to me, already -

She leans in, the familiarity returning, resting her head on my back, wrapping her arms around my waist, as the wind picks up a bit across her skin, prompting her to take the stolen blanket from her lap, and wrap it around her back, trying her best to include me in its coverage.

Neither of us say much of anything, clobbering on, cars passing, as at this point, she realizes that I've likely already made convenient arrangements for us to stay together.

We both miss work the next day, and that's it. †

Good morning, Caligula

“Good morning, Caligula.”, she says, waking me with the statement, and I giggle a bit at the reference, once it settles in, which was quite good.

Her face is very close to mine, and I’m facing the righthand side of the room, notice a bit of drool on my lip, which I quickly wipe off, out of embarrassment.

“Ugh, fucking revolting.”, she says, smiling, but not quite laughing at me.

She looks really good:

I can see the blue of her eyes, and her gaze is constant, with remarkable confidence, as if she were waiting for me to wake up, so that she could make fun of me once I did.

I’m feeling quite awkward, and a bit nervous, as I was very drunk, and though I remember everything, I did rent a horse, and leave a large pile of horse feces in an urban center, riding off visibly drunk, having effectively stolen a blanket from the same restaurant that I desecrated with said feces.

Nonetheless, the results seem to have been a success, as she clearly had fun, and seems quietly happy at the moment.

I briefly turn my back to her, to see fog on the windows of this old farmhouse, in Holmlia, and these old, stiff, plaid colored curtains that don’t even completely cover the window, made out of a fabric more appropriate for a small flag that you attach to a car antenna.

The bed is simply ridiculous:

One of those military style, steel spring devices, with an ultra-firm mattress, about one inch thick, that smells a bit off, and episodically sponges in random locations, leaving you shaped like a broken paper clip in the morning.

I brought my own sheets, blanket, and pillows, which add a bit of normalcy and comfort for us both.

Despite all of this, we had a tremendous night, and she clearly finds all of these deficiencies charming, so even though I’m not quite ready for profound thoughts about our future, I note her attitude as a plus.

I turn around to look at her again, and it seems as though she hasn’t moved, and so she must have been staring at my back -

“Is that an extra blanket you’ve brought for me?”, she says, in reference to what is really not that much back hair, but I suppose it’s quite a bit for a Scandinavian.

“No, it’s a wash cloth, for your intimate bits.”, I reply.

She smacks me on the chest, which prompts me to grab her and shout, and she screams in response, quite loud.

“Are you trying to get the farmer involved? Isn’t it a bit soon for that?”, I say.

“You, prick!”, she replies, as she climbs on top of me, causing both of us to hesitate for a moment, as we realize that perhaps we’ve both become a bit too familiar -

The environment, and my absurd antics, perhaps designed to take her out of the familiar, creating a temporary space in which only the two of us exist, and some aspect must have crept in to spoil that for both of us, perhaps the hour itself, a time when we would ordinarily be getting ready for work, creating a scheduled anxiety.

Moments like these are branches in relationships -

Everyone assumes that you can correct for something that could have happened, by simply doing it later on, but that’s simply not the case, as sometimes things don’t work, including relationships, when things happen out of order -

Just imagine frying an egg before you break it.

The choice presented in this case is fairly obvious -

Both of us are aware of what is happening, and that it’s a bit soon, especially given that we work for the same firm, and so the decision to lean in and kiss someone that you’re already in bed with depends upon context, and in this case, it’s a signal, and possibly a path to something that neither of us can fully control.

To my astonishment, she leans in, completely unprovoked, grabbing the back of my head, pressing her entire body against mine, kissing me, and I put my finger tips on the right side of her face, pushing her hair behind her ear, ultimately holding the base of her head with my hand.

We pause often, and simply stare at each other, laughing a bit, not quite childishly, but aware of each other’s silliness, and at one point we pause, and she looks at me, and says with clarity and confidence,

“I love you, Charles.” †

Universo ao meu redor

We decide to take a trip to Italy together, which is a big deal, because it requires using vacation days, at the same time, and of course, people talk -

Everyone will understand, we've transitioned from office romance, into relationship.

This is not lost on us, but at this point, memories of the shoe incident resign:

A vestigial portrait of a curmudgeon freak, that can't stand the sight of another man touching his woman -

It just happened out of order, in this case.

She's gotten to know me well since then, and thinks that I'm a ridiculous person, as she's unable to reconcile the office robot, with the guerrilla artist, part-time scientist.

Moreover, neither of us are fond of our current apartments, and she absolutely despises mine, which is admittedly awful, littered with guitars, and paintings in trash bags, like Syd Barrett's asylum chamber, so we're both excited to spend some time together in a place that is legitimately beautiful.

We decide on Sardegna, as we've both been a few times, and really enjoyed it, and also because it gives us an opportunity to make a quick stop in Rome.

We've booked a hotel within Costa Smeralda, with its own, private, cashless section of the beach, though we're both a bit suspicious of being tethered to a hotel environment.

In terms of appearance, the hotel presents like a significantly smaller version of The Standard in the Meatpacking District:

The building is vertical, and flat, with significant glass coverage, a pale brick frame, though certainly not as tall or as wide, and the bricks are a bit yellowish in color.

Our room is simply ridiculous:

Massive, about 1,000 square feet, open floor plan, but for a moveable wooden partition, positioned between the bed and the windows, which have black iron frames, floor to ceiling, looking out onto the sea below.

There's a full kitchen on the left wall of the space, with cupboards stocked full of lovely plates, cups, and cutlery, a Viking range cut into a white marble counter top, and a large, pale grey sectional to the right of the space, just off from the wall, across from an over-sized, brown, heavily weathered, extremely

soft, leather love seat.

Otherwise, the room is mostly empty space, save for a few small tables and plants scattered about, with hardwood floors, and a giant Persian rug that covers the empty center of the room.

The bath is equally mental, with small, multicolored subway tiles along the actual shower wall, which is to the right when facing the windows, not sectioned off in any manner from the rest of the room, other than by the coloring of the tiles, which demarcates its area, together with the drain below the showerhead, with the rest of the tiles along the walls a faint grey.

The bathroom also has a wall of floor to ceiling windows, with an old-fashioned, iron, claw-foot tub, painted white, positioned along the right side of the room, parallel to the windows, with another wooden partition behind it, that also covers visibility into the shower.

The room number is 56, on the 17th floor, which is my birthday, in the European system, 5.6.17, which I make a point of, to which she responds,

“You’re a moron.”

To which I reply,

“Don’t be bitter that chance favors my boldness.”

“Your baldness?”

“If I ever go bald, you will refer to me, lovingly, as, ‘Your Baldness’.”

“If you ever go bald, I will refer to you only in the past tense.”

“So long as you use my title.”

I grab my phone, connect to the room’s Bluetooth, and begin a playlist commencing with, “Renaissance Affair”, by Hooverphonic, as we both get ready to head out for lunch.

...

We decide to risk it, and go for the hotel’s beachfront bar, which looks impressive online, though we agree in advance, that we’ll quickly grab two beers, and leave, if it’s filled with a bunch of hoi polloi whatnot tourists.

Walking from the hotel, we climb up a slight, sand hill, up to the bar, which is positioned on top of the hill, between the hotel and the sea, where a man politely asks us to remove our sandals before entering.

I entertain the notion, as I can already see the outlines of what looks like a beautiful chandelier hanging from the center of an extremely long, rectangular building at the top of the hill.

And so I take off my sandals, eyeing a row of shoes assembled by the other patrons.

Once we get close enough to see the interior, we are both taken back -

It's one of the most astonishing spaces I have ever seen:

A busy, intricately patterned, hardwood floor reveals itself as we approach, the length of two Manhattan blocks, but the width of one, with no side walls, and now I know why he asked us to remove our sandals -

It's because the flooring is of the order you'd find in a museum, with a wonderful grain, comprised of short, small planks, each about one foot long, and two inches wide, though arranged in a knotted pattern, preposterously detailed, totally incommensurate with what is appropriate for a dance floor, fit instead for an avant garde woodwork exhibition, mounted upon a wall.

We both smile at each other, implicitly agreeing to at least a few drinks, barring the truly extraordinarily awful.

We approach the bar, which is a long, rectangular slab of black marble, nearly the entire width of the space, and about two feet thick, with a large number of implausibly thin legs beneath, like a deconstructed spider, each made of dark wood, with some light colored accents in the grain, and bronze anchors.

We finally get up to the bar, and we can see the marble's surface, which contains thin white, light blue, yellow, and grey veins, clustering occasionally into what look like puddles, consisting of the same colors.

There are two bronze tubs cut deep into the surface of the bar:

One is filled with beer and soda bottles and cans, and ice and melted water, and the other is a functioning sink, filled with spent cocktail glasses, and small soiled plates and cutlery.

I look closely at the bar, and see black steel slats cut into the entire width, beginning at the opposite end, closest to the bartender, and extending toward me for about 10 inches, to facilitate drainage along the workstation.

This prompts me to look below to trace the path of the drainage, and I see the same blackened steel in the floor under the bar, this time, with a rough surface, presumably operating as a grip, to prevent the bartender from slipping.

The wall behind the bartender is a massive, white marble wall, about 20

feet high, with a proportionally massive baroque wooden frame, that contains a mirror, above which is a hanging potted vine, housed in a bronze trap, that matches the sinks, forming a metallic, horizontal accent across the entire white wall, that is littered with green bits, that drape over everything below.

We've been reading the menu while waiting, and have decided on two dishes:

A burrata plate, which comes with a handful of flatbreads, and a rosemary and sea salt focaccia, together with a prosciutto, fig jam, and mozzarella baguette.

I initially expected the hotel kitchen to provide the food, but was yet again astounded to find that there's both a refrigerator, and an oven, hidden in the wall behind the bartender, which is accessed by simply pressing a bit into it, causing a pressurized arm to release the applicable door.

When we get up to the bar, I can actually see the outlines of the two doors cut into the wall, and realize they're chest-level, relieving the bartender of having to constantly hunch over, which after hours of doing so, would presumably be exhausting -

Everything about this place seems to have been relentlessly obsessed over, producing a borderline divine environment, wildly out of proportion to the amount of thought and effort that goes into an even excellent hotel bar.

The bartender hands us the two Ichnusa beers we've ordered, and tells us to find a seat, as the food will apparently be a minute.

So we find a seat, a couch, a smaller version of the same couch in our room, with a small, round, black marble table that matches the bar, with the same dizzying array of tiny wooden legs beneath.

I look up to see the large, bronze chandelier, with a parabolic, bowl shaped base, long slats cut into the bottom, through which the light above is shining.

The light source is a metallic bush of bronze antennae, with iridescent glass bulbs literally melted onto the ends, only partially illuminated, presumably because it's still daylight.

The bronze column connecting the chandelier to the ceiling also has small antennae with bulbs on their ends, like the thorns on the stem of a rose.

Marisa Monte starts playing, "O Bonde Do Dom", and now I'm legitimately suspicious of what's going on around me, feeling as though, somehow, someone has stolen this entire scene from the innards of my mind -

That I stumbled upon a stolen dream, a group of bandits, meticulously

reconstructing my vision of the external world, presumably now worried that I somehow showed up, foiling their cosmic plot.

I look up at the ceiling, to find that things get only even weirder -

Mounted into the beautiful, bronze colored, tin ceiling, I can see updated, Yamaha NS-10 audio monitors:

The same speakers that I used as a young audio engineer.

“This place is wonderful.”, she says -

I’m too confused to agree, instead staring in disbelief, at a memory mounted into a ceiling. †

New York City

The Club

She's getting dressed at our hotel, whereas I've decided to visit my old social club, which has arranged all of my dry cleaning for me, and so I shower, shave, and get dressed there, before the concert.

I step out of the sauna, walking through the grey marble shower area, towards a white tiled room, filled with sinks.

There are aluminum racks mounted onto the walls, filled with fresh, white towels, of various sizes, and I grab a small wash cloth, that I plan to use while shaving.

My old routine comes back to me:

The sensations, and smells, of having spent about an hour in a sauna and steam room, working out, playing squash, my skin numb, prime for a shave, I grab a disposable plastic razor -

Using only unscented bar soap and water to moisten my skin, I trim the hairs that go beyond the intended perimeter of my beard:

The ones that grow too high along my cheekbone, or too low below my neck.

I use a pair of scissors, and a plastic comb, and get to work, trimming the beard itself, using the comb to first lift the hairs up, by brushing up against the grain, and then using the scissors to clip the beard to a roughly uniform length.

I also trim my hair itself, eyeing for anomalously long hairs that have grown out of sync with the rest.

This takes significant time, but I've set aside a few hours to enjoy myself at The Club, which I haven't been to in about a year.

The Club is a proper, New York social club, centuries old, with deep, long-standing ties to the U.S. Government, set in a repurposed mansion, complete with paintings of U.S. Presidents, generals, and an old wood bar, with a fireplace, a stated code of conduct, and art from the Revolutionary War, and Civil War, that hangs above.

All of this brings back memories of my elementary school:

The blue blazers, khaki pants, my school motto and crest, turtlenecks, and Nicole Miller ties:

The Upper East Side in the 80's -

I remember the sting of this joy being taken from me, after only a few years of childhood, leaving me totally crazed as a young adult, relentless in my ambition to return to the station at which I felt most at home, that I was completely convinced someone had stolen from me.

Later walking outside the Metropolitan Club as a broke teenager, seeing clouds painted into the colossal wooden ceilings, knowing now that I can walk in whenever I want, and order a drink, because I belong to a small circle of people allowed to walk into these types of buildings, all over the world.

The Club reminds me of who I am -

An American, that fell from grace, desperate to rebuild.

When I'm finished shaving, I enter the shower room, throw a fresh towel over the frosted glass door of one of the available stalls, turn the water on, spending a minute simply relaxing under the oversized showerhead, letting the water remove any soap, or hairs, that I may have missed during my shave.

I again use only the same unscented soap, not washing my hair, which I do at most once a week.

Once I feel ready, I turn off the water, grab the towel from above the glass door, and exit toward the lounge, where my dry cleaning and shoes are waiting for me, hanging in one of the dozen or so wooden changing areas that line the walls of the lounge.

A TV mounted on one of the walls is playing a hockey game, and there's an old man in a bathrobe, seated on the leather couch, opposite the TV, staring into it, with a plate of deviled eggs in front of him, and what appears to be a sizable glass of straight vodka, with some olives in it.

I reach in, tearing the plastic wrapping off of my dry cleaning, to see my dark blue, Hugo Boss suit, which looks crisp, my white cotton Valentino shirt behind it, stains gone, and the cuffs look excellent.

My tie was already in great condition, a light blue, sort of shiny, also Hugo Boss, and so that's rolled up in my gym bag, along with my belt, socks, and boxers.

I slip my boxers on first -

Ralph Lauren, cotton, spacious, with a comfortable waistband, solid blue denim in color, with a single tiny red horse on the bottom seam of the left leg.

Then I put my socks on, also Ralph Lauren, simple, black, no additional coloring, or unnecessary structure -

Just somewhat elastic, and tight, pulling them up, as high as they can go, up my calf muscle.

I pull my suit pants out the plastic, slip them on, and I can already feel they fit well, having been recently tailored to account for a slight dip in weight, I leave them open.

I then grab my shirt, slip my arms into the sleeves, begin tucking the shirt into the back of my pants, then pulling my pants up a bit, and button up my shirt.

Once complete, I close the clasps on my pants, zip them up, grab my belt, and loop it through, eventually running the right side of the belt through the gold buckle, and secure the leftover brown leather into the first loop to the left of the buckle.

My jacket still hanging, I reach into my gym bag, and pull out a pair of Paul Smith cuff links, gold, with the classic rainbow print that matches the trim on the interior of my wallet, and slip them both in, looking at them the way you would check the time on a watch, I can see the deep contrast between the white of my shirt, and the painted gold face of my cuff links.

I sit down on the bench inside the changing area, and examine my shoes, which look great, and I can smell that they've just been polished -

Sliding my right foot in, I get the sensation of the frictionless entry that occurs with a freshly polished pair of shoes.

I see the faded gold remnants of a Bruno Magli logo disappear as my left foot slides in, giving me a sense of completeness.

Carnegie Hall

We plan to meet outside the main entrance at 19:30, so I get there at 19:15, since it's a concert, and being late could leave you shut out.

At 19:25, I see Ida begin to exit a black car a few feet away from me, through the crowd outside the concert hall.

I walk over to her, rather quickly, partly to make sure that she that sees me, but also because I'm excited to see her.

Once she's exited, I lean in to thank the driver, close the door, taking her right hand with my left, and we head into the concert hall, together.

I've printed out our tickets, which are folded in the inner pocket of my suit jacket, which I present to the attendee at the base of the stairs, just beyond the main entrance.

The attendee tells us where to go, but I already know, as these are my favorite seats in Carnegie Hall:

Tier 1, Box 33.

We walk up the main stairs, and given that we have some time, we grab a drink.

The place is completely packed, the line for drinks unreasonable, as a result, but we have time, so we stand, and we wait.

She tells me about the last concert she saw, at Oslo's new concert hall, and I recount walking outside, with Norwegian friends of mine, a few years ago.

I tell her about my college professor, who would always talk about seeing Horowitz play at Carnegie, and her eyes light up, both of us mutually enchanted by these stories, and I feel a bit sad, realizing how rare it is for people our age to actually enjoy these things -

Most people wouldn't even understand what I'm talking about, let alone enjoy the conversation.

We get our drinks, and eat some snacks they've laid out, for free, given the scale of tonight's event.

The attendees show up, ringing chimes, a few minutes before we're supposed to head to our seats, and so we both finish our drinks, as we begin walking, tracing the hallway that surrounds the concert hall, following the numbers along the way, ultimately arriving at the door to our section, which I open, and step back, as she enters.

We're the first to arrive, and carefully make our way through the miniature maze of eight seats, on our way to the front row, having booked the center and righthand seat.

Just before she sits down, she removes her jacket, and I see that she's wearing a beaded, black dress, effectively opaque, with straps over her shoulders, and a low-cut back, displaying the breadth of her shoulders, as she turns away from me, revealing the muscles in her back, placing her jacket on the back of her seat.

She's not wearing a bra, since the dress seems to have internal support, causing it to be snug around her ribs, and under her breasts, lifting them.

This causes the weight of the dress to hang mostly from her ribs, rather than the shoulder straps, which appear decorative, not load-bearing.

The dress falls freely, not form-fitting, but slowly floating away from her body as you approach the bottom seam, though it's tight enough that you can nonetheless see the structure of her body as she moves.

The dress rises up under her breasts, and though it's nonetheless modest from the front, you can see the outlines of her cleavage, with additional, small grey and mother of pearl beading, woven into the dress, beginning near the upper portion of her ribs, increasing in density as you approach the bust of the dress, accentuating the lift of the dress under her breasts, and the seams around the front of her dress, near her skin.

The bottom of the dress has fluted pleats, and is asymmetrical, higher on the left leg than the right leg, ending roughly six inches above her right ankle, with the same beading around her breast, increasing in density as you approach the bottom seam from all sides of the dress.

She's wearing simple, black leather flats, with the leather a bit scrunched around the center of her feet, suggesting perhaps an elastic lining, creating tension, keeping them snug, as there are no laces.

Her purse is small, the size and shape of an envelope, completely covered in large, white sequins, that look like feathers, under which is a steel mesh that the sequins are sewn into, with the sequins and mesh almost totally obscuring a blue fabric under the steel that makes up the outer body of the purse itself.

The inside of the purse has a decorative silk lining, like a classic ascot, or tie, with an overall blueish hue -

I look in to see that she's brought only her phone, lip gloss, credit cards, and keys, as she quickly applies a bit of lip gloss just after sitting down.

She's wearing hardly any makeup, just mascara, and what is ultimately a

subtle, almost colorless lip gloss, with no earrings.

She smells like Heaven when finally settled into the seat next to mine.

Evgeny

Evgeny Kissin walks on to the stage, which is itself littered with seats, the piano surrounded, because the show is totally overbooked -

Everyone rises, the entire house bursts into an uproarious applause, with some even shouting in their excitement, as he approaches the piano.

He's wearing a simple, black tuxedo, white shirt, black shoes, his confidence remarkable, walking directly into a sea of people, celebrating him, desperate, for him to deliver them somewhere better.

Unfazed, this is exactly what he does:

He opens with, "Liebesträume", by Franz Liszt, which begins with a delicate opening line, modestly accompanied by arpeggios in the upper registers, that is of course later full of the dramatic, impossibly busy work that Liszt is known for, and that Kissin is famous for interpreting.

The acoustics are wonderful -

I can almost feel the low register of the left hand, the high register, clean, lucid, resonance sustaining, without a noise in the house.

Ida and I are transfixed, as Kissin begins to hammer the bass notes, as the piece modulates from E-Major, back to A-Flat-Major, eventually dissolving into the midpoint:

An initially busy, but ultimately sparse, chromatic line, that reintroduces the opening theme, this time in a higher register.

I point to the program, which lists the song title, taking a pen out of my suit jacket pocket, drawing a line below the title:

"Liebesträume, S. 541, No. 3."

I then write below the characters,

"541, No.",

The message,

"Eda, Norway.",

She looks at me, concerned, as if she's slipping into something, but she understands.

...

Kissin is notorious for extended encores, that would otherwise border on abusive, except no one wants him to stop, with people sometimes seated for an hour after scheduled closing -

Ida and I are more than happy to simply sit there, until he's said what he needs to, astonished, every moment passing, appreciative -

The tireless, relentless, human effort, and love, that go into reaching these levels of performance.

Both of us know how lucky we are to simply participate, however meagerly, alive, knowing there's a pile of bodies that blindly and relentlessly dedicated themselves to nothing other than what we are experiencing.

The unending nonsense of heartache and death, disease and pointless loss, misfortune and injustice -

Whatever, we will make art,

For we know this is not a world made for us, but we will make it ours, anyhow, take what we can get, while we can, most importantly, each other.

...

After about forty-five minutes of unscheduled performances, of Fauré, Chopin, Bach, Mozart, The Brahms Intermezzo Op. 118 No. 2, shocking me with, "Je te Veux", by Erik Satie, he finally closes with, "The Lark", by Mikhail Glinka:

The piece briefly modulates to C-Sharp-Major (using the mode on the five), but then, the opening theme is reintroduced, in the original A-Sharp-Minor, with the addition of an independent chromatic line, in the upper register, as if Liszt showed up, lending a hand, but she still sees only one man on stage, doing all of this work -

I hear Ida say, "My God", under her breath, almost in tears.

I look over at her again, during a lull, just before the closing phrase, now to find that she's actually crying, her bottom lip quivering, and I lose it -

I feel tears, well up in my eyes.

She sees, takes my right hand, and with a bit of desperation, places it below hers, on top of her left leg, and I can feel the beads of her dress press into the palm of my hand, under the weight of hers, the tip of my fingers briefly brushing against the red velvet of the seat below, feeling the warmth of her hand above mine and her leg below, as the closing phrase of the piece finally begins, echoing the opening, but with the introduction of a major third, still holding onto the minor sixth -

Bitterness, the simultaneously irreconcilable tones, when separated by time, making the joy of the major third, feel like relief, holding Ida's hand, after only a moment of separation.

Cafe Mogador

We're planning to have brunch at Cafe Mogador, which she's heard of, through friends, but never been to -

Mogador was a constant in my life in New York, with nearly every weekend involving at least one brunch there.

We take the green line, 6 train, from our hotel, in midtown, heading downtown, and get off at Astor Place.

It's a nice day in late September, about 70 degrees, I'm wearing shorts and a light knitted sweater, and she's wearing black jeans, and a simple white cotton t-shirt, both of us wearing sneakers.

We walk down St. Marks, entertained by the usuals -

Dive bars, head shops, tattoo parlors, karaoke bars, Yakitori spots, all creating an impression of the city I knew growing up, since bulldozed over by the real foreigners, looking only to park their cash, in some vacant condo -

I'm no communist, and I understand the value of development, but there's a balance, and we've reached a point too far in favor of capital, forgetting the real point, which is to live your life.

We pass the old pommes frites spot, that I've been to once, and don't remember a thing about, that apparently exploded, continuing onward, past Second Avenue, now in the portion of the East Village that starts to feel domestic, with tall brownstones, tiny dogs, and small bars and restaurants, though this part of the city was never fully worked over, leaving it with a visibly rougher appearance.

We accidentally pass the restaurant, ending up not far from Charlie Parker's house, just outside Tompkins Square Park, on one of the most beautiful blocks in the neighborhood, on Avenue B, between 7th and 8th Streets.

I make a note of his house, telling Ida some stories about growing up with my unusual uncle, a Jazz guitarist, and his simply ridiculous friends, all of whom were also musicians, and artists:

She laughs at my absurd tales -

Driving on the actual sidewalks of Rome with my uncle's bassist, who's also a nudist, while drinking beers, in a tiny car, seated next to an upright bass, laying on its back;

My other uncle, a rock guitarist, passing out on the floor of his recording studio, in the early afternoon, holding a frozen margarita;

A pianist emerging from a bathroom, his face covered in paint, completely blasted, from huffing paint;

A drummer, who would compete with his bandmates, playing beats so pointlessly complex, that everyone would lose rhythm, deliberately ruining the performance, and later bragging he achieved exactly this result;

This same drummer, kicking a stranger on the streets of New York City, for simply touching his drum set, which was roped onto a cart, on the sidewalk.

“What is wrong with you people?” , she says, in response.

“Don’t include me in this.”, I reply.

“You were there.”, she says.

“Fair enough.”

Though I can’t say for sure that this actually happened, my uncle also told me that Charlie Parker showed up stoned to a set once, apparently playing not up to par, and the drummer stopped, took his cymbal off the stand, and threw it at Parker -

Music is not an object, it is instead an idea, that just happens to have physical substance when performed, totally loaded with far more volatile psychological substance, that could lead to assault by a crazed musician.

...

We finally get to Cafe Mogador, and there’s a huge line -

We wait outside.

Who cares?

The Metropolitan Museum of Art

We again take the green line, this time, uptown, getting off at 86th street.

We trace the path from Medieval Art, to The Annenberg Collection, obviously noticing the subject matter change, as we move through the galleries, echoing the transition from an economy dominated by The Church, to a free market.

We connect it to Kissin's music from last night, as you could clearly hear the freedom of the later artists, in Brahms and Fauré in particular, then taking it further, discussing Ravel's String Quartet in F-Major, and of course -

Franz Liszt.

His economic success, undoubtedly fueling what was a notorious personal life, with women positively obsessed with the man, reportedly picking up his spent cigarettes in the streets of Vienna, putting them in vials, and wearing them as necklaces -

He was the first proper rock star, post Fall of Rome.

Though a piece of music is ultimately an idea, unlike a painting, the artist is always real, and the notion of The Artist, independent of any institution, comes into fruition, with the rise of free markets -

The Artist becomes an economic entity.

We enter The American Wing, as the sunlight breaks through the glass ceiling, illuminating a wall containing floral-topped columns, taken from Louis Comfort Tiffany's home, in Oyster Bay, Long Island, just to the right of my favorite statue in the whole world -

A bronze, a mother, holding her child, below a bunch of grapes, suspended, by Frederick William MacMonnies.

It reminds me of a day in Central Park, when I was in college -

I saw a truly tiny baby, just big enough to sit up on its own, wearing a little red jumper, and a matching, baby-sized, red hat, the net effect, a tomato growing from the grass beneath, from a distance.

The Vanguard

We take a nap after the museum, exhausted, ultimately sleeping in a bit late, deciding to have dinner in our hotel room, as we've made reservations at the Village Vanguard, to see a show at 21:00.

We take a car down to the West Village, along the Westside Highway, the bike lanes to the right, the street lights repeating as we pass, bars spilling out onto West Street, further onto the piers, under the night sky, bouncing off the Hudson River.

We head down until we hit Houston.

...

The Vanguard takes music very seriously, and the atmosphere is a bit tense as a consequence:

Talking is unacceptable, not paying attention is decidedly rude, and more importantly, a waste of your time.

The band is a quintet, and though I'm not familiar with them, I trust the venue:

"The Bellwether Quintet", consisting of tenor saxophone, trumpet, piano, bass, and drums.

They open with, "Blue Train", by John Coltrane, the subtle dissonance of the already iconic opening, in the dim lights, just past the stage, where we're seated, as the tenor joins, the piece opening to define an entire genre, as the upright bass picks up, with the tom drums signaling the beginning of a definition.

I don't have perfect pitch, but nearly perfect relative pitch, which allows me to think like a Jazz musician, even though I can't play like one.

As a result, I can at least follow along, and I'm familiar with a handful of standards, which makes it easier.

Despite portrayals suggesting Jazz is associated with beat poetry, and hippie nonsense, Jazz musicians are in reality, phenomenally competitive people.

Jazz is intellectual athleticism -

The spontaneous navigation of a quantized space, in all twelve tones, and the personalities reflect this.

Just imagine someone showing you a Picasso, and then asking you to reproduce it, but giving you a random palette of colors, right now.

This is exactly what a proper Jazz musician will do, which is to take a song they know, transpose into a random key, and improvise in a manner that is technically consistent with the original composition, right now.

Jazz is in that sense more abstract than classical music, because songs are typically presented as a sequence of chord changes, with only relative relationships, and moreover, you're free to improvise over the melody.

But, because of that, the actual performance is paramount, since you can't know it beforehand:

It's a spontaneous invention -

Idea, and immediate execution.

The next piece is, "Cherokee", by Ray Noble, though I associate it with Charlie Parker.

After that, "Polka Dots and Moonbeams", reminding me of the recordings by Chet Baker, and I immediately become sentimental -

This song, built to make you long for love that may have never even existed in the first instance, leaving you convinced that it did, though on this night, there's an actual hand in mine.

Next is, "So What", by Miles Davis, and though I'm reluctant to admit it, I don't know his music well.

For me, Miles and Coltrane were like Brahms and Schumann, and for me, it was Coltrane, not Miles, Brahms, not Schumann.

Nonetheless, it's an iconic piece, and immediately reminds me of the musical onomatopoeia of, "Salt Peanuts", with the opening line repeating a favorite phrase, and philosophy of mine -

"So What?"

They close with, "Essence of Sapphire", by Dorothy Jeanne Thompson, which I absolutely love, having discovered her work by chance, rather late in life, while in Stockholm.

The tenor and trumpet together, in unison, take the lead from her harp, the piano providing comp, underneath, thickening the sound, with some counterpoint to the melody as well, occasionally quoting the opening to Coltrane's arrangement of, "My Favorite Things", together with the bass, which is otherwise largely unchanged from the recordings I'm familiar with, though the brass completely changes the timbre of the song, from a delicate ballad, reminiscent of Ravel, to a charging work of bebop, perfect for the setting, with the drummer

wailing.

That's the end of the set list, but then the pianist looks at me, and nods his head, so I do the same, in reply.

Ida sees this, so she looks at me, thinking that perhaps I know him through my uncle, but I don't, and though the band is clearly about to step down, off set, the pianist starts playing Scriabin's Etude in C-Sharp-Minor, on his own, without the band, no improvisation -

I immediately recognize it, confused, because it's obviously directed at me, but I love the song -

He sticks to the score, a perfect performance, with a heavy hand in the middle register, float away melody during the climax.

Ida knows the piece as well, and she knows that it's one of my favorites -

Realizing that if I knew him well enough for him to know this about me, I would have said something, so she looks at me, again, with the same look from last night, concerned, understanding now that it's too late.

Thai food

“Do you mind if I invite my friend Aaron to brunch?”

“He’s coming to dinner tonight anyway, so, it’ll give you a chance to meet him beforehand.”

“No, of course not.”, she replies.

We’ve booked a table at 12:30, at Pastis, in meatpacking, which closed for a while, but has since reopened.

We take a car, again down the Westside Highway, pulling up through the busy streets of meatpacking, filled with overdressed pedestrians, everywhere, flooding the cobblestone streets, obstructing traffic, which annoys me.

I can already see Aaron waiting for us -

He’s usually on time, often disappointed by my total disregard for the timing of casual social engagements, so he seems pleased we’re on time.

We exit the car, I grab Aaron’s hand, and lean in for the one arm shoulder hug, then stepping back, I say,

“This is Ida.”, as Aaron reaches out, and she shakes his hand, the three of us now standing in front of the signage of the restaurant, the Sun partially obstructed by the clouds, on an otherwise really nice day.

“OK, why don’t we head in.”, I say, looking at both of them, and so I lead in, since I made the reservation -

I approach the hostess, and say,

“Hi, we had a reservation for 3, at 12:30.”

“What’s the name?”, she responds, to which I reply,

“Charles.”

“Got it, just follow me.”

I look back to get Ida and Aaron’s attention, standing about a meter behind, and they both nod, so I follow the hostess, giving Ida and Aaron a chance to perhaps kick off a conversation, which they do:

“So how did you meet Charles?”, she asks.

“We have some lawyer friends in common, and met at a party one night,

and kept in touch since then.”

“You guys work together, right?”, he asks, to which she replies,

“Yes, but not on the same team, so it’s perfectly manageable, and we barely interact -

We met at an event, not during proper work hours.”

“Got it, I see, so that makes sense then.”, he replies.

“Here you are, enjoy.”, the hostess says, as she places three menus, and a cocktail menu on top, down on our table, which is circular, attached to a booth, and so I volunteer to sit in the middle, though Aaron leaves a bit of extra space between the two of us.

“So where in New York do you live?”, Ida asks, to which Aaron replies,

“I live in Brooklyn, in Park Slope.”, to which she responds,

“Ah, that’s a lovely area, and you work in Manhattan?”

“Yea, but the commute’s not that bad, because my office is downtown, and I got the gym down there too.”

I’m reading the menu, happy some kind of normal conversation is taking place, remembering Aaron recounts all things with a reservation, keeping him from total satisfaction, given any set of facts.

“You do private equity, right?”, he asks, to which she replies,

“Yes, in the energy sector, though I also advise on secondary market work.”

“That’s interesting.”, as he picks up a menu, and starts to read, so she does the same.

I generally don’t drink at brunch, so I focus on food, deciding on gravlax benedict, and a cappuccino, looking up from the menu once I’ve decided.

The waiter shows up, and we order.

...

“So what’s with you and the Thai lady?”, I state, with a deliberately unsolicited delivery, in a somewhat louder than normal tone.

Ida looks at me, a bit puzzled, quickly expecting some kind of gossip, she looks back at Aaron, who’s now hiding a faint smile.

“It’s still on, but it’s still weird.”, he replies.

“How weird? Am I going to see some food-related headline in The New York Post, about a murder?”

Ida’s legitimately intrigued, and knowing me, she’s now expecting high-quality nonsense, smiling in advance, despite not knowing the facts, just yet.

“No, her husband’s not that bad -

He knows, it’s fine.”, he replies.

Ida interjects,

“Her husband?”

“It’s not as bad as it sounds -

They still work together, but they’re basically divorced.”

“What?”, she responds.

“How old is she?”, I throw in, already knowing the answer.

“Fifty-eight,” he responds, causing Ida to oscillate back and forth from a smile, to morbid curiosity, as she looks at me, and back at Aaron.

Our food shows up.

...

The conversation drifts from Aaron’s indiscretions, to some nonsense about healthcare spending in Scandinavia, so I again slam the wheel,

“Does her husband still give you free food?”

Ida pauses, with a french fry in her hand, which is now not making it in, as she tries to make sense of what I’ve said.

Aaron is visibly annoyed, but starts to laugh -

“Yea, whatever.”

Ida then eats her french fries, staring at him -

I can see a combination of scorn, and fascination, as she visibly ponders the role of food in this relationship, unable to help herself, she asks,

“Alright, so is this a relationship that involves all three of you?”

“What? No, of course not.”, to which Ida replies,

“I’m sorry, I just thought the food ... ”, as Aaron cuts her off,

“No, they own a restaurant together.”

There’s a brief pause.

“I see, so you go to the restaurant?”, to which he replies,

“Yea, it’s really good -

Thai food.”

She’s now chewing on some french fries, nodding, visibly placating, clearly astonished by this sordid set of facts accompanying her brunch.

The Standard Grill

I'm wearing a black cotton t-shirt, that's snug around the shoulders and the arms, with a knitted wool, light brown sweater, draped on my shoulders, faded, but not torn, Diesel jeans, baby blue, "recycled", Muji socks, soft brown leather drivers, with a matching, ultra-thick, Cavalli, braided leather belt, with a large gold buckle, reading, "Just Cavali", embossed, on the bottom of the buckle -

This is New York, even billionaires wear t-shirts.

Ida ends up liking Aaron, despite his rather questionable personal life, and so the three of us order for the entire table, jointly alerting our waiter to the plan -

Sharing a large number of dishes.

We then discuss food allergies, bottled water, all standing near the long table for ten, set up just outside the main entrance.

Though not going quite as far as a set up, she nudges a friend of hers, and says,

"Why don't you sit next to Aaron, so we can all catch up."

She's a fairly petite, and very attractive Norwegian -

A friend of Ida's from university, I've met only a few times in Oslo, then realizing, how much of Ida's life is consumed by time with me, and that we all live in the same city, yet now catching up on things, on the other side of the planet, but this is again New York.

We start with a huge plate of oysters for the entire table, served on an oval shaped bed of finely chopped ice, and I get a Pimm's Cup, as Ida gets some kind of cucumber thing, with one of those giant, single ice cubes, cucumber slices so thin, they appear to have been prepared by a surgeon -

This is what happens when you pay people too much money.

Ida's friend, Mari, is a bit shy, so I ask,

"Is this your first time in New York?", knowing that she's almost certainly been here before, she responds,

"No, I've been to the U.S. a few times, and was a summer analyst here, so I know the city fairly well."

I can see that Aaron likes her, as she's bright, with an almost nerdy affect, and several decades younger than his chef.

“What do you do now?”, he asks.

“I work in credit, at a bank in Oslo.”, to which he immediately responds,

“Ah, I work in credit too, but I’m a lawyer.”

“I work with a lot of lawyers, but I’m not a lawyer.”, she replies, clarifying,

“I work in operations.”, to which he replies,

“Got it.”

I step in, “Mari lives reasonably close to us in Oslo, and went to university with Ida.”, though the conversation is quickly broken by a group of servers, this time carrying what appear to be nearly identical charcuterie platters, as I jealously eye the platter furthest from me, to ensure that it doesn’t contain anything not present in the most proximate.

I lean back a bit to let the server in, as he lays the display before us:

Salted meats, glistening, slightly reflective, rectangular and triangular wedges of various cheeses, cut thick, with a particular soft blue that I’m coveting, near a dollop of what appears to be peach jam, resolving to a generous pile of salted almonds, resting in a scalloped corner.

Aaron and I do not talk for several minutes, as we viciously consume essentially everything before us, pouring olive oil on small baguettes that we’ve torn open, later dipping them again into the spoils on our plates, having already salted the partially spent remnants beforehand -

I can see him sweating along his brow, with almost no capacity left for the beautiful, young, blonde woman that actually seems interested in him, seated just a few inches away, quietly eating a modest portion of cheese, with a single almond, and a bit of jam, like a small bird perched near a rhino.

The Jane

We all pull up in black Chevy SUVs, outside the Jane, I'm sitting in front, as part of an effort to push Aaron and Mari into sitting next to each other, which worked, but has yet to yield anything.

I exit the front passenger seat, as Ida exits the rear left passenger seat, both of us ultimately walking side by side, she places her jacket on her shoulders, without putting her arms through the sleeves, like a shawl, as we approach the steps of The Jane Hotel:

It's a black, leather bomber jacket, with ribbed, leather shoulder pads.

Her hair is tightly, and neatly pulled back into a single, thick, braided ponytail, and she looks a bit mean -

What could you say?

I got to know the manager of the Jane, after a dispute of sorts, relating to a stolen jacket, which ended with him actually liking me, despite the hostile initial conditions, and as a result, I can show up whenever I want, and simply skip the line.

I take her hand, as we ignore the long line, both of us heading right up the stairs, towards the building.

At the top of the stairs, I shake hands with the security guard, using my right hand, as we nod at each other, briefly making eye contact, and so I give the signal, raising my left hand into the air, two fingers pointing up -

Aaron is already outside, and directs the crew, as a small army of Scandinavians, and one Jewish man, make their way out of their cars, and up the steps.

I spot the manager, as he's chatting up a group of people, so I wave, he acknowledges, and the guy who ultimately manages the door, who completely despises me, reluctantly waves us all in, as we approach the doors to the main hall.

We open the doors, and I see my usual bartender to the left, she smiles, as Aaron says,

"I'll get us a bunch of drinks."

We leave the bar area, under the assumption that it's going to be a minute before we get our drinks, and so we enter the main hall itself, to an immediately preposterous scene:

Britney Spears, “Till the World Ends” , blasting, the house lights episodically flashing, from total blackout, to spotlight, in sync with the music, and everyone that can be, is dancing on a table -

There’s one man, with no shirt on, who has apparently scaled the cathedral-sized walls of the establishment, now seated atop a dangerously high perch, shouting, waving his shirt as a flag of sorts, as the entire place lights up, celebrating his positively reckless display.

She looks at me, in love with everything.

Circa Tabac

Everyone's still gunning for more, and so we reassemble into SUVs, and make our way to an after-hours cigar bar in TriBeCa, that is usually manageable, in terms of getting a table.

Ida and I both get old fashioned, two punch cigars, feeling a bit like gangsters, with background smiles, that remain roughly fixed at nearly all moments, like a pair of benevolent devils, finally at peace.

She's seated across from me, and we both look over to Mari and Aaron kissing, and I give her the look of a mission accomplished.

I can feel her start to run her foot run up my inner thigh, under the table -

So I completely blow up her spot, tickling her foot, which causes her to yelp, and kick the table, glasses rattling, minor spillage, modest ashes landing on the table, embarrassed, she throws a napkin at me, staring at me, all of her friends having heard her kick the table, now laughing at us both, Coltrane plays, "My Favorite Things", Ida still staring, a bit red in the face, this time, simply happy, the dim lights, her goofy drunkenness, soften the impression of an otherwise intimidating woman.

She looks down, to put on her shoes, grabs her purse, and then climbs onto the long horizontal window ledge below, about six inches above the floor, just behind our table, and jumps out into the street, turning back, smiling -

"I'm out", throwing my left hand into the air, as I get up, and walk quickly toward the door, taking my phone out along the way, to order a car.

The Empire State

We're both in bed together, having just showered, since we wreaked of cigars, the both of us wearing plain cotton T's, and boxers.

While sitting on top of the freshly made bed, the comforter still laid atop the sheets, Ida says, visibly drunk,

"Dette er så koselig!", smiling at me.

I reach under the bed, and pull up a tan, thin, and nearly translucent, delicate folder, that I planted there earlier -

It's closed with a thin red thread, I've tied into a bow, through a brass ring, that's cut into the center right of the folder, at the opening.

She looks at it, with a goofy drunken smile, slurring very slightly, she says,

"Vad ar det?", to which I reply,

"Open it.", also smiling, quite drunk myself.

She unties the bow, to find a single, white piece of paper inside, with what appears to be a poem, handwritten, blue ink, with my signature on the bottom right, undated.

She sees the title, "Jane", and as she's beginning to read, I stop her, turning the page over, to show her sheet music I wrote on the back of the page -

She takes a moment to imagine the song in her mind, and really likes it, so she says,

"This is really sweet of you Charles, thank you so much."

Though seeing I'm still excited, she asks,

"Is there something else?", smiling, now unsure of what's to follow -

I take out my phone, and pull up a song, entitled, "Jane - Dada Art Edition", as she begins to connect the song with our flight to New York:

She saw that I was working on a piece of music, on my laptop, and so she asked to listen, though when she did, she thought it positively awful, nearly certain she heard a kazoo, but nonetheless nodded, while quietly listening, without saying anything, simply handing back my headphones, after what she decided was polite in terms of timing.

It begins to settle in, that I took the time to write a fake, and thoughtfully

terrible, piece of music, that upon reflection, was purposed to hide the real thing, so that I could work, right in front of her, on an airplane, though she's nonetheless comically annoyed, since I knew she wouldn't say it sucked, even though it plainly did -

Then she remembers the title, gleaned from along the file bar, at the top of the screen on my laptop, which she now announces:

"The Beast Sonata?", to which I reply,

"Yes, for you, of course from the beast, to the beauty."

"I cannot, for the life of me, understand why you do these things.", as she leans in, her words growing louder as she does, visibly flattered on balance, the both of us kissing for quite some time.

When we stop, I say,

"Can I play it for you now?", to which she replies,

"Of course.", and so I push play on my phone, already connected to the room's sound system:

She can hear I've recorded it on my phone, though she also notes the sound is quite good, imagining me scrambling to hide the fact that my guitar had been used, working on the song, like some top secret project, though hearing the simple guitar lines, recognizing right away a thing reflecting my sincerity, plainly unpretentious, in my simple love for her.

Reading along,² she hears the line, "memories of life lost", and since she knows that she's not dead, she gathers that I'm referencing my childhood, then recalling pictures of me as a kid -

She appreciates the song on a personal level, but was nonetheless evaluating by habit with some dispassion, despite being drunk, though the song starts to strike her as candid, which takes her back a bit, as she continues to read along, with the context now changed, far more personal than she anticipated, she hears the words, to the chorus:

"I understand what Love is now, because of you.", and she looks up at me and says,

"This is so beautiful Charles, thank you."

She continues to read along during the second verse, hearing, "Cuts through every bit of hate in my heart", so she looks at me and smiles, and as I smile

²The lyrics are set out on Page 95.

back, grabbing my calf muscle, her fingers moving gently along my hairy legs, as the song continues to play, and she says,

“You angry monkey-man.”

Though as the flute comes in during the second chorus, she is visibly surprised, and instantly starts to cry, her tears landing on the page, as she reads along, the viola and spoken word then enter, elevating from folk, and into the peculiar, her tears blurring the blue ink below, now able to see the music through the page, as it rests in its folder -

And she looks as though she’s about to say something, appearing almost upset with me, but then stops herself, and now I can see that she’s actually extremely drunk.

She again starts to say something, but upon hearing me say the words, “New York” in the spoken word track, her grip on the page slips, and she instead lets the lyrics fall down to the bed beside her, as she falls into my arms, sobbing, and says, speaking into my shoulder, articulation broken by intermittent sobbing,

“Charles, ... why, do you do these things.”

On the downbeat, she squeezes into the skin of my ribs, pressing her body against mine, crying uncontrollably, as tears pool on the skin of my neck, so I feel guilty, for not taking into account, the fact we’re both extremely drunk, so maybe it was too much, in context.

The Empire State Building, now lit up beside us, entirely in blue, the light of mankind, breaking through clouds, reminding exactly, where, we are -

Again, lit up cutouts, from a distance, illuminated in the lights of our designs, one set of windows in a column of glass, opposite an icon of the human ocean, below.

This is New York.

Elderly woman on a small corner in Soho

We're in bed the next morning, and I am brutally hungover, though too lazy to vomit, instead fighting the sensation, and settling for quiet, relatively motionless, discomfort.

Our hotel room is completely filled with sunlight, though the temperature is quite nice, and cool, so I'm cowering under the blanket, literally moaning out loud, rolling around a bit, in what at times seems like legitimate anguish.

I open my eyes, just enough to look outside, and see the glare of an airplane, at an extremely high altitude, able to see it only because the sky is perfectly clear, allowing the faint reflection to make its way to me, coming in and out, causing it to look like a blinking, flying transponder -

Apparently not the code to feeling better.

Seeing that I've opened my eyes, she leans her head in, obstructing my view, as she's otherwise seated upright, close to the center of her side of the bed, which is closer to the window, her hair brushing up against my skin, drastically changing the scene from my drunken perch.

In my neediness, I enjoy the sensation of her hair, and the smell of her hair and her skin, so I deeply inhale, which she notices -

"You are a total creep," she says, then moving away from me, leaving me back where I started, though with the memories of some temporary relief.

Now bordering on disgusted with my condition, she says,

"Wake up you loser", poking me through the blanket.

"No."

"This is your fault.

I'm not spending all day in bed -

This is my trip as well, get up.", she continues, this time, while back to being seated upright, her ability to sit up adding consternation.

"No."

Apparently in perfectly fine shape, she begins her merciless infantilization:

"Poor Charles -

Do you remember what you did on the walk to the car?"

“Somewhat.”, I reply.

“It was not your finest moment, but the elderly woman you took to dancing with was clearly enjoying herself, so, well done, overall, I suppose.”

I pull the blanket totally over my head, partially in response, as she says,

“Fine, fifteen more minutes, then get up and take a shower, you stink.”

I hear moving, so I peak over the blanket, seeing her lean over the edge of the bed, her clothing taught around her body, exciting me, though I’m too lazy to do anything about it -

She grabs her phone, which is resting on the floor near the bed, and disconnects it from the charger.

Though I can’t see what she’s doing, I can hear her connect to the room’s system, and, “Para Mais Ninguém”, by Marisa Monte starts playing, so I pull the blanket fully off of my head, and the room is so bright, my eyelids don’t do the job, as I can see the back of my eyelids lit up, in an inconvenient, fleshy color.

Nonetheless, I love the song, so I don’t give a shit what’s happening -

I hear the samba guitar, somewhere between classical, jazz, and flamenco, waking my mind, despite my body, so I smile, and she leans in, kissing the side of my forehead, but stops, and says,

“You smell like a tank of gin.”

“I know.”

“You’re such a loser.”, she says.

“I know.”

She pauses -

“Thank you for the song Charles, I really love it.

And I really love you -

It means a lot to me.”

I open my eyes to acknowledge -

“You’re welcome, I love you too.”

After a while, she starts to sing along, and I remember how beautiful her

voice is:

I open my eyes to see her staring out of the window, as she sings, quietly, to herself, with a gaze fixed outward, as if no one else is around, looking out at the Empire State Building, now lit up in the light of the Sun, the windows now reflecting at points, just like the plane I saw minutes ago.

Not quite keeping up with Monte's subtle vibrato, but not trying, either, instead with the clarity of a proper choir singer, leading me to tear up, because it's all so beautiful, and I'm emotional when I'm hungover.

Before the song is over, she senses me watching, and quickly turns around -

"You fruit!", she says, upon spotting my moment of weakness, due to over-consumption.

"Shut up, I love you."

"Get up.", she says, pushing me again, this time, under the sheets, repeatedly grabbing me, randomly, in spots where she knows that I'm fattest, as if my weakened state could be exploited to coax action through insult -

"No." †

Christmas together

She's Christian, whereas I border on some depraved mix of Buddhism and shamanism -

Make that the only joke, and comb the essay for unintended comedy.

But I grew up celebrating Christmas, and I enjoy it:

Every year, I take it seriously, not doing anything outrageous -

Small, thoughtful gestures, simple things, that anyone can do:

I make her breakfast, before she gets up, and bring her something to drink in bed.

We go to church together, one year watching a children's choir singing, "Mitt hjerte alltid vanker".

These moments are branches in relationships -

The devil is a joke that breaks an unrelated stranger, too clever to make its intended target known, perhaps unaware itself;

The awful grace of God, no different in a world like ours, routing out and drawing to the surface what is worst, and destroying it, leaving only our unadulterated origin, from an unrequited generosity, and unconditional love. †

The incident

It's Syttende Mai, 2017, and we're near Aker Brygge, with a group of friends, at a bar on the water.

I am ludicrously drunk, as is Ida, with my own personal bottle of vodka, that I refuse to share with anyone else, only partially out of irony.

I'm wearing cheap, pink, imitation wayfarer sunglasses, bordering on a self-aware parody of an American.

Some random guy that Ida knew from high school shows up, and while I really couldn't care less, I attempt to be polite, and throw my arm around him, as I do with pretty much everyone that falls within one degree of friendship, under the presumption that he was a mutual friend of the group.

The music is blasting, and I'm dancing like an idiot, with this random person that I've known for just a few minutes, who is suddenly my best friend in the whole world.

I could see her discomfort, which is unusual for her, and as drunk as I was, it took me a bit out of the moment -

This was another branching point in our relationship, but in reality, I didn't have any options, because our entire network was there, so a blow up was not a possibility, especially given the absence of any hard evidence of malfeasance.

So ultimately, almost as reflex, I just pretend that I didn't notice, though suspecting the possibility that she cheated on me with him, before he took off, I made sure to pat him on the ass, and say,

"Nice to meet you, buddy."

When we got home, I was totally blasted, and she was a bit belligerent towards me, giving me a hard time for being so drunk, which is fine, but in context, it made me even more suspicious -

So I just threw it on the table, and said,

"Look, if you cheated on me with that lesbian, at least promise me that you used some kind of protection, presumably suitable for lesbians."

"Fuck you, Charles."

We sleep on opposite corners of the bed. †

The investigation

Our first day back to work afterwards, I come back to the apartment, during work hours, and tear through everything imaginable:

Email, Facebook, old phones, diaries, receipts, photo albums, her camera, suit cases, whatever -

It's a complete investigation, and I'm convinced that she's cheated on me with this idiot.

If it were possible, I would have broken into her childhood bedroom, and rummaged through her socks, looking for some evidence of indiscretion.

As I ruthlessly violate her privacy, potentially ruining our relationship as a consequence, the picture that emerges is not at all what I had expected, but I quickly realize, as a wave of bitterness washes over me, that it's one that I should have anticipated as a possibility -

The last message she sent to this guy closed with,

"You broke my arm, so don't you think you should at least apologize to me?"

She was 21 at the time.

My internal response is so complete, that I think that I might have had a stroke, as I see a flash of light in my left eye. †

Hangover

I'm standing over our kitchen counter, staring at a photograph of you, in an old silver frame, waiting for water to boil, so I can make myself some coffee.

I see the silhouette of a tree, projected on the lefthand wall of our living room, lit up by the street lights below, moving in the wind.

It's 6:00, still completely dark, I'm still completely drunk, and I look straight out of the windows separating me from the outside world, into absolutely nothing.

I can feel my dependency upon you in my stomach, belittling, the fumes of my drunkenness, in the bleakness of your absence, nothing is happening -

I don't know what I'm supposed to do. †

My painting for Ida

I make her a painting, and I buy myself a painter's smock, and hat.

It's a single, white peddled flower, with a yellow, egg yolk center, green stem, each drawn with a wide, thick, soft brush, and generous layers of paint, that have a sculptural finish, with a thickness that is significantly raised off the surface of the canvas, showing the motions of the brush:

A more contemporary version of Van Gogh's, Two Cut Sunflowers.

There's watercolor under it, with blues from the sky, some whites, and some faint floral colors to create contrast, allowing the pedals to be discerned from the white canvas.

The watercolor is almost entirely limited to the area of the flower bud.

The painting is large, nearly the height of our ceilings, and has a long green stem, also drawn with the same brush and style, equally heavy, that reduces to nearly a single point at its base, executed by twisting the brush till perpendicular to the bottom of the painting, at the end of each stroke.

Each component is a single, premixed color, or group of colors, mixed onto the brush before application, creating homogenous blocks of colors -

There are however, some very faint, thin lines of violet and pale blue iridescence in some of the pedals.

There are accents of naturally occurring greens throughout, also drawn with a heavy hand, as if a single flower had been placed upon a flower shop counter, above fine, translucent, colored paper wraps, with their leaves generally, naturally falling nearby.

I work on the painting in secret, renting a small space in a local artist's loft, regularly lying to her, saying that I'm at the gym.

I sign it, "C. Davi", in black oil ink, with the knob of the brush used as a pen, undated, on the bottom righthand corner of the painting.

I never tell her this, but I also write on the bottom left of the back of the canvas, in the same ink -

"Jeg elsker deg, Ida."

I also hide a small Okiagari doll, fashioned after Bodhidharma, resting on the bottom of the frame behind the canvas.

The frame is a natural, unfinished wood, baroque frame, that I also paint,

with small gold and white dot accents, modest in number, significantly distanced from one another, randomly scattered about the frame.

When the painting is finished, before I come home, I hand wash the smock and hat in a small basin at the studio, and leave both there to dry.

I come home to mount the painting myself, before Ida gets home from work, where I saw the silhouette of the tree that morning, alone, so that it never happens again.

She comes home that night, spotting the painting, immediately understanding why I've made it for her, begins to cry upon seeing it, and forgives me for knowing why. †

My artwork for Charles

Nihilism is not a belief system for me, but is instead an unfortunate, occasionally physically real experience that I despise, creating a terrible need for her company -

It's the leveraged depression of a hangover, written everywhere, creating a uniform signal of nothing.

Scandinavians are a bit naive, but they can afford this because they live in an insular, safe, wealthy part of the world.

As a result, basically everything you want to know about someone can be found online, including their address:

I send Andreas a friend request on Facebook the day before my performance, to make sure that he knows what I look like, and that I'm dating Ida.

I follow this up hours later, sending him a single, kissy-face emoji, and a solitary capital, "R", isolated on a new line.

It turns out that he notices this, and he responds -

"Hey, cool, what does that mean?"

He accepts my request:

So I show up outside of his house the next day to explain, before work, wearing the painter's smock and hat, because I hate him, and I want the next 5 minutes of his life to make no sense at all:

He's about to get into his car, and I've already opened my car door to avoid making noise, as I quietly get out of my car, which is parked down the street from his driveway, slowly and unremarkably walking towards his house, waiting for him to open his car door.

Before he's completely seated, with his left leg still sticking out of the driver's seat, I run towards him as fast I can, and jump into the air, kicking the door shut on his leg, with my left leg, falling to the ground, sliding on my back, and I scramble to kick the door a second time, while still on my back, because I hate him.

I stand up, completely livid, smash the rear passenger window with a wrench that I've clung to the entire time, shouting, and as he's screaming in pain, I calmly walk over to the rear of his car, and carefully draw an upside down human nose on his rear window, using the edge of the wrench, etching deeply into the surface of the glass.

The noise is positively awful, and I can tell that he thinks that the noise is somehow contributing to his physical pain, though it's obviously not -

Nonetheless, he starts to scream even louder, perhaps realizing that this is shaping up to be an unusual part of his life, full of unfamiliar sounds and experiences.

I wore my painter's hat to partially obscure my face, but I want him to see my face eventually, so when I'm done with my glasswork, I throw the front door to his shitty car open, and I squat in front of him:

Pushing him with my right hand in the flesh of his shoulder to get his attention, I point to my eyes, making a capital, "Y" with my pointer and middle fingers, directing him to look at me -

Then I spit in his face, stand up, and shout,

"This is what it means."

I am crying hysterically, shouting these words inches from his face, grabbing the bottom of his chin, and like his ugly mother, I give him a kiss on the mouth, and squeeze his face afterward, hard enough to hurt him, and grab the top of his head to make him think that I might actually rape him -

His face level with my crotch, I grab the buckle on my belt with my left hand.

I lean in, scream for no reason, again inches from his face, and I can see my spit land in his shitty eyeballs, as he blinks, and shakes his head to get my spit off of his face, in total horror at what's happening to him, and I eat it all up:

I smush my hat onto his stupid head, rubbing it around to ruin his hair, staring at him the whole time.

I step back from his shitty car, spit on his lawn, and standing perfectly upright, I can feel the wind blow across my back, hearing the trees moving behind me -

My eyes wide open, I look up at the sky, but I don't see anything, and I know that he sees all of these things happening, because I'm already inside of his head -

I've infected him, in return for infecting my life, and infecting my family:

I lean back, again, shouting again, desperate for him to understand -

My nose running all over my face, crying like a baby, I throw my entire bodyweight into kicking him, like a fireman knocking down a door, I connect

forwards, flat against his chin, and his entire body lifts and snaps upon contact.

. . .

I walk away, leaving him unconscious, his body awkwardly draped over the barrier between the two front seats, and with some distance, I again scream like an animal, this time staring forward, again into nothing, for no one, not saying anything at all, otherwise calmly walking towards my car.

The birds are chirping, which pisses me off.

. . .

He's almost certainly going to call the police, given the facts, but I'm banking that he won't say it was me, given the facts, since I've given him an out, as this was all designed to make it look like some kind of new, poorly understood hate crime, or perhaps ritualistic violence, in either case, the sheer spectacle will deflect any sensible theory, because they'll be forced to address the giant upside down nose etched into the rear window of his car -

It is a symbol of my total disregard for this maggot, that I won't waste anything at all on:

Nothing, not even the possibility of carrying meaning -

It is an upside down, nonsense thing, just like him.

Moreover, if caught, I don't want to be associated with actual racism, so I invent a new symbol of hatred, just for him:

The upside down nose. †

The coffee shop, “hello”

I know where and when this fruit loop turned gimp gets his coffee every day, and apparently his shattered tibia and stupid foam boot don’t hold back his sense of entitlement to overpriced coffee, so I decided to say hello, twice.

I make sure to get behind him in line, and just as he’s about to pay, I start whistling the tune of, “Greensleeves”, with deliberately homoerotic overtones, repeatedly scratching my eyebrows, ostentatiously.

He hears me whistling, turns around, and looks at my eyebrows first, prompting me to scratch them even faster, as I do bit of a dance, leaning in towards him -

I can see that he recognizes me, and I can also see that he’s getting nervous.

I take my credit card out before I’ve ordered, tapping it on the counter, quickly, and aggressively, until he looks at it, and I plant it down, face up, expecting him to make a mental note of my name, while I order.

The barista seems to think I’m an anxious jerk, merely signaling to get the barista’s attention, so I roll with it, ignoring Andreas going forward. †

Baby powder

I call her, “my baby” during some incredibly desperate, emotionally codependent sex, and she snaps to a positively livid state, stopping everything, sitting upright, as if a high speed train had hit a twisted piece of track -

The whole thing goes airborne, and everyone dies.

I instantly get a free, but incredibly hostile education in feminist theory.

Then, episodically, for months, I randomly discover baby powder in things:

My loafers - baby powder.

My shampoo - baby powder;

My food - baby powder.

This, continuous, for months, with no forewarning -

All things are subject to baby powder.

I press the steam button on the iron, and then wet baby powder explodes all over my pants, leaving permanent stains.

So finally, I say something, and Ida explodes into a totally incoherent tirade, but the main takeaway is:

She’s mad about the baby comment, and so now everything is baby powder, constantly -

This is my punishment, which she’s judged to be appropriate.

So I say, “And if you’re right, what should I do?”

She says nothing, and I can see that she instantly hates me, and sleeps on the couch that night.

The next day, I notice that she doesn’t get up for work, I say nothing, for fear of baby powder reprisal, and while I’m gone, she attempts to rip the painting off the wall, but she can’t manage to dismount the frame, which drives her totally insane, reminding her of my constant, infantilizing nature, and now she feels trapped in some kind of rubberized playpen -

She’s convinced that I’ve somehow cleverly robbed her of the ability to express her outrage in an unsafe manner in her own home, and that nothing operates as expected, because of premeditation on my part.

When she finally realizes that all I've done is instal gliders behind the frame, so that the painting can be easily lifted, and then removed, she completely loses her mind, screaming at the top of her lungs, lifting the painting, above the requisite height, and slamming it down on the floor like an animal -

Hours later, she eventually sees what I wrote on the back of the canvas, and sees the small Okiagari doll, which is now standing upright on the back of the canvas, laying on the floor, face down, she can see before her my undisturbed opinions, notwithstanding what I might occasionally say or do -

That within her lives something unreasonably relentless, surrounded by love, that is simply physically incapable of giving up, by design.

She loses it again, this time saying, "no" to herself, repeatedly, sitting near the painting on the floor of our living room, desperately and clumsily turning it back over, collecting the broken shards of the wood from the frame that are now scattered about, calling me repeatedly, though I don't answer -

Baby powder.

I come home to see her seated on the floor near the painting, with a pile of wood shards assembled nearby, and she looks positively awful, with her hair completely frazzled, possibly the worst I've ever seen her look, inexplicably wearing something that looks like a wedding dress, and I'm honestly worried about her, for the first time.

So I just say,

"Ida, I'm sorry."

The painting hangs for a week, as is, as a shitty reminder of the outside world, which both of us are not terribly fond of at times.

She fixes the frame herself, over time. †

Ida goes to work

She's drinking coffee by herself, already dressed for work, wearing a black skirt, with a somewhat visible decorative white cotton lining, like a miniature fine tablecloth, with the opening resting just above her knees, one leg crossed over the other, her bare feet moving about a bit under our small kitchen table, with a sharp, white cotton, button down shirt, with thick, smashed pearl buttons, pressed neatly, the pleats running down her long arms, with a bit of thin gold jewelry showing under her cuffs, reading the local newspaper.

She turns a few pages to find a sale on Joike balls that she's decidedly uninterested in, a bus crash in Bergen, a local politician that's been spotted cheating on his wife, and then she sees the Andreas story, in the center of some page, featuring a large picture of the upside down nose, with a sensational headline:

"Var Det Hat, Eller Sex?"

There's a panel below the main photo, with rotated instances of the nose, supplemented with other visual media, ultimately trying to reconstruct the intended final state, as the running conclusion is that it was an incomplete work of vandalism, though one analysis reaches the correct conclusion:

"Er det en nese?", reads one caption, under an upside down version of my glasswork, with a textbook photo of a human nose to the right, for context, labeled, "nese".

They interview the neighbors, who uniformly report what they believe to be the shouting of a man in the throws of some kind of sexually charged rage -

Only able to make out the silhouettes of the scene, they all saw a man first squatting near the driver's seat, episodically shouting, kissing the other man, later standing and reaching for his crotch, with bizarre actions taking place earlier in the rear of the car, accompanied by truly disturbing screeching noises.

It's amazing how removing some information can completely change a story, without changing the facts.

One neighbor is confident that it was a consensual encounter gone too far, and that the assailant was having sex with the muffler of the car while carving into the window -

He noted that he had heard of similar things happening in Austria, and that perhaps the assailant was foreign.

Though she feels guilty, she hates him enough to afford herself a bit of laughter, at his admittedly severe expense, and she is in fact laughing quite

loud at this point, as the story grows ever more ridiculous.

Recalling the date that I made her the painting, and given the reported date of the incident, she realizes that this was almost certainly my doing, also because it's completely mental, and seems calculated to produce absurd, and petty consequences.

She doesn't care at all -

She views it as proportional, with extra points for being funny.

She looks at her watch, puts the paper down, picks up her keys, and goes to work. †

The Roman Forum

I see her from some distance below me in The Roman Forum on vacation, in a simple white cotton dress, as I've gone off to take pictures -

In flat, tan leather sandals, her naked feet covered only by laces that wrap up high along her shins, prompting me to stare up from her muscular calves to her thighs, tracing their path, upward, as I walk back towards her, like a predator, imagining the soft touch of the skin along her inner thigh, as the cotton of her dress brushes over my wrist and forearm, and her hair touches my face.

Her blonde hair, barely moving in the slow heat of the city, she's sweating, basically everywhere, including her face, and I become so aroused, that I want to kill every man that I see, just so she can understand the magnitude of my desires for her at the moment:

I would deliberately impregnate her on what remains of the grass, shouting like an animal, and raise a family right there, hunting tourists with a hand-fashioned shank for sustenance, for so long as we both shall live.

I settle for the nonetheless inappropriate option of walking towards her, leaning in and kissing her, squeezing her wonderful behind, and I can see her eyes open, because I never close my eyes outside of bed, and she says, with some sincere condemnation,

"Charles . . ."

And I instantly regret it -

Baby powder.

I realize in that moment that I value her company so much, that I tolerate the risk of psychological mania, without even questioning it:

In about one minute's worth of time, I transitioned from towering Roman upon a hill, willing to hunt human beings and raise a family on a rock, to anxiety over being yet again subjected to constant baby powder terrorism.

Most of this is of course my fault, but she knows at this point how I respond to her presence, and she does nothing to accommodate it, and in fact, I suspect she deliberately antagonizes it -

We walk off together, and she randomly smacks my ass quite hard, squeezing it afterwards, and I yelp out of legitimate surprise, jumping a bit, and though she clearly did this in jest, she also pinches the skin between my thumb and pointer finger, biting her lip as she does this, staring off, suggesting that she was also legitimately excited by the prospect of a bit of spontaneous B.C. sex,

as a sort of immersive history:

I imagine myself standing atop the hill above the forum, as she looks up past a sea of fluted columns, and sees this beastly, bearded man, sweating, my mediocre hair flailing, like a modern Gilgamesh, both legitimately aroused, and amused by me. †

The wind farm transaction

We're at the pharmacy, talking about work -

She's explaining some wind farm transaction, and I'm taking it quite seriously, because I'm paranoid, and so by nature, if someone offers information about what's going on at work, I listen -

And she farts, audibly.

And I laugh, right in her face, so she hits me on the shoulder, incredibly embarrassed, quickly looking around, finding no one close by, laughing, she skips away from me, shewing me off, as if it makes a difference, since we're both going home together afterward.

...

Rather than simply leave this comedic gem unattended, I decide to use it as the inspiration for further comedy -

I buy an alphanumeric pricing gun, with the same labels as the pharmacy, which costs me \$250 USD, and use it to produce a brand new, spectacular pricing possibility of, "**\$FART**", in all capital letters, bold-faced and underlined, deliberately using the U.S. dollar sign, to make it completely absurd.

...

One month later, she goes back to the pharmacy, buying her usual items, this time alone, and while waiting to pay, she looks at her basket -

"Oh, for fuck's sake."

She looks over, at other people's baskets, seeing the same labels, seemingly everywhere, now surrounded, she feels a rush of anxiety, she can feel her face turning red, briefly considering simply walking out.

She's relieved to see prices scanned at the register, so her anxiety fades, though there is a moment where the cashier struggles with an item, rotating a bottle of ointment, as an old lady points at it, attempting to help the cashier, causing Ida to shrink, convinced they'd know the American did it, thereby implicating her.

She can imagine the performance, now laughing to herself -

I'm wearing a balaclava, holding the pricing gun with one hand, hanging from the ceiling with the other, like Spider-Man, descending only to vandalize carefully preselected merchandise. †

The terrarium

I come home first, and it's insanely hot in our apartment, both of us having left the windows closed on a warm, extremely sunny day, giving the apartment the feel of a moist, terrarium.

I desperately have to take a shit, so I quickly lower the temperature in the apartment, blasting the AC, leaving the bathroom door wide open, to let the cold air in.

Then suddenly, she opens the door to the apartment, and it's just too hot -

I leave the bathroom door open.

"Oh, for fuck's sake, Charles, close the door, you disgusting freak." †

The y-chromosome

It's the middle of August, and our first time at the beach together -

We've rented a small house in the South of Sweden for the weekend, since the beaches in Norway are significantly colder.

As we walk to the beach from the house, I look down at my right hand, remembering that I have unusually shaped nails, which are highly circular, with some of my fingernails even forming nearly perfect circles:

I realize that I'm likely just running through the typical anxieties that you have at the beach with others, especially in a new relationship -

My chest hair is probably a bit much for Sweden, my stomach is not its best, but my biceps look legitimately awesome in my jet black, Mountain Dew T-shirt, with cut-off sleeves, so I'm feeling pretty good about my overall situation.

We get to the beach, and it's not terribly different from the beaches out in The Hamptons, with a really long shoreline, and sand that extends out quite far perpendicular to the shore.

The main difference is the presence of a significant boardwalk, and though there are great restaurants in the Hamptons, the quality of food in Sweden is world class, in my opinion on par with France and Italy, this beach being no exception, with excellent representation from basically every genre imaginable, as if they had transplanted Williamsburg, Brooklyn, and laid it upon a beach.

We pick out a spot fairly close to the water, since the tide is calm -

I lay down an oversized, rough khaki sheet, with an elaborate, but thin, blue floral print, that I bought in a small shop in the North of India, placing our towels down upon it, spaced out a bit, since the relationship is new, and the fact that she's my colleague is always coloring our time together -

Two, white cotton, hotel-style beach towels, that we've taken from the house.

I reach further into the plaid interior of my Herschel bag, removing a set of small, Bluetooth speakers, that nonetheless have excellent, balanced low end sound, sunglasses for both of us, and before the spread is complete, I turn the speakers on, which makes a low frequency popping sound that shakes the unit in my hand, then pulling out my phone, ultimately kicking off a playlist that I've curated specifically for this occasion, that begins with, "Feed me Diamonds", by MNDR (RAC Remix), and as the song begins, I place the speakers in the top center of the blanket, equidistant from each towel, with the full display being crafted to convey my shamelessly pretentious tastes in absolutely everything imaginable, and that I really just want her to have a good time with me.

“I’m going to hit the loo, but I’ll be back in a minute.”, she says.

“Sounds good.”, I reply, as I tweak the spread a bit more in her absence.

I’m still wearing my artisanal tank top, because I feel a bit fat, and I’m quite anxious in her absence, though I’m convinced it doesn’t show through the shielding of the Mountain Dew logo across my chest.

About five minutes in, I see her starting to walk back towards me, and while still walking, with the confidence of a concrete beam, she begins to take off her already somewhat see-through, white cotton sundress, and I can see her fit, but nonetheless plum body come into view, like I’m watching a beer commercial, and I realize that she is bonkers hot -

I am so proud of myself at the moment, that I forget about my slight chubbiness, concluding that I must look pretty good to have pulled this off, but nonetheless keep the top on for a minute.

I take off my leather Brooks Brothers sandals, that have little palm trees on the straps, gesture for her to give me her Havaianas, that have a decorative bow across the top, which I complement, and with that and my backpack, three of the four blanket corners are now secured, holding down the fourth with her rather sizable beach bag, made of a finely woven, decorative straw, with a thin yellow print that matches notes from the bows on her sandals, the contents of which are a total mystery to me, given that I’m nearly certain that I’ve carried all objects of any utility.

I reach again into the backpack, this time revealing a Nalgene bottle, with a thick, grey, rubberized top, filled with a cocktail that I’ve made for both of us, consisting of Hendrix gin, fresh grapefruit juice, some mint, sparkling water, and a splash of limonata soda.

She’s selected the towel closest to where I’m standing, sits down, and while organizing herself, she grabs the back of my left calf, looking off into the water, as I shake the bottle aggressively to circulate the ice, and even out the temperature, pouring it into the classic red solo cup that I’ve brought, with two cups stacked, one into the next, completing my updated American cliché.

I lift the top cup out with my finger tips, which is fizzing a bit due to the sparkling water and limonata, but at no risk of spilling, and hand it to her -

I kneel, and again, reach down into my backpack, withdrawing a small ziplock bag containing torn mint, that I then use to dress her cocktail as she holds it, and I can see that she enjoys the spread, as, “Eddie”, the Oliver Nelson Remix, begins to play.

. . .

About thirty minutes have passed since we sat down, and while sitting up a bit, resting on my elbows, I look at the water ahead, and as she's laying on her back, I can see that her eyes are closed through one of my many cheap pairs of wayfarers, this time featuring a glossy black frame, with the name of some shitty bar in Nantucket emblazoned on both temples, close to the lenses, at an angle, the text pale blue in color, fit for a frozen margarita cup, complete, with an italicized font, ultimately displaying the name, "The Chicken Box" -

A masterpiece.

I notice her sandy foot in my view, with her left knee raised, and her right foot perched atop, not annoyed at all, that some portion of sea has been obscured by her frame, as, "Dreams", by The Cranberries starts playing -

I really like her, so this is good -

Completing the scene of the day at the beach, with the lovely girlfriend, beautiful weather, music I love, playing with a magnificent clarity, just waiting for a vodka slogan to appear in the sky, blasting out from the exhaust of American fighter jets scrambling above, confirming my impulses for empire, of which I am clearly an ambassador.

Then I notice her toenail is exactly the same shape as mine -

"Look at your foot.", I say excitedly, quite loud.

She holds up her right foot into the air, pointing her toes forward, staring at them for a moment, with her gorgeous leg fully extended, like a flying gazelle, then taking off her sunglasses, extending her arm, her palm up, blocking the Sun with her right hand, perhaps expecting to find a bug, she wiggles her toes, sand falling off a bit, and looks at me, smiling.

"Now look at my foot."

I lift my right foot to the side of her's, in roughly the same position, but with a bit of distance, held perfectly still, for comparison.

She leans in to observe, and then says,

"OK, that is a bit weird."

There's some discussion about the frequency of this in nature, and apparently, she hides the ball a bit, perhaps embarrassed, as I insist on seeing pictures of her family, convinced that I'll find a doppelgänger:

I instead find out that her mother looks exactly like her, just older, which only adds to my concerns, and as I stare at her, now instead worried that we're all slightly permuted versions of the same person, producing deliberately

engineered, scientifically calibrated incest -

Some kind of secret project to produce hot, bright, belligerent people, scattered about the surface of the Earth.

She confesses that her mother does not have the foot in question, but that her father does, leading to one of those discussions that overly educated people have, that sound convincing, referencing articles from *The Economist*, but are nonetheless unscientific gibberish, ultimately leading us to the conclusion that this type of foot is likely carried by the y-chromosome.

As we both nod in agreement, with confidence, but modest professional apprehension in our conclusion, she puts her sunglasses back on, and takes a sip from her cocktail, again wiggling her toes, staring at them, then smiling at me.

This is what happens when you pay people too much money.

. . .

I'm still bothered by this, so I decide to lean in and give her a kiss, as she's resting on her elbows, staring into the sea, she turns towards me -

As I gently remove her sunglasses afterwards, I can see that she's freckled a bit near her eyes, which I stare into both romantically, and clinically, to find that they are nearly identical to mine in color.

I run my fingers through the right side of her wet hair, doubling back to remove some sand, to deflect from the intrusions that I've imposed upon her, then leaning back to examine her frame, I realize that she has a smaller version of my unusually broad shoulders, built like a capital, "T", and I'm left feeling a bit gay, dating someone that intersects substantially with my own physical appearance.

She sees where I'm looking, and laughing a bit, she notices the same things in me -

"Howdy!", she says, feigning the accent of an American bumpkin, looking directly into my eyes, shaking the same foot -

I impulsively grab her, kissing her quickly, then roll over her, without putting much pressure on her body.

When to her right, I scoop her up, snaking my left arm under her back, ultimately pulling her onto my body.

Her face now directly above mine, I can smell the ocean on her lips, and as the wind blows, her wet hair flails, as we stare at each other with some seriousness -

I place my right palm on the side of her face, my thumb gently resting near her eye, laying with my back in the sand -

She sneaks away, inching her wet body down a bit, and falls asleep on my chest. †

Acceleration

You both decide to cook dinner at home after the beach, and drive into town to pick up groceries.

As you're driving, you reach down to your phone, and put on, "Across the Universe", as arranged by Fiona Apple, and after listening to the words for a bit, she says,

"Are you trying to tell me something?"

You reply, smiling, but without looking at her,

"That was pretty good.", continuing to stare at the road ahead.

She's a bit disappointed in your response to her joke, and you seem overly serious:

Looking at you, she now sees the person that she works with, with the strange addition of a ballad playing -

Nonetheless, she's annoyed that you didn't fully appreciate her joke.

After the song ends, you grab your phone again, and play, "Dig", by Incubus:

She looks at you again, this time a bit suspicious, as her ex-boyfriend would always play that song while driving.

Now tan, built well, she can see your profile with an animal gaze into the road ahead -

She can see the lens above your pupil illuminated as the Sun starts to set a bit behind the forest to the left, and as she looks from the top of your eye down to the bottom, she sees the lit up surface of the lens lift forward away from your eye, in the shape of a parabola.

You look like a machine:

An exaggerated representation of the person that she sees at work.

Then she continues to look down, seeing the tattered cloth around the shoulders of your shirt, and sees that you deliberately started with an already totally stupid thing, and consciously pushed it completely over the edge, by cutting off the sleeves -

She imagines the psychology at the moment of purchase, as you spotted it, at some horrible store, imagining you carefully selecting the right size, after an unreasonably hard day at work, and your sincere, quiet enjoyment upon finding,

“the right one.”

She realizes that your ridiculousness could be something that you do automatically to distract from the fact that you’re simply not normal, sizing you down a bit.

Before the downbeat of the chorus, you take her hand and say,

“I think you should hold onto something.”, and then roll up all of the windows.

Exactly on the downbeat, you lean into the gas pedal, staring into the visibly empty highway ahead, with the acceleration steady, but increasingly noticeable:

The Sun receding further behind the forest that bounds the outer lanes of the highway, with shadows rapidly painting the interior of the car, she hears the engine roar, and she feels the entire frame of the car start to vibrate -

Breaking her introspection, again, as if you knew something that you couldn’t have known without looking first.

You look over to her, and because she’s smiling so much, you again lean into the gas, this time out of synch with the music, the same pattern repeating, only out of synch, creating some apprehension of a third -

The entire car at this point rocking from the combustion of the engine, she sees even the dials in the dashboard moving at unfamiliar speeds, producing noises inside the cabin, with the wind pounding against the windshield.

She sees the melted ice in her drink churning in the cupholder, occasionally spilling, but she is nonetheless not afraid at all, other than by the realization that she trusts you, perhaps too much -

You take her hand and squeeze it, as she finds additional comfort in your denim shorts, and bare feet below, seeing a simply ridiculous man, that seems to really love her -

Like a proper hillbilly that’s stolen a rich man’s identity, seeing your hairy legs covered in goosebumps, concluding that you are obviously sharing in her excitement.

You look at her just long enough to make sure that she’s alright, with her smiling back, terribly excited, neither of you saying anything at all, with everything now appearing overexposed from the low angle of the Sun, as she sees only the outlines of an abstraction in you, in which she has quite plainly entrusted her personal safety -

You squeeze her hand again, she finds relief, and you turn back to the road,

putting both your hands on the wheel, continuing at what is now an absurd velocity.

She focuses on the music, as the lyrics set into the context, she realizes that all of this says something that you couldn't possibly otherwise articulate:

That you see nothing else in this world when she is with you -

That there are only two of you, with no obstacles, as your mind accelerates, with no inhibitions, other than her wellbeing, like a car roaring down an open road.

"Ida ... ", staring forward.

"Yes ... ", she replies, as if asking a question.

"Ida I love you." †

Who are you?

We show up to the market, disturbingly professional in our shopping:

You point at a parking spot, which I barrel into, in one continuous motion.

We both get out of the car like *The Matrix*, and walk through the automatic doors to the market like we might rob the place, quickly agreeing on exactly what we want for dinner, and the consequent ingredients, being politely aggressive to everyone around us, managing the situation like we're closing a deal as quickly as possible, so as to avoid imposing undue costs on an important client.

Mundane considerations, such as which one of the many indifferentiable brands of Swedish produce that we should purchase get ruthlessly processed by two towering automatons, their confidence alarming ordinary shoppers, as we point at things, mercilessly throwing them into our cart, inspiring others, immaculately executing upon a menu that we conceive of on the spot, looking more like a pair of football players than shoppers.

Only the classics are ultimately permitted:

Gravlax, pickled herring, toast Skagen, Jansson's temptation -

Boom, done.

We pass the beer isle, and I grab an armful, stacked full of six-packs, of Mikkeller beers, because I like them.

The checkout becomes reduced to a nothing, as I load items from the cart onto the belt, and you organize them on the belt, the consummate team, with your credit card already out, immediately ready for payment once all items have been loaded, both of us watching the prices, for any sales that may have been missed.

I drive us home, not as fast as the way in, but fast, with no music playing, barely talking:

We're going to make love before cooking dinner, and it's going to be extreme, because car -

Baby powder.

We are both plainly in love with each other at this point, which is now no longer a secret of any order -

We are desperate people.

We get back to the house, leaving the groceries in the car, because something

far more important might expire, and so we bolt the moment I open the front door to the house, with my keys already out the moment we exit the car -

Running through the interior of the house, we know the common area we both have in mind, which we agree upon by looking at each other as we're running.

As we're running, I pull up, "Maps", by The Yeah Yeah Yeahs, on my phone, and hit the play button, carrying my phone until I see the large couch in the center of the common area that I know we both have in mind -

I toss my phone into the right corner of the couch, just as the song is just getting started, and dive into the left corner, twisting my body around mid-flight, so I can finally, really see you, separating the section that I've landed on a bit due to the concussive force of my impact.

You follow shortly after, jumping in as well, landing to the right of me, with your beautiful legs on top of me, smiling, pushing the couch back as well upon landing, both of us moving, and I turn into you, grabbing the back of your head, under your hair, with every last bit of psychological well-being that I have left in me.

The house's Bluetooth speakers pick up the signal from my phone, causing the song to circulate, positively blasting, with happenstance adding ever more to our favor, as the evening sunlight cuts through the entire room, into your eyes above me, and suddenly, you appear to me, your face inches away from mine, with the blue echoes of the house lights bouncing around behind you, in straight horizontal lines above and beside your head.

Substantial time passes, and we don't bother to take each other's clothes off:

Our hands and arms snaked around each other's backs, heads, and bottoms, grasping for the silhouettes that we saw earlier burned by the Sun into the middle of the air, now occasionally uttering nonsense, but none of it works.

Ultimately naked on a stranger's couch, lost in an environment that would almost certainly not protect what we've found, we plum what time allows -

Lurid desires haplessly recreating the indelible realities we experienced hurtling along the surface of the Earth, at velocities our Creator might eventually frown upon, in a tiny, fragile, little thing, holding our futures in an eggshell, settling for what we have:

Far more than anything we've ever expected. †

Sketches of the Inchoate

Musical references

Note that song titles are hyperlinks

1. César Franck, “The Violin Sonata in A-Major, Mov. 2.” (1886).
2. Hooverphonic, “Renaissance Affair” (1998).
3. Marisa Monte, “O Bonde do Dom” (2006).
4. Franz Liszt, “Liebesträume” (1850).
5. Johannes Brahms, “Six Pieces for Piano, No. 2.” (1893).
6. Erik Satie, “Je te veux” (1897).
7. Mikhail Glinka, “The Lark” (1840).
8. Maurice Ravel, “String Quartet in F-Major” (1903).
9. John Coltrane, “Blue Train” (1958).
10. Ray Noble, “Cherokee” (1938).
11. Jimmy Van Heusen, “Polka Dots and Moonbeams” (1940).
12. Miles Davis, “So What” (1959).
13. John “Dizzy” Gillespie, “Salt Peanuts” (1942).
14. Dorothy Jeanne Thompson, “Essence of Sapphire” (1965).
15. Alexander Scriabin, “Etude in C-Sharp-Minor” (1887).
16. Lukasz Sebastian Gottwald, “Till the World Ends” (2012).
17. Richard Rodgers, arr. by John Coltrane, “My Favorite Things” (1961).
18. Charles Davi, “Jane - Dada Art Edition” (2020).
19. Marisa Monte, “Para Mais Ninguém” (2006).
20. Hans Adolph Brorson, “Mitt hjerte alltid vanker” (1731).
21. MNDR, “Feed me Diamonds (RAC Remix)” (2012).
22. Everywhere, “Eddie (Oliver Nelson Remix)” (2013).

23. The Cranberries, “Dreams” (1993).
24. The Beatles, arr. by Fiona Apple, “Across the Universe” (1998).
25. Incubus, “Dig” (2006).
26. The Yeah Yeah Yeahs, “Maps” (2003). †

Sketches of the Inchoate

Jane

The outline of your face,
The vague scent of your skin,
Awakens something buried deep in my mind.

It only takes one glimpse,
And the thoughts come rushing in -
Memories of life lost,
Within my mind.

I understand,
What Love is now,
Because of you.

I understand,
What Love is now,
Because of you.

The iris of your eye,
Like a harpoon in my skin,
Cuts through every bit of hate in my heart.

Blood-let, soft with Love,
Broken and done in,
Knotted up in every inch of my guts.

I understand,

What Love is now,
Because of you.

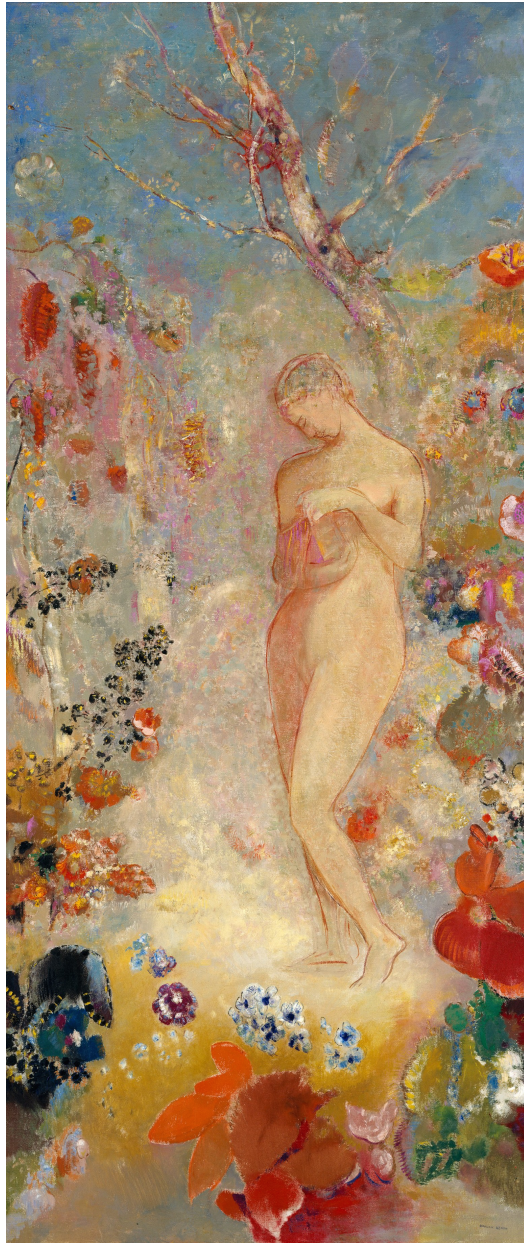
I understand,
What Love is now,
Because of you. †

Sketches of the Inchoate

For Anna, in Denmark.

Sketches of the Inchoate

Information and Belief



By Charles Davi

Sketches of the Inchoate

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The office

Today I'm working on thermodynamics -

Specifically, the first question I considered at the intersection of information theory and physics, about six years ago:

How much information do you need to describe a thing?

One conclusion that I reached, about six years ago, is that light must be the simplest substance we're aware of, in terms of how much information it takes to describe its behavior -

Just point a lit flashlight at a wall.

How would you describe what the light did to get there?

You'd merely have to point in the direction that it traveled, since the speed of light is constant.

So if you want to describe what light does, all you have to know is the direction that it's going, and then you know everything you need to know to about its motion.

Now compare that to throwing a plate of spaghetti at a wall -

If you want to account for the movement of the noodles, you'll need a lot of detail, since they'll all do different things, possibly moving at different speeds, in different directions, at different times.

There is of course more to my work than just a flashlight and some noodles, with the commercial goal to describe complex systems using simple code -

If you can do that, then you can predict how a system will behave on a cheap computer, which has applications that range from farming, to defense.

And I've done exactly this, today, so now I'm headed home.

I pack up for the day -

I open up a new pack of printer paper, that I use to keep my notes, writing down an outline of my work.

Once I'm done, I wipe the dry-erase board clear, using the eraser, doubling back with a wet cloth.

Then I punch three-ring binder holes in my notes, add them to a binder that's been accumulating, for about a month, I'll eventually have picked up,

scanned, and placed into storage, and uploaded to a system I can search, later on, if I need to.

I'm working for a private U.S. aeronautics firm, getting paid to do this type of research in A.I., having left my old job about a year ago.

Ida simply switched her office, working out of Copenhagen, which was fine with her, since she has a lot of friends in the city, and in Malmö.

I told her I'd be making more than I was before, with a year's worth of severance, if the new job doesn't work out, so she was fine overall with the move.

What I didn't mention is that I sold some rights in my core algorithms, which allow almost every problem in machine learning to be solved quickly on extremely cheap computers -

They can turn a \$150 tablet, into a supercharged 10-year old, that can read, and recognize objects, but also track the path of about a dozen rockets, and predict 10,000 steps in the future, in an instant.³

I hid this not to lie to her, or protect my wealth, since it's probably not protected by local law, in any case -

I did it so we keep things steady, so the move would be simpler, and this news would soon surprise her on the upside.

I told her the truth about the matter she was most concerned with, which is my salary, leaving the additional good news for another day. †

³C. Davi, "A New Model of Artificial Intelligence", available here.

The open house

Walking around Copenhagen, we often visit open houses, with old brownstones being our favorite.

We came upon an old brownstone on a quiet block, with a bright blue door, draped in vines, potted flowers hanging outside the windows, and a pale brick exterior.

We saw the sign for an open house, and decided to have a look inside.

There were a bunch of people floating around, with the broker near the door, standing near a tiny fold-up desk, with a bunch of business cards on top -

She was polite, but assertive, shaking both our hands, Ida's hand first, handing each of us a business card.

The house is very old, with wide-planked, weathered, hardwood floors, an old wooden staircase, terminating at an exposed landing, with a wrap-around, wooden banister.

The house was completely empty, and so the tenants must have moved already, which suggests they're either too rich to care about the cost of the house, or getting desperate for a closing.

In either case, they're clearly done with the place, suggesting that it can be taken.

Ida seems immediately taken as well, walking up the stairs, on her own, I can see her fingers brush the old, rough railing on the banister, as she stares up toward the landing, eventually disappearing, into one of the rooms at the top of the stairs.

I stay put, staring out, through the railroad layout of the first floor, out into the kitchen, then through the kitchen window, getting faint glimpses of the backyard, just beyond -

I can see the daylight, broken up by a moving tree, lightly swaying in the wind, casting moving light along the floors, walls, and ceilings of the house.

Ida comes back out, peeking in the bathroom at the top right of the landing, seeing me below, with a look I've never seen before -

A calm more than happy, serene in her slower motions, her hand again hovers down the railing, fingers lightly touching on its rough grain, beyond the light let in by the kitchen window, someone new opens up the front door, and Ida gets lit up, breaking through her newfound stoicism, leaving just a simple grin, looking at me with a subtle love, leaving me now sharing in her grace.

...

The next day I email the broker:

“Hi Anna -

I’m interested in the house, what are next steps?”

To which she replies, a few hours later -

“Hello Charles,

I’d like to set up a phone interview, to be sure it all makes sense, as we have an offer, near the asking price.

What day works best for you?”

To which I immediately reply,

“I’ll pay .03% over asking, cash.”

To which she quickly replies -

“Hi Charles,

That’s great, but we’ll need to run a background check first, and so I think we’ll still need to do a call, before we move ahead.”

And I fire back, copying my banker -

“Anna -

Please meet Espen, he can get you any info that you need.

Espen -

Please see below, and coordinate with Anna.

I’d like to get this closed as soon as possible, so please keep me posted on any issues that pop up.

Thanks,

Charles”

We close on the house, six weeks later. †

Another transponder

Driving over the Øresundsbron Bridge into Malmö, I play, “Hurricane”, by Mat Zo.

“This is a bit aggressive.” she says, to which I reply,

“Give it a minute.”

A large group of seagulls fly along the car, just beyond the bridge, with enormous clouds lining both sides of the horizon, beginning where the horizon meets the sea below, and up hundreds of feet into the air, though the sky above is perfectly clear -

I take a sip from my water bottle, and she gestures, asking to have a bit as well, so I pass it over to her.

I quickly look out my window, to see an airplane at cruising altitude, making its way above the giant wall of clouds, painting a clean horizontal line parallel to the horizon below, with a second plane at what seems to be another few hundred feet above the first, heading in the opposite direction, in roughly our direction of motion, and Ida asks,

“Why do you always look at airplanes?”, to which I reply,

“I don’t know how it got started, but one time I actually found legitimate mechanical insight from it, so now it’s become a habit.”

“You’re a proper freak.”, she says, with a somewhat awkward pause afterwards.

The song takes off about a minute later, and I can see she really likes it, as she squeezes my leg, saying,

“I’m sorry that I tease you for your strange behaviors -

I see they work for you, and so I don’t mind.”

“Thank you, your majesty.”, I reply, looking forward.

So she pinches my leg.

Now about four minutes into the song, we approach its climax, the kick repeating, leaving, alerting us to something new to come -

Synth pads bouncing, vocals panning, the bass line slowly rising, into higher registers, the bridge itself, rising from the road below, into a suspension structure, for the second time, with beams repeating, rapidly, as we barrel on, echoing

the sky on either side, I see her looking up to trace their path, then descending, like a landing, as I see her joy, in the animated structure of the world around us -

Our decisions, however meager, contribute to a moving portrait, that we share, together, as coauthors and spectators of an uncertain future, and a certain now.

She looks out the window as we leave the beams behind us, looking outward, singing to herself, this time content with my participation in her song.

She looks down at the windshield, seeing the small American flag stuck upon the glass, smiling at me, in my cliché, understanding my love for New York, and America as well -

That I could come from nowhere else, at least on this Earth. †

Estampes

On the drive back, I tell her that I have a few surprises -

She's a bit tired, leaning on my shoulder, and asks,

"Will they require much effort on my part?", and she quickly adds,

"Please tell me they don't involve that awful boat.", to which I reply,

"There are no boats at all involved, just a bit of walking, but not that far from our apartment.", to which she says,

"Fair enough, I'll oblige.", as she again rests her head on my shoulder.

...

I park the car in our usual spot, down the block from our apartment, and as she gets out, she says,

"So which way are we going?"

And I point, as the both of us head onward, now hand in hand, with Ida visibly a bit tired, episodically resting her head again against my body.

We get up to the house, and she says,

"I knew you did this -

I cannot believe you, Charles."

I take out the key, and open up the front door, having already set the dimmer the night before, together with a blanket, tealight candles, a bottle of cannonau, to remind us of Sardegna, with two, tall, wide glasses set on top.

There's another light, at the top of the landing, just above a painting that she didn't see at the openhouse, so she leans her head in, walking closer to the painting, getting closer to the base of the staircase, and upon recognizing Odilon Redon's, "Pandora", she exclaims,

"Now, I didn't think you did that -

You're a maniac, that must have cost a fortune."

"Yes.", I reply.

...

She starts to take off her shirt, as the warm chords of, "Estampes", by

Debussy begin to play, and so I do the same, laying my shirt on the blanket, just before me, under the old chandelier, with those thin, faux-candlestick lights, the crystals hanging under, partially illuminated, in the dim light that I've set it to, as I move over to lay my back atop my shirt, she moves to climb on top of me.

I can see the Redon at the top of the stairs, as we kiss, seeing Ida, somehow the subject of a painting, from a century ago, made by a man, I only somewhat jokingly think at times, is himself made to look a bit like Odin -

Having stolen Ida, just for me, from Heaven itself, paying with his life for his generosity.

She opens her eyes, knowing that I never close mine, and sees me staring up, knowing more or less now what I see, she slips down to lay atop my chest, the back of my head now against the floor, looking up into the chandelier above -

Motionless, just like us, glowing of a different sort, till the song is over, both of us knowing, we're to get up at the end, put our clothes back on, turn the lights off, and walk home, together, because it's finally just the two of us. †

Michael Bolton

Ida's in our kitchen eating breakfast, while using a shared computer, that's logged into my iTunes account, looking for something to listen to -

She notices that I've played the same Mø song, 56 times in the last month, and so she gives it a listen, with a bit of suspicion.

She hears the opening word:

"Baby".

Thinking, albeit briefly, perhaps I'm using the song, as some kind of sexual device, repetitiously, but she dismisses this, with confidence, as not only unlikely, but also uninteresting.

But then upon hearing the closing phrase of the opening line, "You hold me in your arms, like your red guitar", knowing I had a red guitar in college, she grows legitimately paranoid, looking up Mø online, as she eats an open-faced sandwich, on hearty, Danish bread, with cheese and sliced cucumbers, sipping her coffee -

Staring at images of Mø, scrolling, only to realize that Mø looks a lot like her, who looks a bit me as well, adding to her jealousy, which consciously, she knows makes no sense at all, but she nonetheless can't help but wonder, whether there's something there, since if it were true, I would likely never tell her, and so she broods on the idea, of the secret relationship, with the Danish celebrity, while she eats her breakfast, in the kitchen, ultimately deciding that simply asking me about it is the best, and most mature solution to the problem.

Continuing to listen, to strengthen her case, she he hears the line, "I want both of those hands on me", and gets legitimately jealous.

Then, "I don't have to sleep." -

And now she can't help herself, almost angry, at the thought of sleepless, relentless sex, between myself and Mø.

She survives to the end of the first chorus, which again closes with the word, "baby", seeming to add insult to injury, now convinced that it's at least not impossible that the song is in fact about an affair between me, and a Danish celebrity, Mø, and that I've orchestrated this confession, perhaps even writing the song with Mø, given the seemingly unending use of the word, "baby", that Mø is, "losing her mind", briefly even identifying with Mø, and of course, the, "red guitar", and Mø's appearance, which is very similar to Ida's, and bizarrely, somewhat similar to mine, noting my narcissism as an additional factor, contributing to the plausibility of this seemingly implausible theory.

She realizes, that suddenly, she's now forced to evaluate incredibly unlikely things, as at least possible, and she struggles with their probabilities -

What was previously totally disregarded, must now at least be considered, leading her in this case to experience jealousy in proportion to the actual occurrence of an event, despite knowing its probability is minuscule, even given these compelling factors.

So she walks into the living room, as I'm sitting on a couch, reading the Financial Times, and she asks -

"Do you know Mø, personally?"

I pause, put the paper down, and look up at her, for a moment, sizing up the situation, and once I realize what she's getting at, I start laughing -

"Did you sleep with Michael Bolton?", I ask.

She starts laughing, "I hate you, you watch, I'm going to find out", to which I say,

"Is that a yes on the Bolton thing?"

She walks back toward the kitchen, turns around to give me the finger, while still walking away, smiling, and once back in the kitchen, puts the song on, again, this time, extremely loud, now singing along -

"Oh, oh oh, **baby** -

You hold me in your arms like your **red guitar**.", with great emphasis on the words, "baby", and, "red guitar", dancing in the kitchen, as if she's holding a microphone, singing into a sponge.

"Wow, you're a loser." †

The awful boat

Its condition suggests a negative price, but I nonetheless offer a modest, positive sum of money, about 5% less than asking, insisting on discount only because it is truly awful, and will require hours worth of cleaning.

The man claiming title to the boat arrives shirtless, to a swamp, on the outskirts of Nyholm, Denmark.

Ida is visibly uncomfortable, with everything, looking in disgust at the measly boat, covered in some kind of green, living moss, that has also occupied the already rustic seats, made of simple wooden slats.

The man climbs into the boat, and after leaning in towards the engine, he inserts the key, turns the engine on, as a demonstration, apprehensive, presumably because the engine is ultimately disastrously loud, producing a lawnmower-type noise, totally incommensurate with the power of the small engine.

He looks up at me, as I stand on the dock, eyeing the frame of the boat, and he's clearly concerned this will be a dealbreaker, prompting me to stand up straight, and exclaim,

“Excellent, I’ll take it.”

He smiles, first at me, then at Ida, visibly missing a few of his teeth, his tattoos faded, and somewhat reflective in the warm Sun.

I lean into the boat to shake his hand, as he reaches up to the dock, now the both of us excited, I take out the stated sum of money, he hands me the key to the engine, and gives me a captain’s salute, quickly jumping out of the boat.

Ida and I both get into the boat -

I sit in the back, near the engine, as she stands, politely refusing to sit without saying, so as not to offend the man, as the man waves us both off, clearly happy with the trade.

“You paid too much.”, she says.

...

Ida is incredibly embarrassed of the boat, still standing, as we take it through the rather scenic, crowded areas along the river, near the Opera House, back toward the dock I’ve already rented, assuming I would get a boat sometime soon, having discussed the matter with Ida -

This is not the boat she had in mind.

...

It's a small piece of plastic that's obstructing a belt inside the engine, doing visible damage to the belt, and making a preposterous noise as well -

The plastic in question is attached to the shell of the engine, twisted off a bit, but because it's attached only to the shell, I wager I can simply clip it with a pair of pliers, which I do, to no immediate consequence, other than solving for the noise.

Then I clean the boat, which begins with sanding the entire wooden frame, with a manual, hand-sander, which takes me hours.

The moss is disgusting, and requires the additional use of a spackle, before sanding, to scrape the slimy nonsense off the surface of the boat.

This leaves the boat filled with dust and dead moss, but I can see that a garden hose and rag will do the trick at this point, so I take a break, have a beer I've placed in a freezer, in a communal shed, attached to the dock, which clearly deserves a better boat -

Newly constructed, with a grey wood base, a wide walkway, and generous spacing in between boats, with tall, modern, aluminum lights, fit for a public park, lining the dock, ultimately suited for a much larger boat, surrounded by fairly expensive sailboats and powerboats.

I stare out into the harbor, with my legs hanging off the dock, remembering a morning after Syttende Mai, years ago, as a single guy, getting kicked out of a woman's apartment, first thing in the morning, having only my tuxedo to wear, spending about an hour watching the sunrise in the port of Oslo, with my legs dangling off the pier, near the Nobel Center, just like now, as if I were staring into today -

Context is everything.

...

After hosing down the boat, I consider doing research on some coating for the wood, which looks a bit raw, but I risk a single trip, just to celebrate with Ida:

The finish ends up a roughly uniform grey, not quite matching with the color of the dock, with noticeable green spots, from the moss, that are simply in the wood itself -

I dress it up, buying two white cushions that I tie to the wooden slats, making proper seats, but the bottom line is, it's a piece of a shit, but now it's

clean, and not noisy at all, ultimately docked in an incredibly beautiful city, so it all works.

..

Ida sees the boat, and is legitimately impressed, and as I stand near the back of the boat, as she's still on the dock, I turn the engine on, with the gestures of a magician, and she nods like some maiden being courted, noting the improvements -

I take her hand, as she climbs off the dock, entering the boat, and sits in the front seat, looking around for a moment, signaling an overall, cautious approval.

We take the boat up toward Fisketorvet, deciding to cook dinner at our apartment, and use the trip as an excuse to shop somewhere different.

She sees the Bluetooth speakers in the center of the boat, facing up, and connects to them, playing, "Not Going Anywhere", by Keren Ann, and we ride off, smiling and waving at people as we pass them by. †

I'm from New Jersey

Everyone other than Ida and I end up going out to some club I've never heard of, pretty far outside the city center, including Jeff.

They all walk into the club, and it is from Jeff's perspective no different from any other club he's been to before, save for the company he's with, and the people at the club, most of whom are Danish -

The music is loud, generally background house music, of the type they play at Le Bain, that seems an unending medley of indifferentiable baselines, all with a steady beat, the music changing so gradually, you never notice the changes at all, absent conscious effort.

Jeff is not a fan, but he understands the utility of this type of music, in an environment where you need to fill the void, creating demand for a type of primal communication, of which he is a master.

He gets to know everyone well enough beforehand, so there's only incremental schmoozing left to obtain the arguably unwanted status of the center of attention, which is something he can't do without, due to his physical stature, and imposing personality.

So he it makes it happen -

He identifies the most likely point of friction, Ron, the petite gay man, who appreciates Jeff's intellectualism, after hours with him at our home beforehand, but is nonetheless naturally a bit distant from the large, lumbering, heterosexual male.

Jeff eventually charms Ron to the point that Ron is later seated atop Jeff's shoulders, bouncing Ron up and down to the beat of the music, as Ron sings along to a song he happens to know -

This catches the attention of a group of Danish girls, in their late twenties, seeing a petite man, in tight, high-legged shorts, perched atop the shoulders of a beast, with both men laughing hysterically, in earnest, at the presumed absurdity of the scene.

One of the girls makes eye contact with Ron, who waves them over, and seeing a sizable table filled with free drinks, before a couch fit for dancing, they're now completely sold on the matter -

Ron taps Jeff on the chest, like some kind of giant horse-man, who gently places him back on the dance floor, both giving each other a giant hug afterwards, while still laughing.

The girls approach, and Ron offers them drinks, as does Jeff, one of the girls immediately firing off at Jeff in Danish, which is not surprising, given his appearance, which borders on the cliché Nordic man:

Tall, fit, with blonde hair, fair skin, albeit a multiple up in scale.

Jeff replies to her in English,

“I’m from New Jersey.”, causing her to laugh, already softened up a bit from the scene before involving Ron.

She says, somewhat loud, leaning in so he can hear, with the music blasting, as he’s now standing behind the table, with her before it,

“What’s your name?”

“Jeff, how about you?”, he says, to which she replies,

“Pernilla”,

He repeats,

“Pernilla?”

And she says,

“Yes, you’ve got it right.”, to which he says,

“Just making sure -

So what do you want?

We’ve got vodka, Hendrix, and some champagne too, which you’re welcome to, but we don’t have a lot.”

“I’ll have champagne, if that’s OK.”

So he pours a glass, and she laughs a bit, as he lifts an already thin champagne flute, which now looks comically tiny in the full context of his massive frame -

As he carefully pours the champagne, she can see that he is oddly delicate, succeeding without any spillage, then recalling the way he placed Ron back onto the dance floor, immediately puzzled by an apparently complex person from New Jersey. †

Physical graffiti

There's only one late-night food option outside of the club, which is basically a grocery store, that stays open late only because of the club, giving them a brand new source of income.

Jeff walks in with Pernilla, both of them completely obliterated, after several hours of heavy drinking -

Jeff now confronted with an ocean of foreign labels, written in what appears to be heavily vandalized English, he spots a wooden cubby filled with bananas, a familiar food, and so he moves upon his prey, grabbing a bunch, still attached at the stem, roughly a dozen in number, and marches to the counter, simply pointing at the bananas with his credit card, while looking at the clerk, who nods, prompting Jeff to simply hand the clerk his credit card. †

Don't get too excited

Jeff and Pernilla get out of a cab, both hysterically laughing at nothing.

Jeff then opens the door to the house, prompting Pernilla to exclaim,

“Fyfan, who is your friend?”,

Upon seeing the landing of the staircase, unclear if she recognizes the painting, but in any case, with the sense, this is not a normal set up.

“Don’t get too excited”, he replies, pulling up the chain that then lifts a trap door in the floor, exposing the staircase to the studio below, in the basement.

She looks at him, grinning,

“This is mental.” †

Eurovision

Jeff is sleeping on the couch in the basement studio lounge, unfolded into a bed, together with Pernilla -

He wakes up first, to total darkness, since the studio has no windows, and no incoming light, but for the two staircases, which Jeff has left concealed.

He desperately needs to vomit, and knowing there's a bathroom, he grabs his phone to use it as a light, but it's not enough to navigate -

Spotting a light switch, he accidentally turns on a bright neon light that says, "This is not a door", hanging above what is plainly a door, now glowing bright red in his face, somehow adding to his nausea, annoying him, though he leaves it lit.

He then spots what looks like another light switch, which apparently does nothing, which he angrily flips up and down, but it is instead the volume fader for a set of headphones mounted on the wall of the studio lounge.

Finally, he spots the remote for the TV, which he wagers should provide enough lighting, when on.

Confused, and desperately hungover, still otherwise in the dark, he turns on the television, sincerely hoping for some kind of brightly-lit programming that will end his drunken woes:

It's a best-of Eurovision show, glaring at an unreasonably loud volume, which Jeff fears he has no time to adjust, featuring a male singer, wearing what is in essence a figure skater's outfit, throwing his body about a preposterous stage, with cheesy pyrotechnics, audibly exploding, basically shouting into a microphone, in what strikes Jeff as most likely to be German, as he briefly stares in disbelief at the TV, thinking for a moment this could be a telethon for mentally ill people, having seen some phone numbers flash, that are instead intended for voting -

Hearing positively awful, saxophone-heavy music, as the singer parades about the stage in spandex, with innumerable flairs, flying about, positioned inopportunistically along the singer's lanky, and highly visible frame, with a deep-cut tank, snug around the crotch, exposing copious chest hair, all of this ultimately expressed in a totally alien language.

Jeff, now able to see somewhat, quickly spots and grabs an ice bucket from the table below the TV, and vomits -

Pernilla bursts into laughter, then hiding herself under the blanket. †

The studio

Emilie

We're seated in the control room of the studio, that I've had built into the basement of our house, which spans the entire length of the house underground, giving me plenty of room to work with.

I've put on a song by Emilie Nicolas, "Sky", to demo the space, and the clarity possible in the studio's control room.

I've already set the volume to a level that is very loud, but not uncomfortable, to show that the control room allows music to be listened to at high volumes, certainly without any distortion, certainly without any rattling whatsoever, and moreover, no perceptible changes to the frequency distribution of the sounds.

As the opening percussive bells strike, Jeff says,

"The panning is so pronounced in an environment like this -

I forgot what it's like to listen to music in a studio:

It's just not the same.

I can hear every detail of the recording, it completely unfolds."

He looks over to see the woofers of the NS-10 speakers above the console visibly oscillating to the strike of the bass drum at the drop of the chorus, reverberating after, pumping a fluid, creating the impression that something is alive, as Jeff thinks he hears Emilie say the word, "animal".

The second chorus comes in, confident again he hears Emilie say the word, "animal", as he feels a wave of chills wash over his skin, terribly excited by this tiny Norwegian woman, now in a location unknown to him, her mind nonetheless animated, in the room, with him, filling the air around him and in him, like a ghost.

No need for speculation

There's something about the outside world you want to remember later on -

How do you make that happen?

Your actual human memory can handle only so much, so you need something in the outside world to store it, which means you need a system that lets you represent the thing in question.

Language is probably the first generalized method human beings developed for doing exactly that.

Musicians developed their own language, to represent music, filled with the familiar dots and lines, and Italian annotations.

But both words and notes represent ideas.

What we're looking for instead is something more concrete:

A representation of an actual thing in the outside world.

For example, a portrait lets you represent an image, and perhaps to better remember it, though perhaps it could instead eventually replace the actual memory.

A photograph notches up the quality of representation, since the process eliminates the role of a human interpreter of facts, and is instead automatically driven by machine -

This assures an accurate accounting of whatever's there, though it could still of course be incomplete.

So as we transition from human language to photograph, we slip from idea and into physical reality, where your mental associations are no longer necessary to the core message of the representation.

The process that generates the representation also slips from the subjective, and into the mechanically objective -

Two people will probably use different words to describe the same thing, but they have almost no control over what happens inside a camera, once the conditions of the photo are fixed, making the representation deterministic after that point.

Now imagine looking at sheet music -

If you can't read it, then you're looking at a nonsense thing, and so your

mental associations matter.

Now instead listen to a song you've stored on your phone -

It doesn't matter what you think, at least in terms of listening, since the sound is physically real, compressing the air around you, directly triggering your senses.

In the latter case, your associations are important to a tertiary message, which is the meaning of the song, that you can't understand unless you feel, and in some cases, unless you analyze its structure.

When you see a note, you have to imagine what it sounds like.

When you hear a note, you don't have to do a thing.

What modern media did generally was to create a new, generalized method for representing the outside world -

You can take a picture, or record a sound, perhaps record the temperature, all allowing the conditions at the time to be recorded and recalled.

Digital technology took this idea right into the extreme, allowing absolutely anything to be represented in a single universal language -

Binary code.

This turned the giant tape machine I laboriously cleaned and loaded reels onto as a college student, into a program you can now buy for a few hundred bucks, allowing the type of signal processing that just a few decades ago required millions of dollars worth of equipment to be done on a laptop.

This is a longwinded way of saying that our studio is much more elaborate than it needs to be, both in size and in scope, and is instead a piece of memory, recreated -

A representation of my past, so that I can remember who I am, and where I come from;

It's roughly two thousand square feet of New York City, buried in a basement, in Copenhagen -

The ghost is the real thing.

The control room

A quality recording will accurately represent the sounds it is intended to record.

A quality playback device will accurately unpack a representation of a sound.

A quality set of speakers will accurately amplify the signal generated by a playback device.

A quality control room won't change the sounds coming out of the speakers, due to reflections and absorptions in the room.

And so the recording process begins with a sound, slips into representation, and then ends again with a sound.

The control room is where you listen to the sound of your recording, and change it to suit your imagination, or a client, if you're me in college -

But now I have no clients, and no one else to please, other than my Ida, and my imagination, and so everything I do reflects this.

The live room

Through the sliding glass doors behind the console, is the live room, where you record live instruments, and vocals -

Rectangular, wider than deep, and wider than the control room -

The control room has additional insulation and wiring in the walls, and a deliberate structure shaped to create an acoustically neutral environment, that doesn't change the sounds emitted by the speakers.

What you hear in the control room is as close as you can get to the undisturbed ghost that made the recording.

The live room is instead acoustically dead, so the moment you make a noise, the sound terminates, once it hits a surface in the live room, with no noticeable echo, creating a very strange environment, even for conversation, since your voice doesn't carry at all.

This is achieved by padding the walls and the ceilings, with absorbent foams and fabrics, and covering the entire floor of the room with a thick, Persian-style rug that is specifically designed for the purpose of absorbing sound, but nonetheless gives the visual impression of an otherwise ordinary patterned rug, with an overall reddish hue, and white fringes.

The ceilings are lower in the control room, to model the original studio I grew up in, about 9 feet high, but the live room has towering, 20 foot ceilings.

The second stairwell down into the studio enters the live room, at the back left of the room -

It was built to accommodate the movement of equipment, and large instruments, and so it's more than double the width of a normal staircase, causing the trap door above in the kitchen floor to be incredibly heavy.

To make this more manageable, we had a gearbox mounted to the kitchen wall, adjacent to the trap door, with a crank that lifts the chain, which is attached to the trap door, which when closed, leaves the chain slacked, and flush into a cutout in the surface of the trap door, so we don't trip on the chain.

The live room is empty, save for three items:

A single bass drum set, with three tom drums;

A Hughes & Kettner amplifier;

A black Steinway grand piano.

All other incidentals, like XLR cables, microphones, and mic stands, are kept in a closet in the live room.

The piano is on the center right of the room, with the keyboard visible upon entry.

I also bought the portrait of Clara Schumann by Lenbach, which hangs on the wall to the right of the piano.

The drums are on the left, roughly opposite the piano, with the drummer's seat positioned just a few feet from the left wall.

The closet is a roughly double-wide, walk-in closet, built into the right wall of the live room, to the right of, and just behind the piano, opened by pulling on the right hand side of what appears to be another sound panel, that doubles as the door to the closet.

There's a large and heavy sleeping bag in the closet, that we use to drape the drums when recording piano, and drape the piano when recording drums;

There are also fresh, white, hotel-style towels on a rack -

If you're a real musician, you might sweat.

The original chandelier from the house is hanging from the center of the live room, having been replaced, with an assemblage made from twenty interleaving small gold metal chandeliers, each with bulbs atop gold metal branches, extending outward from a gold metal center, like a blasted atom, then assembled into a large collective whole, with the branches and bulbs interleaving within, shaped more or less exactly like its parts at its perimeter, with each component chandelier independently suspended, which I designed myself.

I understand that hanging a chandelier in a live room is a bad fact for acoustics, creating some reflections, maybe even sympathetic vibrations, but this is our home studio.

Moreover, even when pounding on the drum set, I've never heard a rattle, because the floors and walls of the room are so dead.

The only thing hitting the chandelier, as a practical matter, is the concussive force of the air from the cymbals moving, and the drum skins vibrating, which isn't enough to move the needle, and actually make an unwanted, audible noise.

There are panels of XLR inputs mounted into the walls of the live room, just above the floors, connected to the patch bay in the control room, which in turn allows for connection to the A/D converter, and the outboard compressors and effects modules -

This is how you take a sound picked up by a mic in the live room, and pump it to the control room, and ultimately record it.

Each panel of inputs is demarcated by a thin blue line above, which you can see from a distance.

Clara Schumann

Ida's playing Estampes, looking out the windows of the kitchen, as I sit at a small iron café table with a marble top, having coffee, reading the weekend edition of the FT, and I see her staring out the window, off into the yard, watching the tree in our yard move about the breeze, just like I did the day we found this place, but with both of us now closer to the window -

Small, leaded glass panels, in a fairly large, iron-frame, painted white, only slightly distorting visibility, and only upon conscious effort to observe the uneven surface of the glass.

She's in a white, floral-printed cotton dress, with small and sparse, but bright coloring, echoing the colors from our yard.

The walls of the kitchen are pale red brick, but with tiling above the sink and stove, which are just below the window, with an arabesque pattern, blue and pale yellow color.

"I bought the Clara Schumann painting that I showed you a few months ago.", I announce, which I suppose was rude to both of us, since we were otherwise both lost in introspection.

"Wasn't that in the Robert Schumann house?", she asks.

"Yes."

"How did you manage that?", she asks.

"I have nothing else to do.", to which she replies,

"You're a moron."

...

While I'm out with Ove, who's visiting us, Ida goes into the studio -

Descending the smaller staircase, into the studio lounge, through the control room door, with the absurdist signage, walking past the console, sliding the door open to the live room, looking up into the chandelier above, then standing, her hands on her hips, staring at the portrait of Clara on the wall, she tries to understand why I've done this -

Looking closely at Clara's eyes, she becomes reminded of me, without conscious effort, and so she understands, and I have no one to forgive.

Ida's gift for me

Ida spends months studying the Brahms Intermezzo Op. 118 No. 2, ultimately playing it for me on a Sunday afternoon, in our studio, as I sit not far from the piano, with the portrait of Clara not far from Ida.

I say afterwards,

“That’s the nicest thing anyone’s ever done for me.” †

Super loser

The fucking loser super that couldn't muscle the ambition to fix the wobbly railing up the stairs in the shit hole that I lived in when I was 12.

Fuck you -

I'm still making music. †

We are who they once were

I think some people are awful because it is a cheap way of being relevant -

I don't have that problem. †

The song of our house

Ida says,

“Charles wrote a new piece, dad.”

I read some of his papers online, and I don’t understand them, and he intimidates me as a result.

This never happens to me -

I literally rewrote Einstein.⁴

He works mostly in group theory, which two Norwegian mathematicians, Niels Henrik Abel, and Sophus Lie, contributed heavily to -

This annoys me, because I know it implies that he knows combinatorics, which is close to my area of math, but I don’t know group theory.

As a consequence, he can do things that I cannot, which again, annoys me, and makes me nervous around him.

“Have you had a chance to record it yet, Charles?”

“Yes, but not with live instruments, though the production is passable.”

“I’d certainly like to hear it, if you don’t mind playing it -

There’s an auxiliary cable attached to the hifi that you can plug your phone into, which is right over there.”, he says, pointing at a black eighth-inch cable, resting to right of what looks to be a tube amplifier.

I plug my phone in, pull the song up, and press play -

There’s a sizable delay that I’ve left into the recording, before it begins, giving me time to get back into my seat.

...

“That was fantastic Charles -

What is it called?”, he says, to which I reply,

“The Song of Our House.” †

⁴C. Davi, “A Computational Model of Time-Dilation”, available [here](#).

Sketches of the Inchoate

Musical references

Note that song titles are hyperlinks

1. Mat Zo, “Hurricane” (2013).
2. Claude Debussy, “Estampes” (1903).
3. Karen Marie Ørsted “Mø” Andersen, “Beautiful Wreck” (2018).
4. Keren Ann, “Not Going Anywhere” (2003).
5. Emilie Nicolas, “Sky” (2017).
6. Johannes Brahms, “Six Pieces for Piano, No. 2” (1893).
7. Charles Davi, “The Song of Our House” (2020). †

Sketches of the Inchoate

*Pandora*⁵

When you fall,
Out of sight,
I slip back in my mind.

And I see a long game to play -
The cruelest of loves,
That's been found and then displaced.

Though it's not a way to spend your days -
Tracing out memories of a broken vase.

No it's not a way to spend your days,
But it's a longwinded way of saying that,
That I Love you.
That I Love you.
That I Love you.
That I Love you.

When you fall,
Out of line,
Just slip back in your mind,
And you'll hear a song, singing plain -
Proof that Love has found a home in this place.

Though it's not a way to spend your days -

⁵The song, "Pandora", set to this poem, also written by me, is available here.

Rebuilding memories of a broken vase.

No, it's not a way to spend your days,

But if you want it,

Here's my way of saying that,

That I Love you.

That I Love you.

That I Love you.

That I Love you. †

Sketches of the Inchoate

For Anna, in Denmark.

Sketches of the Inchoate

Black Tree



By Charles Davi

Sketches of the Inchoate

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Permutations over time

Our world can at times be a house on fire -

It is not a place you can stay for too long.

Even order itself can be corrupted, permuting expectations -

The realization of your desires, out of order, piled into a broken thing. †

Dressed for brunch

I've got a long, and totally unkempt beard, long, chin-length hair, also unkempt, wavy, curly at points, obstructing my face.

I'm still wearing the same black t-shirt, which is now stained with spilled beer -

I'm bigger than I was, not fat, but instead because of lifting, and eating and drinking way too much, and I am aware that I appear a bit menacing in this condition.

I've since bought a Patek Philippe, softening or sharpening the edge of this aesthetic, depending upon your view, the same leather drivers from New York, which are heavily worn-in, but still look good, and of course, blue jeans and Muji socks.

I'm at some terrible bar not far from our house in Copenhagen, it's pouring rain outside, and they're playing awful, dansband music.

There's a small group of young guys that clearly don't like me, already, despite only scratching the surface of the many reasons there will soon be to hate me.

I'm talking to myself, looking forward, as if I'm talking in my sleep, clearly to no one at all, as the bartender stares at me, leaning against the wall behind the bar, just a few feet down the bar, the green light of a neon sign giving everyone close enough, including the two of us, a sickly glow, apparently all of which earns careful examination from a man whose job it is to service people with drinking problems -

I look like alcoholic Osama Bin Laden, dressed for brunch. †

So I talk to myself instead

She had a miscarriage -

Two baby girls.

She doesn't talk to me anymore -

So I talk to myself instead.

So I talk to them -

I write music for them, because I know they love my work, and because I love them both so much. †

Aha!

I keep ignoring these guys, not because I dislike them, but because I'm basically a vegetable -

So the main guy taps me on the shoulder, saying something in Danish, as I continue to stare off, mumbling in English, but then he finally pushes me hard enough, that I look up and see his face, and stare at him -

"It's you.", I exclaim.

He looks back at his friends, who are laughing, and then turns back around, also laughing at me.

"You did this!", I shout, now standing up, as I walk towards him, and then poke him in the chest, still holding my beer bottle, with the poking hand, spilling it a bit, repeating,

"You did this!"

I then take a large swig of my beer, spilling some on my shirt and my face.

He pushes me, in the middle of my swig, extremely hard, and I fall on the floor of the bar.

My expression sours, and I stand up, and smash my beer bottle, bottom down, into his forehead, which doesn't break, but he goes down -

He's done for.

Looking down at him, as he's on his knees, holding his head, which is bleeding, profusely, I say,

"Aha!", with the articulation and affect of a person that has a brain disorder that is pleased to have just solved some basic math, I grin, take another swig, in celebration, though disappointed to find basically nothing left in my beer -

His friends tackle me to the floor, just as I stare into my empty beer bottle, and in the scramble, I grab the guy's leg, which I refuse to let go of, punching it repeatedly, having lost the beer bottle.

I start grinning again,

"I got your leg.", I say repeatedly, with great pride, as his friends mercilessly kick and punch me, and I block my face, one-handed, on the floor of this disgusting bar, refusing to let go of a stranger's leg.

...

I wake up on the floor of a jail cell in Copenhagen -

It's not that bad, but I definitely need to go to the hospital. †

I fell down the stairs

I take a picture of my summons on my phone, and text it to my banker, Espen -

“I’m not dealing with this -

Get me a lawyer.”

I walk into the ER closest to our home, and the initial attendant asks me in English, what brings me to the ER, to which I reply,

“Yea whatever, I fell down the stairs.”

...

The nurse does an initial check up, looking in my eyes, checking my pulse and blood pressure, listening to my lungs, all of which are fine, though looking at my arms and torso, she orders some x-rays.

I’m in an ER bed for about two hours, passed out, just waiting, with an intravenous containing what I believe to be saline and pain killers.

It turns out, there’s no internal bleeding, no damage to my organs, some fractures in my ribs, and some fractures in my arms, but there’s nothing they can do about that -

Nothing is broken to the point that it would benefit from a cast or surgery, since it’s just a large number of very small fractures:

It’s just pain.

My arms, legs, and torso are completely covered in bruises and scrapes, and some cuts, and I have a fairly deep cut into the skin between my neck and my shoulders -

No idea how that happened.

The nurse cleans the wounds out, and draws blood to test for infections -

I told them I got the cuts in some, “disgusting bar”.

Everything comes back clean.

The doctor is about my age, also a man, and he looks at me, sees my shoes, he knows that I’m American, and he sees my watch, which is now cracked -

An antique, Patek Phillipe, from the 1940’s, with a gold face, and a leather

band, right next to what he knows are cuts from a pair of handcuffs, so as he's about to walk off, he instead turns around to ask,

“Why are you doing this to yourself?”

I stare into his eyes, fighting through the pain that I feel basically everywhere at the moment, just to make sure he knows that I hate him, biting my lip a bit before I talk -

“Why are you asking questions that will put me back in jail.”, with an inflection making plain that I was not asking a question.

“OK, good luck.”, he says, as he walks away, and taps the top of the door frame on his way out, which pisses me off.

...

I get back to the house, and pass out on the couch that's on the first floor -

I haven't showered or changed my clothes, which are now stained with a medley of charming odors -

Bar, jail, hospital.

I'm too depressed and exhausted to do anything about it -

I'm also totally annihilated on booze and intravenous painkillers, which I would never use otherwise, but in this case, the pain is legitimately awful. †

The flood

Nothing makes any sense, as I'm still too drunk to reason properly, my vision tunneling, and in excruciating pain:

I can feel my ribs jabbing into my swollen organs, unable to alleviate this problem and lay down at the same time, as my condition requires.

I scream, "Ida", at the top of my lungs, in total agony, crying, because I'm in horrible physical pain -

Ida thinks I'm merely drunk, with no idea as to what's happened, though she sticks her head out over the railing to see me on the couch, which she notes is unusual, since I've been sleeping in the studio for months.

She looks at me, but goes back to bed, as I continue screaming, having never seen her look to check in on me, feeling unbelievably alone. †

Two weeks later

I'm sleeping in the lounge of the studio, again, and I hear water running, so I get up, turn on the lights, to find water running down the stairs.

Assuming a pipe burst, I climb the steps, up to the foyer, to instead find water running under the main door of the house, as a bolt of lightning connects across the street, close enough to the house, that the entire sky and interior hallway light up, brighter than daylight, completely overexposing everything.

I open the door to see substantial flooding in the streets, and though the rain is bad, it's not enough to explain the flooding, and so I assume the sea is rising over the boundaries of the city.

I run up the stairs, shouting, as I get closer to the bedroom.

"Ida wake up, there's a flood -

Get your phone and your keys, and pack a bag now."

Now in the bedroom, I quickly pack my gym bag with socks, underwear, t-shirts and jeans, knowing there are towels and soap in the car, together with two fleece sweaters, as she is now doing the same, able to hear the rain outside, looking out the window, seeing what is plainly dangerous flooding.

I run downstairs with my gym bag, and grab two gallons of water from the kitchen, walk them out to the car, and throw them in the trunk -

I double-check to make sure there's an extra tank of gas in the trunk, which there is, though I know we already have a full tank, since I filled it yesterday.

I look below, water rushing all over my sneakers, under the frame of the car, so I step to the side of the car to get a profile view, to assess the height of the water -

It's about an inch and a half, up to three inches, up on the tires, depending upon what is basically a varying current of water rushing through the streets.

Nonetheless, the wind is blowing, it's definitely raining quite a bit, and there's lightning, all creating an incredibly threatening atmosphere.

Ida comes out with her bag, ready to leave, and I go back into the house to get two more gallons of water, a large bag of chips, bread, and quickly pack the freezer bag we thankfully keep in the freezer, with cheese, some meats, and a cucumber, and grab a handful of plastic forks and knives, assuming it could be hours before we find a place where we can actually stop.

We both get in the car, and take out our phones, checking the news, to

see coastal flooding all over southern Norway and Sweden, and basically all of Denmark.

Ida and I immediately think the obvious -

The North Sea is rising, for whatever reason.

She says, “we should probably go to my family’s place in Narvik.”, to which I reply,

“Good idea, done.”

And I take off, driving towards Sweden, avoiding the West coast, which is where it seems the flooding is coming from.

In the abstract, the plan is to keep driving until we’re comfortable we’re no longer at risk from the flooding, which we’re hoping will happen by Stockholm, which is our first choice, since we can easily get a hotel there, or worst case, stay with friends.

The initial results are not reassuring, as we approach the Øresundsbron Bridge, as the Sun is coming up, over the other end of the bridge:

The clouds are broken by what look like deliberately drawn horizontal lines, all subdividing what looks like one giant cloud above the rising Sun;

The sky is a strange, yellowish blue above the top of the cloud line, with lightning visibly dissipating within the clouds below, all confirming our suspicions that the flooding is geological, perhaps even an event in the Atlantic Ocean, and almost certainly not due to the rain, which simply cannot explain what we’re experiencing.

This view finds further evidence in the tides, which are churning, wildly, the sea below us a raging foam, violently hitting the bottom of the bridge at its lowest points.

The bridge itself is visibly swaying somewhat, presumably as a result, and Ida takes my hand for the first time in months, and so I squeeze it, with every bit of psychological well-being that I have left in me -

The wind is blowing, but not terribly strong, and certainly not strong enough to explain the movement of the bridge, which I suppose is being caused by the tide below.

The inside of the car is eerily calm, even comfortable -

The windows shut, the AC more or less ideally adjusted, no music playing, with the apparent chaos of the outside world relatively inaudible to us within

the confines of the cabin.

We are clearly about to embark on an uncertain journey, though we both know we're almost certain to survive -

The immediate fear is instead the fate of our home, plainly already flooded before we left, the studio almost certain to sustain heavy, and possibly ruinous damage.

As we proceed along the bridge, the clouds nearest to the Sun start to look like the inside of a furnace, burning some kind of slow moving gel. †

Stockholm

We get to Stockholm, and the weather is perfectly fine, though we can both tell that the sky is discolored a bit.

We park the car in the street, in an empty spot near Humlegården, and because it's around 13:00, and neither of us ate much during the roughly eight hour drive, we walk through the park, down to Stureplan, and grab lunch at Stureplan 1, since it's ultimately a really nice day, and they have TVs mounted around the bar, both of us expecting the flood to get coverage in the news.

CNN is playing, and they're showing scenes along the southwest coast of Scandinavia, which are positively disastrous:

Copenhagen is basically underwater, though the flooding was gradual, and so fatalities were generally limited to the elderly, and few in number, with CNN reporting 16 deaths throughout all of Scandinavia.

Nonetheless, I'm expecting our house to be totally trashed -

I lived through Hurricane Sandy in New York, and this looks the same, just across a wider geography, and because our house is old, and near the water, with a deep basement, it's basically a giant wooden bucket.

It turns out we were right about the cause of the storm, as there was an explosion under water in the North Sea, not due to anything man-made, that set off a small tsunami, and released sand, seawater, and gasses into the atmosphere.

We are both plainly underdressed for Stureplan, both unshowered, and I look like some kind of barbarian artist, visible bruising still on my arms, with gauze on my neck, with a few judgmental looks our way as a consequence, but most people at the bar are too captivated by the scene on TV -

There's an aerial shot of the region around the Opera House in Copenhagen, clearly flooded, followed by an on-the-ground scene with a reporter, waist-high in flood water, standing in the streets of Gothenburg, with the wind blowing, and a more extreme version of the same discolored sky above Stockholm, though completely filled with clouds, and still raining.

There are shots of some low-lying areas in the southwest of Sweden that have been effectively bulldozed by flood waters, with homes, cars, and lawn furniture floating away, though again, because the flooding was gradual, all of this was predicted, with very few fatalities, all things considered -

This is about property damage, on a massive geographic scale.

There's some active tide in the UK and Netherlands, with some mention of

this in the news, but it's nothing compared to what's taking place in Scandinavia.

The governments of Scandinavia are all coordinating with each other, the United States has offered logistical support through the Navy, which has been accepted and deployed, all culminating in what are effectively outdoor living arrangements being constructed for the enormous number of people displaced by the flood.

Ida and I are legitimately relieved to realize that we overreacted, and that human life doesn't seem to be at risk. †

The broken frame

We get back to our hotel, and because we're both exhausted after lunch, we decide to take nap -

It's the first time we've slept in the same bed in months.

I sit on the bed, and take my shirt off, as Ida sees my entire torso swollen, and completely covered in bruises.

She immediately begins to cry, too afraid to touch my body, she sits on the bed beside me, and instead places her fingertips on the side of my face, as I stare forward out the window -

She sees my ear swollen and purple, the ruptured vessels beneath.

...

We decide to take the trip to Narvik anyway. †

No longer fearing Armageddon

No longer fearing Armageddon, we decide to drive along the eastern coast of Sweden, up North, and then at some point, cut across West, into Norway.

I know she now feels profoundly guilty for leaving me wailing in pain on the couch, even though it was my fault, so I roll the dice, and play a song, and I'm not sure if she knows it -

Petter Carlson, "Pull the Brakes."

She does not recognize the song, looking at my phone, realizing he's Norwegian as well, she turns to say -

"How is it that you are turning me onto Norwegian music, when you're American?"

I say nothing, quickly shrugging my shoulders, but the reality is, my ex-girlfriend introduced me to him.

"This is really lovely.", she says, after a few moments into the chorus.

"Thank you.", she follows up.

The sky still a somewhat strange yellow color, with some cloud coverage, but a nonetheless sunny day, with otherwise extremely blue skies, and anomalously hot for Scandinavia -

Over 90 degrees Fahrenheit.

The windows are open, noisy, the white hood of the Porsche SUV glowing a bit in the bright Sun, as the sea looks like the glimmering necklace dangling above a celebrity's gown, descending a staircase, lit up from an ocean of incoming camera lights, stoic and calm, the sea reminds us of better days -

Indifferent to the chaos just miles away, our geography protects us, reminds us, protecting our memory as well. †

The man with nothing to do

We found a decent home to rent for the night through the Internet, in a small town near Hudiksvall, and after dropping off our stuff, we quickly change, and head out to the beach.

We pick a spot, at a sensible distance from the shore, with account of the tide, which is calm, and eventually sit down -

There's a family next to us:

A man and wife, and their two little girls.

Since I've explored the issue so thoroughly, I'm no longer saddened by these things, and so I turn to Ida, a bit concerned she'll be upset -

She instead smiles at me, her hair blowing in the wind, a bit before her face, unevenly.

"I love you Charles." †

Sketches of the Inchoate

Musical references

Note that song titles are hyperlinks

1. Charles Davi, [“The Butterfly Sonata”](#) (2019).
2. Charles Davi, [“Song for a New America”](#) (2019).
3. Petter Carlsen, [“Pull the Brakes”](#) (2008).

Sketches of the Inchoate

Black tree

From my heart grows a black tree:

Its fruits are iridescent bulbs,
In green and blue, and black and white,
In spots, suspended, glowing bright.

With light within from hearts without,
It grows through time, and leaves its mark.

Coincidence will mark its notes -
The sounds of chance, and sights of hope,
And unexplained, gaffes, and tropes.

All observable, but remote -
The switch that moves from dark to light,
That chance encumbrance,
That foils our vice,
And sets us all towards our heights. †

Sketches of the Inchoate

For Anna, in Denmark.

Sketches of the Inchoate

Analysis of Main Characters



By Charles Davi

Sketches of the Inchoate

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Ida is not a typical muse

Our relationship wouldn't work without her professionalism.

During the flooding -

In a different set of facts, being able to quickly and calmly execute like we both did, could mean the difference between life and death.

During the shopping -

It's stupid, but it would have spoiled the romance, if we argued over mundane decisions -

Loser stuff:

That which causes pointless unhappiness, with the idea that high-functioning people don't care about stuff like that, and are happier because of it.

Instead, we plow through the scene, because we both want the same thing, so we operate as a team, suspending irrelevant preferences, in light of a shared goal.

Being a professional in a high-stress environment makes these behaviors automatic after a while, and that's definitely an upside to dating someone with a high-stress job, provided they're actually good at it, which I plainly suggest is the case with Ida -

She's both brilliant and competent.

The downside is the borderline autism of Ove, where emotional considerations get processed incorrectly -

He buys his rat a race car, because he incorrectly thinks that it cares.

Nonetheless, he's successful, because his job is quantitative, scientific, and strategic, and he's clearly really good at it.

He doesn't have to make people happy at work, and I suggest he's even printing porn at work, which is wildly inappropriate, and again an example of a guy that just doesn't get it -

His job is to keep the lights on, which he does.

Ove is an absurd person meant to highlight a real personality defect, which is that some people simply cannot effectively predict or understand the emotional state of other people.

Ove is nonetheless a good guy, just strange, and I both legitimately and cynically enjoy my time with him.

Ida is highly, emotionally aware, though with a touch of narcissism -

“... your majesty.”,

Deliberately, because I treat her like a Queen in many ways, and it's only natural for someone to adjust to that, which doesn't bother me at all, since it's how I actually see her, with that kind of regard, albeit in a healthier manner, less the ceremonious pretensions, still clearly willing to tease her.

My character is menacingly conscious of what other people think and feel, and highly manipulative, even with Ida, but strictly intended for her amusement and happiness -

E.g., “The Beast Sonata.”

This is an insane thing to do, that requires a lot of effort and forethought to achieve an unnecessary outcome, designed only to make her laugh, partially at herself, but laugh nonetheless.

It is a microcosm of why my character gets up in the morning -

To make her happy.

And the fact that we can both execute on plans dispassionately, leaves me more free to create, for her.

This is a longwinded way of saying that she is certainly a muse for me, but the relationship nonetheless defines a team -

We share equally in the practical management of our lives, making our life together more efficient.

Ultimately, all we want to do is hangout with each other, with healthy interest in the external world, but nowhere near as much as we have in each other.

The, “Awful boat” sequence is intended to convey this -

She doesn't have to come, as she presumably knows it's on a swamp, and though she is legitimately annoyed by the revolting condition of the boat, and its embarrassing noise, she now has a story, and that's why she does it.

Ultimately, she trusts that I'm going to provide something to talk about, even if it's just with me sometime later on -

She's going to have an interesting life, and so she tolerates me.

So she is undoubtedly a muse for me, as she fires up my ambitions -

Even though I'm with her, I still feel the need to compete, to create, for her.

But we are a team of equals. †

Ida and I are old-fashioned

Ida and I are both old-fashioned, in that we have an education in both the arts and the sciences -

This is what people were like only seventy years ago.

It's only recently that we associate the arts with weirdos and losers -

Was Brahms a weirdo?

Bach?

Handel?

Beethoven?

Fauré?

Chopin?

Were any of these people lazy?

Mozart is often unfairly portrayed as a weirdo, but he wasn't -

He was just far more intelligent than everyone else, and less ashamed, perhaps because he was impossibly prolific and brilliant, having written his fifth symphony at just 9 years old -

Would you care what anyone else thinks?

I don't.

He had ordinary flaws, and extraordinary, unprecedented gifts.

Most people have at best average flaws, and average gifts.

Who should be ashamed on balance?

Mozart was not a weirdo -

He was a person that made everyone else feel small, and so in response, lesser people portray him as a weirdo, to size him down a bit.

This is something my character does on purpose, with stupid t-shirts, and absurd conduct, because the reality is, most people don't want to be friends with the nihilistic bar-fight super-genius, because it's beyond intimidating.

This is something Ida struggles with in, "The Empire State" sequence, where

what she thought was a simple folk song, turns into a work of dada art, clearly specifically created for the moment, even the room and city that she's in, ultimately leading her to not enjoy herself -

It's too much.

She would like it at an exhibit -

She doesn't like it in her bedroom, where she feels emotionally safe with me, and, "koselig", which is a word built by association over time with intimate, and physically comfortable moments and textures, in particular with family and close friends, that doesn't really have a good translation in English, but rough justice says it's, "cozy".

The sequence is a conscious play on, "The Beast Sonata", in that I overdid it, even suggesting with the title, the notion of cultural empire, which she has no interest in -

She wants a normal life, plus.

However, because my character is typically professional in my outward interactions, this is a rare outcome, and so our relationship generally works as a practical matter, and it is instead circumstances we can't control that interfere, causing both of us to temporarily shun the outside world, at times. †

Ida and I are conservative

Ida and I are profoundly monogamist, arguably codependent, with both of us being completely wrong about our perceived indiscretions, in my case, disastrously so.

The scene with Mø is designed to make a joke of the idea of indiscretion -

We're both too in love with each other to stray.

There is absolutely no drug use by either of us, which I make a point of in the hospital scene, though I make it plain that I probably have a drinking problem, but that's not a political issue, it is instead a character flaw.

Nonetheless, it's pretty obvious that we wouldn't judge people that don't subscribe to our way of life -

I spend substantial free time with a guy that has a pet rat, that he feeds steak.

We are both outwardly, beyond open-minded, but personally conservative, which is an anathema to modern politics, and again, in my opinion, deliberate, to denigrate the people most likely to raise successful families and create a healthy liberal society -

Monogamist professionals that really love each other, and their kids, and don't care what other people do, so long as you don't break the law.

Though not stated, the implication is that we're already married in Copenhagen, having been engaged in Oslo. †

The inspiration for Ida

Ida's personality and appearance are an amalgam of women that I've dated, mostly from Scandinavia, in all honesty, taking the aspects that I liked most about each of them, and combining them into one person, and the flaws that I found most charming, like her willingness to be essentially worshiped by me, generally without question -

I used to live on Jones Street in the village in New York with my ex-girlfriend from Norway, and our local deli guy would refer to her, jokingly, as, "The Princess of Jones Street", presumably because he witnessed our interactions, and though I can't say exactly what he saw, the text is generally consistent with how I really behave with women that I love:

Relentlessly celebrating the person, which is occasionally exhausting, and probably at times annoying. †

The inspiration for Charles

It's really me, and almost everything is real, or based in a real story, except, regrettably, I've yet to sell my algorithms, which are also real,⁶ which I should probably get back to work on, now that the Covid virus has subsided. Johann is an amalgam of the entitled douche, but not a specific person, though of a specific type you find at clubs in Scandinavia. Andreas is a real person, who's name is not Andreas, but he is Norwegian, and white, though for better or worse, the assault sequence I described with him is not real.

That said, the character that emerges after Ida has a miscarriage is admittedly, thankfully, somewhat exaggerated:

Externally, he's a baby, complete with a bottle, describing the external world with childish components:

Head + Bottle = Boom.

And I'm then pleased to discover this new law of nature, after the man collapses from his injury.

Internally, I'm a torrid, complex person, writing depressing music, talking to dead, imaginary people at a disgusting bar that plays strange music, presumably not very happy -

I've resigned to living in my thoughts, so unless necessary, my interactions with the external world are incredibly simplistic, and indifferent.

I don't even dislike the guys while getting beaten by them, and instead, I grin -

I just don't care, at the time.

Internally, I'm a disaster, and the sky during the bridge scene is supposed to reflect my internal condition, with the coloring of our kitchen tiles appearing just above what appears to be a slow moving inferno in the sky:

The colors of the kitchen tiles manifest in the sky at the far end of the bridge, as if we're heading back into our own imagined reality that we loved, back into our home, when things were normal, across a perilous path, the bridge, where even the Sun, a symbol associated with our love and fertility, suddenly appears dangerous in context, revealing its awesome power, appearing to burn the sky, making us modest, and afraid, before true majesty, Nature.

The lines in the cloud appear deliberate, echoing the lines of light behind Ida in the closing scene to the first book, suggesting that perhaps this is all no

⁶See this deck for my deep learning engine, Prometheus A.I., available here.

accident -

That somehow, my internal state is manifesting in the external world.

This is also implied by the lyrics in Petter Carlsen's song, "Pull the Brakes", where he says,

"I don't care what it takes; now it's time we pull the brakes.",

Implying some kind of sentient action to stop what's happening, to bring Ida and I back together, with a desperate intensity.

The idea being that I made my entire life into a work of art dedicated to Ida, which included my personal, physical appearance, with my body the frame for this total work of art -

That the energy of my love for her, and our unborn children, is so extreme, that when it derailed, it took out entire cities, all seemingly designed to bring us back together:

A cosmic version of the sequence where I assault Andreas, with both events arguably out of my control, due to my uncontrollable love for Ida, as I become an instrument of Nature -

Causing in the first case, the wind to blow behind me, through my rage, moving the trees behind me, to frighten Andreas, before I kick him, and in the second case, through my anguish on the couch, a bona fide geological event.

Despite all of this insanity, the closing scene is intended to convey that even this cosmic struggle was all an effort for us to simply be together, and be normal:

To be the family on the beach, with nothing to do. †

Sketches of the Inchoate

Musical references

Note that song titles are [hyperlinks](#)

1. Petter Carlsen, “[Pull the Brakes](#)” (2008). †

Sketches of the Inchoate

Our home

As an idea,

My Love for you can achieve the permanent -

The infinite, and immutable.

A jewel suspended,

In an infinite void -

The home I will build,

For you.

Each day,

You will rise,

Astonished,

By my Love,

For you.

Its relentlessness,

Will exhaust you,

And so you will never spend a day,

Alone.

Even in death,

You will hear its echo,

And it will call you back,

Home. †

Sketches of the Inchoate

For Anna, in Denmark.

Sketches of the Inchoate

My Song for America



By Charles Davi

Sketches of the Inchoate

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American Gladiators

Personally and professionally, my music is a total failure, as even Ida can't stand it, since it has apparently gotten only more avant-garde, and annoying -

She thinks it sounds like, "Shostakovich, with the addition of crippling anxiety."

I am nonetheless already quite rich thanks to my software, so I don't really care, as there's an audience of one that appreciates it quite a bit -

Me.

Our children also hate my music, and run out of the room whenever I start playing it, mocking its sound, making buzzing sounds, like bees, whenever I play it, once even baiting me, suggesting that they were about to jointly listen to one of my compositions, asking me to join them, to my legitimate enthusiasm, sitting on the bed with them, only to instead witness my oldest son quickly pull up the, "dramatic hamster" video on YouTube, which they had apparently queued up in advance, and minimized, all three of them then laughing at me, even the baby, only three years old, too young to fully understand the joke, but nonetheless understanding that she should be laughing at her dad, because he writes weird music.

Ida has since quit her job in private equity, and instead retooled as a pianist, and is now somewhat popular in Norway and Denmark, playing at large churches, and several small concert halls.

She plays mostly French music, with some German, almost entirely from the early 20th century, in particular Poulenc, Ravel, Debussy, Germaine Tailleferre, Brahms, and some Scriabin and Rachmaninoff as well, at times.

She has also dabbled in composing, though she hides it from me, so I sneak into her office to listen to recordings she keeps on what is basically a small electronic dictaphone, to her legitimate aggravation.

She's also been experimenting with arrangements of jazz standards for solo piano, which she's played for me, and I think they work quite well for her aesthetic -

The goal being to take the jazz format and apply it once, to create a distilled arrangement of a standard that she can take with her to different venues -

She sticks to ballads, which works well with her selections generally.

This works as a practical matter as well, since she can't improvise well enough to spontaneously compose, but she can improvise well enough to com-

pose an arrangement.

We have small performances in our home, from chamber music to jazz ensembles, which the children really enjoy -

The kinetics of live instruments always fascinate children.

The flood trashed the studio and everything in it, and severely damaged the Clara Schumann portrait, making me feel awful for my selfishness -

I was an alcoholic millionaire with no regard for history, and took a public item and purchased it to quench my own unhappiness, ultimately failing, cosmically.

The painting has since been restored, with no visible damage, absent x-rays, which we had done on the painting, both out of curiosity, and for insurance, but the house was damaged to the point that we decided to settle with our insurance company, who took title to the house and all insured items, except Pandora, which was undamaged, since there was no flooding on the roof, since the rain was ultimately not that bad -

There were electrical fires all over the city, before they ultimately cut the power to certain neighborhoods, including in the wiring under the flooring of the studio, creating damage that was wide spread, but small in scale, making repair pointless in the case of our house.

We now live in New York, on Governor's Island, which has since been privatized -

We bought a bit of land, and built a truly incredible home, which looks like a spaceship from a distance.

There's a small bit of sand and beach on our land just behind the house.

The kids all go to public school, but have private music education on the weekends at Manhattan School of Music Prep, my alma-matter.

They all grew up taking Suzuki lessons, and the baby is doing exactly that now, for piano.

Ida travels often, but almost never for more than a week at a time.

The house is basically alive -

It's always on in the background, my complete set of algorithms, that knows where we are at all times, monitors and predicts everything, and provides security:

The house is bounded by extremely dense bushes that cannot be walked through, since there's insufficient space in between the branches, leaving only two walkways up to the clearing that contains the house and our property.

As you proceed along the identical walkways, unaccompanied by one of us, things get increasingly weird:

It begins with a simple red sign attached to a low, green-painted metal post, tilted, for kitsch, with a white font that reads:

“Warning: if you don't stop, you will have a bad time.”

If you pass it, a recording of my voice plays, simply reading the words on the sign, played from a speaker hidden in a bush nearby.

Then, at the first perimeter, the ground starts rumbling beneath you, and sprinklers turn on, except they're mounted to autonomous rotors that know where you are, and deliberately spray you, randomly firing from positions hidden in bushes about the property.

If you continue past this confusing and humiliating experience, autonomous red laser pointers mounted to the roof of the house fire, to create the impression of snipers on the roof -

They're totally harmless, but they track your movements, and it's not the most comforting experience.

If you continue past the lasers, which don't stop, then an autonomous spotlight, mounted to an extremely noisy rotor on the roof, turns on and follows you, and also calls the police, as a recording of my voice says,

“Your life is about to get very strange.”

This happens just as a second sign becomes visible along the path, in this case, it's a black and white photo, the size of an ad at a bus stop, about 4x6 feet, housed in an aluminum casing, with white fluorescent lighting around the inner boundary to display the photograph:

It's my mugshot from jail in Copenhagen, that I've vandalized on the glass encasing the photo, with the words, “Giant Baby”, written across the top, above the pixelated industrial print, in a thick, black graffiti marker, that I top up on occasion.

If you still don't stop, then water balloons filled with non-toxic paint get chucked at you, by another autonomous arm mounted on the roof of the house, powered by an algorithm I came up with designed to track rockets,⁷ which

⁷C. Davi, “Tracking Moving Objects in 3-Space”, available here.

has no trouble tracking people clumsily moving about a relatively small space getting pelted by paint-filled balloons -

As punishment, they don't stop until you actually leave the property.

Our oldest son of course uses the system to prank his friends, some of whom are very young, and out of fear, run forward, into the madness, presumably because they associate the house itself with safety.

This ruins their clothes, sometimes upsets them, and requires us to clean paint off small children and the floors of our house, which is infuriating, and also requires us to explain to enraged parents why their children come home from our house completely covered in paint, wearing new clothes.

But it is the natural consequence of thinking at least in part like a child when you have children, and it is on balance worth the inconvenience, since it has at least once foiled what we suspect was an attempted robbery, with the ostensible bandits quitting after being mercilessly barraged with paint balloons, ultimately getting arrested, with a spectacular spread in the New York Post a few days later, featuring what was apparently a couple, completely covered in what was a carefully selected spectrum of nonsense -

I of course shared the low-fi security camera footage with The Post, which they loved, showing the bandits attempting to hide in the bushes, as a mechanical arm hurled balloons at them from the roof, with an astonishing rate of precision, that I also shared with The Post -

Approximately 92% of the balloons made contact -

As they clumsily tried to hide in what was impenetrably dense bush, ultimately running away out of confusion and merciless inconvenience.

The reporter asked me for my inspiration for the security system, to which I replied,

“American Gladiators.” †

Immigrant Song

We go over the Williamsburg Bridge, currently renting a place just off Mc-carren Park, ultimately heading to upstate New York, to visit my uncle, who's not really my uncle, but I call him that, having grown up with him, working in his recording studio from the age of twelve onward, until law school.

I've put on the Turina Piano Quartet in A-Minor, which I'm singing along to, to highlight the melody for William, being overly dramatic at all times, and even though it's certainly modern, it has a listenable melody that I'm hoping will eventually stick in his head, as he gets older, providing him with a tune he can whistle, that will unfold in complexity over time, as he learns more about music, and the context of the melody changes its meaning.

Leaving William was not easy, though this isn't the first time we've done so, having spent a weekend with Ida's parents in Norway, without us -

He is so well-adjusted, that it's not that he doesn't care that we're gone, he instead already has an appropriate understanding of our relationship, knowing somehow we'll come back, and that he'll be fine, and that our affections for him carry even in our physical absence.

On this occasion, he actually waved back to us as we closed the door, causing Ida to get a bit upset, and cry in the elevator down from our mutual friend's apartment in TriBeCa, which she eventually shrugged off, before exiting the building.

...

My uncle now lives in a decidedly massive Victorian mansion in a small town that he's turned into a record studio, plus a home.

This is our first quasi-real trip without William since he was born eight months ago, since then doing almost nothing other than taking care of him, moving to New York, and settling out our life in Copenhagen.

Once we get onto the FDR (to avoid the lights on West Street), which is fairly empty, presumably because it's a Thursday afternoon during work hours, I crank the volume up, and start blasting, "Immigrant Song", by Led Zeppelin, loud enough that you can hear the faders open up one by one in the beginning of the track, together with someone counting them in, "two, three, four ..." -

Ida opens up the glove compartment as the guitar and drums come in, pulls out a pair of wayfarers, this time white, with small black polka dots, slides them on, with both hands, staring forward into the open road ahead, while John Bonham terrorizes a drum set, both of us feeling completely awesome.

...

I can see him standing on his giant wrap around porch as we approach the massive house, complete with a bell tower that he's converted into a den filled with rare comic books.

As we get closer, an enormous American flag now becomes visible in the windows of his home, clearly spanning an entire room -

He stands before it, outside, on his porch, wearing black jeans, a white button-down shirt, neatly pressed, snakeskin boots, with a matching snakeskin belt, a black cowboy hat, with an actual revolver pistol in a holster attached to his belt, his long, black, rock star hair obscuring his face.

Taking in the presentment, I hear Ida say,

"Oh my God.", under her breath.

...

We make some small talk in his main kitchen, as we're the first guests to arrive, and Ida sees a water cooler -

Preferring bottled over tap, and ignoring the large, cautionary Grey Goose sticker planted over whatever brand of water was originally there, she grabs a glass from the table beside the cooler, after gesturing for permission, she fills it up, then taking a sip, only to realize it's actually vodka -

He compliments her, seeing a full glass,

"I like this one.", he says, as he then supplements a cup of coffee he's holding with some vodka, as an acknowledgement, lifting it to toast, and having a sip as he smiles at Ida, who is now in the awkward position of trying to balance impressing a person of legendary status in my own personal narrative, with the fact that she is now a mother of a small child, and also simply never in the mood for a tall glass of straight vodka.

So she passes me the glass, and simply walks over to the sink, grabbing a new cup from the drying rack, atop a rustic wooden counter, pouring herself a glass of water from the sink, as my uncle watches, confused -

Perhaps she prefers Belvedere, he thinks to himself.

...

The control room of the studio on the first floor of the house overlooks a lake positioned about two-hundred feet in front of the house, and has a handmade vocal booth, made of reclaimed wood generated by demo work we did inside the

house together, that we then lined with grey insulating foam.

Ida looks about the room, looks at me, and then stares out the old windows lining the control room, leaded glass, like our home in Copenhagen, suddenly getting a much better look into my own personal narrative, despite knowing me for five years at this point.

...

He's organized a party for us, and himself, inviting many of the people I grew up with at his studio, including some of the other engineers, some of the musicians I worked with regularly, as well as some of the locals from the town.

Ida is entertained by the unusual company, and my uncle's legitimately beautiful home, which varies from proper Victorian mansion, complete with original Edison recordings and playback devices, and Victorian furniture and art, to the madman's house, loaded with vintage and modern recording equipment, and instruments, absolutely everywhere.

The music is awesome, as he plays all of the songs I grew up with -

Frank Zappa, "Baby Snakes";

King Crimson, "Red";

Yes, "The Gates to Delirium", which makes me a bit sad, hearing the dreamy opening harmonics, wishing William were old enough to be here with us, and hear this, in this setting, the lake beyond the old windows, listening to music that sounds as though it's from a different future;

Steve Vai, "For the Love of God";

Cream, "White Room";

Then, finally, Jimi Hendrix, "All Along the Watchtower".

We leave the music in the control room to grab a bite to eat, and Ida is pleased to find that my uncle is a gourmand, with an excellent spread of great champagne, baked cheeses and baguettes, and a hearty salad of vegetables grown in his own garden, loaded with sea salt and olive oil, supplemented with several meats that he's hunted himself, including cured venison, which she tries, thinking it's quite good.

This goes on for a few hours, with him manually loading CDs and playing records, despite having a home filled with professional audio equipment, after which his band from years ago plays a set, in his live room, which is in terms of appearance, true to the original house, with high tin ceilings, old, small plank hardwood floors below, that are heavily worn in, with a small, black iron, wood-

burning stove, unlit with a few small logs within for effect, since it's a warm spring night, though the room is filled with instruments, equipment racks, and amplifiers, and has some sound panels on the walls to absorb the sounds in the room.

The performance is completely mental -

American Yngwie Malmsteen:

Heavy metal of an unprecedented, yet dated variety, featuring furious, harmonic minor guitar solos, riddled with impossibly fast lines, randomly palm-muted riffs, and a double-bass drummer peddling fast enough to power a small car.

Ida is amused, as we sit on the couch, this being the first time either of us have been drunk since William was born, on the perfect occasion, totally unpredictable from her perspective, exactly the kind of moment that defines our relationship -

The random.

They then of course cover a Malmsteen track, "Eclipse" -

Epic.

The song ends in a fury of palm-muted riffs, crashing into him slamming the pedal to his vintage tape echo, playing an outro solo, harmonizing with himself, throwing his hair back once done, using his right hand, the final note still sustaining, and echoing, with a slight one-hand vibrato using his left, as he continues to fix his hair.

They follow up with another Malmsteen song, this time, "Leviathan" -

My uncle, sweating like a beast, his shirt now partially unbuttoned, hammering down on the floor pedals of a Moog synthesizer, as his guitar roars, the synthesizer setting off a massive bass tone, shaking the floors, bringing a smile to Ida's face, reminding both of us how much fun we have together. †

Ramble On

We wake up before the others, with many people staying over my uncle's house, which has three floors, and over twenty rooms, so everyone that stayed has their own space, including us, taking a bedroom on the second floor, featuring in its center, a glass-topped, wooden, museum-style display case, fit for a collection of butterflies, that instead contains a rare issue of Spider-Man, causing Ida to laugh first thing in the morning.

I head downstairs to make us coffee, toasting some baguette leftovers from the night before, ultimately setting up a small spread on a stone stage that my uncle constructed about twenty feet from his porch.

As we're seated, Ida stops eating for a moment, clearly about to say something, so I look at her,

"Yes?", I ask.

She says nothing, and continues eating, shaking her head, signaling a nothing.

But then pauses again, this time puts her plate and coffee down, as, "Ramble On" by Led Zeppelin plays from my phone -

As the lyrics come in, "... magic filled the air", she finally asks,

"Charles, he looks just like you, but older -

Who is he to you?", to which I reply,

"I know -

I don't know".

She accepts this answer, as we continue eating breakfast, admiring the lake just beyond the house.

Otherwise enjoying a tranquil spring day in the countryside, we see a formation of ducks fly first over the house, then make their way overhead, when suddenly, my uncle bursts onto the scene, at the drop of the final chorus, he kicks the screen door open, holding a chrome shotgun, standing on his porch, pointing the gun into the sky, prompting Ida to hide behind me -

He opens fire, appearing this time as a total madman, wearing a black Looney Tunes t-shirt, and the same jeans from last night, a cigar in his mouth, he reloads the chamber from shells in his pocket, cocks the gun, firing and reloading again and again, causing Ida to scream, the gun blasting, deafeningly loud, Ida hiding behind me, now even closer to the surface of the stage, covering her ears, pressing

herself against my back, as I laugh hysterically.

This continues for about fifteen seconds, after which he stops, having hit nothing, he returns to the house, saying nothing.

She immediately sits up and stares at me, astonished, though she sees me laughing, and so she starts to laugh as well, and as the lyrics continue, rambling into the outro,

“Baby baby baby baby baby ...”,

We both start to laugh hysterically, Ida now suspecting we somehow teamed up to do this, together with the ducks. †

The voodoo child returns

On the drive back to Brooklyn, the Sun setting again behind the trees, “Voodoo Child” glaring, continuing on into, “Freedom”, painting the interior with shadows and ghosts, she sees the benevolent devil within me, again, perhaps in herself as well, the weekend having transformed the way she sees me, with my biography now coming together, after years of politely not asking. †

Sending out an SOS

We end up in Soho, following instructions from my phone, and I take the opportunity to get one more moment of freedom in before we return to adulthood in TriBeCa, playing, “Message in a Bottle”.

We drive past CBGB’s on Bowery, seeing it’s now a Varvatos shop, which I like, but it says something -

Independent music has moved, but where?

I see time for one more, about to turn off Bowery at a red light -

“Blind Faith”, Chase and Status, rolling the windows down, singing at the top of my lungs, slamming the roof of the car with my hand on the downbeats, people on Bowery staring at us, the block completely lit up with the track, blasting, as Ida laughs at me, a group of punk-looking kids pass the car on skateboards and bikes, some throwing their arms into the air, others shouting, some singing along as well, several popping wheelies, one reaching out and grabbing my hand, which is now hanging out of the car window, pointing up, for a brief moment as he passes -

He looks back and smiles, we make eye contact, he looks like I did when I was a kid, with my eyes, long hair, then turns forward, kicking the ground to catch up, as Ida and I turn left off Bowery. †

It worked

I wake up the next morning after our trip to my uncle's place, as Ida is still sleeping, and I lean into William's crib, just to check on him - he's sleeping.

So I leave him alone, though I want to grab him and shout, which leaves a smile on my face -

I walk quietly into the living room, which overlooks North Williamsburg, the height allowing visibility all the way out to the Empire State Building, which I can see through blue skies, with some clouds.

I look out the other way, facing South, across, to see my old building, on the water in South Williamsburg, just before I moved to Oslo -

I remember what a maniac I was, always partying like I might die the next minute, desperate to fall in love with my own life, I put a simply unreasonable amount of thought and effort into my social life, though since it yielded results, in retrospect, now staring into my own past, with some distance, it worked. †

London Grammar

It's the weekend after we visited my uncle's house, and I check my watch to see it's 22:00, just before I pull the gallery door:

A long, roughly rectangular wooden handle, just wide enough to fit into the center of a grip, and unlocked -

It swings open, to the right, just in time for me to hear the first verse of, "The What" kick off, already excited by the scene -

Ida's not interested, and not here.

I hate to say it, but she's basically a very open-minded snob.

We already live in Williamsburg, where every day is some kind of highly curated experience rooted in contemporary culture, with only ironic references to classical culture, clearly planted to please the snobs -

She likes it, but that's not who she really is, which is a person from a small town, in an already small country, that grew up wearing knitted sweaters and heavy socks, spending summer weekends in the woods, in a cabin.

I am instead quite certain that any sensible visual representation of my mind will look like a blasted mural, including the broken concrete, held together by some new and poorly understood force of Nature, like an updated version of Raphael's Head Exploding - nothing planted, but a disaster, organized through necessity.

I spot my friends, mostly Swedes, mostly from Stockholm, and as I approach, I hear one of them say, "Precis", with something that borders on a lisp, the sound of Stockholmska coming back to me, the old habits as well, so I say hello to the whole group at once, like some kind of local celebrity.

Though there's a new face I don't recognize, a woman that looks about her late twenties -

She is clearly interested in me.

She looks like Ava Gardner, and appears to be just as cruel.

She's so attractive that it makes me a bit sick to my stomach, and so partially in response, I immediately walk to the bar to get a drink, just to get away from her.

I turn around to look at her again while at the bar, and she catches me, turning her back towards me, without breaking eye contact -

I'm simply caught, with no sensible alternative theory to explain why I've turned around, and so I own it, despite her display, and smile, politely.

I come back to the group, which is broken into smaller groups, holding a bottle of Pilsner, innocently picking the group that includes her, and she is astonishingly forward -

Right after the chorus, she says,

"What do you ask the world for, Charles?", which I took as both wildly inappropriate, and a challenge, so I fire back with,

"As suggested, I don't ask the world for anything", so she fires back,

"So you're a rapist then?", to which I reply,

"I'm typically the recipient of what is a plain offer in these matters".

"So you're a bottom?"

I laugh, reminded of Ida's humor, which makes me feel bad, but I'm doing my best to be polite about an inappropriate subject in front of people that I know, and so I keep it going, having quickly reasoned through my guilt.

"Will that steer the conversation to a more appropriate topic?", I ask.

"Not likely.", she says, callously, as she's checking the bottom of her shoes, because she's apparently stepped on a wet napkin, with no concern at all for what she's plainly suggesting, simply plucking it off, throwing it on the floor, then staring me directly in the eyes, as she quickly shrugs her shoulders, pouting her lips a bit.

"I think I need a minute.", as I walk away to check out the gallery.

Lincoln Jesser, "Wicked Son" plays.

...

It's a big space on Allen Street, just off East Houston.

The gallery is similar to every other LES and East Village commercial gallery I'm familiar with -

White walls and ceilings, concrete floors.

There are some standout features, including one big brick wall at the back, with a self-service bar set up in front of it, with a solid spread catered by DBGB, featuring massive bowls of truffle fries, and proportionally massive trays

of sliders, with some loser salad no one is paying attention to, that you can tell even the chef gave up on, knowing full well this will get attention from only the worst people, who deserve exactly what they get -

There are veggie sliders.

The space is big, about 1,500 square feet, with some iron columns, otherwise open, all the art on the walls, except for what I suspect is a Dale Chihuly glass piece hanging from the center of the ceiling, as an unlit chandelier, with actual lighting recessed into the ceilings, and not notable.

There are two thin ropes hanging in front of the two opposite white walls of the gallery, creating about three feet of distance from the art, and there are some works hanging behind the temporary bar setup along the brick wall as well, in no danger of being touched.

The rear brick wall is bordered by two massive beams that extend floor to ceiling, that I thought were made of heavily damaged wood, but when I actually got up to the bar, I realized they are instead deliberately rusted steel beams, of the type you'd find in the frame of a commercial building, which are paired with steel segments, about 3 inches wide by 1 foot long, also rusted, randomly mounted along the brick wall, creating an awesome overall aesthetic -

Raw, creative intellectual power, applied to the arbitrary, giving them a pass for the noticeable, lamentable smell of fresh paint, that probably goes well with the loser salad.

One Basquiat painting, multiple Keith Haring paintings, not his street art, actual paintings, some of which are sizable, providing the otherwise colorless space with a bit of life, some small paintings and sketches by Dalí, and a handful of small Picasso sketches, and some other artist I've never heard of.

Overall, it's the kind of art you'd find at a large gallery on West Broadway, but with the vibe of an indie gallery on the LES, suggesting nothing under \$100,000, with some of the larger Keith Harings likely grabbing a few million, and the Basquiat almost certainly pulling in a few million, at a minimum.

The space also has a booming system, invisible, mounted into the ceiling, and though brightly lit, respecting the art, the atmosphere clearly borders on a party.

A piece catches my eye on my way back to the group -

It's by the new artist, apparently a woman, and I've never heard of her.

She uses watercolor, as a base, on a white canvas, abstract, but with real world objects mounted onto the canvas, presumably with a glue between the

object and the canvas -

In this case, green leaves, pieces of grayish tree bark, some grass, and pine needles, assembled sparsely atop the canvas, other than the grass, which is in patches, that are themselves sparsely distributed;

The canvas is basically stained by the watercolors, with some white spaces, in greens and blues, taken from the ocean, framed with what is plainly driftwood;

There are uneven horizontal white lines drawn into the blues and greens, that look like they may have been done with a very fine sponge, dabbed in white;

Then looking closer, I can see faint, nearly translucent stones mounted about the surface of the canvas, that look like giant sand, or salt crystals, and I then realize what she's done:

It's a memory of a beach, near a tree line, which would litter the sand with bark and leaves, and the title of the piece is in fact, "The Beach Just Beyond The Woods".

This, as, "Deja Vu" plays, Oliver Nelson Remix.

...

"Just Ride" starts playing, which I like, just as I return to the group, this time to a deliberately different subset, ex Christine, but she doesn't care -

She walks right over to me.

"I got rid of that napkin, so now we can finally talk.", she says, and though I couldn't politely confront her on the issue, or even alter my behavior, I got the sense she was suggesting that marriage is dispensable, like a spent, wet napkin, attached to your shoe, to my total astonishment at the level of craftsmanship in her mind-game, though again offended.

All that said, I'm not going to let this ruin my night, so I'm polite, talking to her and others, attempting to steer the conversation as best I can in a sensible, and respectable direction.

...

We all go out to GoldBar afterwards, and, "Trap Queen" starts playing -

She looks right at me, across the group, across the room, as if she knew my immediate association -

She is quite plainly a trap, but not of the variety that will facilitate stable

growth, but instead of the type that ensnares a thing, to its detriment, and possibly death.

Nonetheless, I am drunk, and all of us start dancing the moment we reach a clearing in the back room, in between the tightly spaced aisle, with some of us breaking off, though at this point, her overt allusions to desire have been replaced by a much more subtle game, that I have yet to figure out.

So I overtly avoid her, and eventually, this erodes her confidence, and so she just goes for it -

She calmly walks right up to me, standing some immeasurable, but non-zero distance from me, puts her right pointer finger on my bottom lip, in the dark lights of the main room, people smoking, she stares at me, her finger starting to separate my lips, as I hear the singer from London Grammar, and though I don't know the song, I know her voice, and so I take her finger off my lip, and hold it in my hand tightly, but not rudely, or aggressively, and then politely step beside her, and leave, gently letting go. †

The Beach Just Beyond The Woods

I come home, quietly open the door, and immediately wash my face in the bathroom.

I stare at myself in the mirror, asking whether I have anything I should apologize for, or tell her about, and I think the answer's no, but it was enough to make me miss Ida terribly in the cab ride home -

I just want to forget everything else.

So I go into our living room, the bedroom door just beside open a bit, as I quietly, but noticeably, start playing, "Your Song", by Elton John.

I poke my head into the bedroom -

"Hey.", I whisper, as William sleeps just before the right wall of the room, in his little wooden crib.

She quietly replies, "Hi.", clearly already awoken by me coming home, and possibly the music as well.

"Come hang out with me.", I say,

And she gets up, almost immediately, wearing a pair of my boxers, and a cotton t-shirt, quietly skipping over to me, and as she gets closer, I can see her smile, breaking my useless heart, she gives me a huge hug -

I squeeze her, pick her up in the air, just a bit off the floor.

I hold her, in my arms, feeling her arms around my ribs, she presses her head into the nape of my neck, for a few seconds, and then she throws her legs around my hips, squeezing unexpectedly hard, telling she missed me too.

She lifts her head, so I put her down, and brush her hair out of her eyes, fighting back tears, just so unreasonably happy to see that's she's OK -

That I didn't fuck this up.

She looks beautiful -

She's shorter than me, and this is funny, for some reason, and so I laugh at her, and she laughs in response, waking William, who struggles to sit up, seeing both of us, his little head barely lit by the dim light of our living room, we both wave to him, and he marches over to the edge of his crib, clumsily, and does a little baby dance in reply, also laughing, understanding he's participating in something.

She sits down on the long bench aside our dining room table, as I open a bottle of cannonau, bringing two glasses over at the same time, leaving the bottle behind me on the kitchen counter.

I sit unreasonably close to her, causing her to laugh again, The Empire State Building, lit up again in blue, though further away, as Pandora hangs on a new wall, now closer to us, just to our right, this time in America, in New York -

I wrote a song for Ida when I first bought the painting, also called, “Pandora”, that I never played for her, or told her about:

I took Pandora’s vase, and turned it into a reason for me to live -

To rebuild it.

What I hoped for, was to rebuild the family I never knew, with Ida -

To rebuild a broken past, by making something new, with her, looking forward, selfish as that might be, I trusted in what I know is my unselfish love for her.

So tonight, I don’t say anything at all, and instead, finally, just the three of us, doing nothing, let someone else far more normal than I am do the talking -

I listen, and I look, with the help of the words and the music of a man, even more unafraid than I am, to simply say what he really thinks:

A real artist:

Someone who helps a clumsy beast like me, tell someone else how much I really love them. †

Sketches of the Inchoate

Musical references

Note that song titles are hyperlinks

1. Joaquín Turina, “Piano Quartet in A-Minor, Mov. 2” (1931).
2. Led Zeppelin, “Immigrant Song” (1970).
3. Frank Zappa, “Baby Snakes” (1979).
4. King Crimson, “Red” (1974).
5. Yes, “The Gates of Delirium” (1974).
6. Steve Vai, “For the Love of God” (1990).
7. Cream, “White Room” (1968).
8. Bob Dylan, arr. by Jimi Hendrix, “All Along the Watchtower” (1968).
9. Yngwie Malmsteen, “Eclipse” (1990).
10. Yngwie Malmsteen, “Leviathan” (1992).
11. Led Zeppelin, “Ramble On” (1969).
12. Jimi Hendrix, “Voodoo Child (Slight Return)” (1968).
13. Jimi Hendrix, “Freedom” (1971).
14. The Police, “Message in a Bottle” (1979).
15. Chase & Status, “Blind Faith” (2011).
16. Christopher Wallace, “The What” (1994).
17. Lincoln Jesser, “Wicked Son” (2014).
18. Urban Cone, “Deja Vu (Oliver Nelson Remix)” (2012).
19. Steven A. Clark, “Just Ride” (2014).
20. Willie Junior Maxwell II, “Trap Queen” (2014).
21. Flume feat. London Grammar, “Let You Know (N. C. Remix)” (2019).
22. Elton John, “Your Song” (1970). †

Sketches of the Inchoate

Clair de lune

La clair de lune -

La clair de lune,

Sur la mer,

Est la langue de mon mere. †

Sketches of the Inchoate

For America -
If you disappoint me,
I swear to God,
I will find a way ... †



Sketches of the Inchoate

My Song for America - Analysis



By Charles Davi

Sketches of the Inchoate

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Coincidence in the arts

I plainly make repeated use of the word, “baby”, in songs, and in the text itself, without out any obvious explanation, or justification.

As an artistic device, the word, “baby” serves as a unifying trope across a huge range of genres, from the bronze sculpture at the Met, to Led Zeppelin and Fetty Wap.

This is also clearly planted to contrast with the expectations of people in modern relationships, who are likely offended by the use of the word in these contexts, despite the frequent use of the word in contemporary music, including by a woman, Mø, who’s from a highly gender-conscious society, Denmark.

The implication being that superficially unrelated artists are perhaps a bit more honest about their feelings, and that this creates a unifying coincidence, forming a trope -

“Baby”.

This is also a play on associations, and what I think is a perfectly normal tendency to infantilize a partner, since it signals the ability to care for children, which is obviously a huge component of any long-term relationship.

As a practical matter, for the reader, it’s a signal that once observed gives an otherwise unrelated group of artists something in common -

“Baby”.

This is an exogenously realized variant of the same instant familiarity I allude to when I first meet Ida, which I took to an absurd, and realized level with the horse, deliberately creating a shared experience for both of us.

It is nonetheless as if we had something in common even before we met, though this is disrupted by external events -

Food guy and shoe guy.

Further, I realized after writing the, “London Grammar” sequence, that it’s plausible that Ida in fact made the work that I describe, “The Beach Just Beyond the Woods”, though this was totally unintentional.

This kind of coincidence nonetheless suggests deliberate action, by someone, to the reader -

The work is obviously similar to the painting that I made for Ida, and the gallery as described sounds a lot like our apartment in Oslo, and I even focus on the door of the gallery, just like I did for our apartment.

The work arguably serves as a mood-changer for me in that sequence, solidifying my fidelity to Ida, since the memories it conjures color the rest of my night, though this is unstated, and implied.

This is an absurd variant on the idea that artists share ideas, without communicating -

In this case, I invented a character, Ida, who somehow, as a character in my head, arguably shared her work with me, and this was genuinely unintentional on my part.

Taking this idea of coincidence even further, I have a somewhat lazy and misshapen right eye, Biggie Smalls plainly has a lazy eye, Dale Chihuly has an eye patch, and Fetty Wap also has a damaged eye.

Noticing this, I intended this intersection in appearance to operate as a symbol for coincidence in the arts generally, except this time, as a symbol for the idea that artists can almost see each other's works, and that we share ideas without knowing it, elevating the role of coincidence in the arts, as if chance altered our physical appearance, to let us know that perhaps we have something in common -

This is symbolized by the color blue, which serves the role of the light of mankind, and the light of ideas, with the lights of the Empire State Building symbolizing the fact that New York is a powerful source of this light of mankind.

And that this light is the invisible medium that facilitates this spooky, otherwise unexplained communication among artists.

This is plainly alluded to in the cover art, which features an encircled eye, which is currently a reoccurring theme in street art around lower Manhattan.

This is also plainly alluded to by, "Blue Train", by, "So What?", from, "Kind of Blue", and Ida's ability to suddenly see, "the music beneath the page", which is also written in blue.

This is also consistent with, "The broken frame" sequence, presenting the body itself as art, that is both a conscious work by the person in question, but also subject to chance.

In this case, a group of otherwise unrelated artists including myself all have a similar physical feature, that is unusual, and I'm clearly putting myself in the role of the observer, who through mutual appreciation of a group of otherwise unrelated artists, creates the opportunity for a single narrative to reference all of our work, alluding to the intersection of our appearance, reducing both to a common physical feature, that operates as a symbol for coincidence in the arts.

In this case, a physical feature that we all have in common -

Eye problems. †

Music in the text

The fourth book repeatedly makes use of song lyrics that are explicitly incorporated into scenes, creating an artistic device that is tough to manage, since the lyrics are rarely a perfect fit for the scene, outside of the few moments referenced.

The overall idea is to take the use of music beyond how it's used even in film, which is typically an emotional match for the scene, and instead elevate it to a technical match on the subject matter as well.

Ramble On

“Mine’s a tale that can’t be told”, alluding to some mystery as to my ultimate origin, with Ida noting the obvious similarity in appearance between my uncle and myself, and only naturally asking about the matter.

Then, “magic filled the air”, providing her with an answer, as he performs his version of, “The Beast Sonata”, which is plainly alluded to by Ida hesitantly asking the question, twice.

He also has an absurd, black t-shirt, referencing me, and is smoking a cigar, referencing both Ida and I, and a shared experience we had at a cigar bar earlier in our relationship.

Ida is of course astonished, and this connects to the next scene, where we’re driving back, again alluding to poorly understood connections between artists, as Jimi Hendrix plays, and so the car is filled with, “shadows and ghosts”:

Both the outlines and the souls of the past, that made the music we’re now listening to -

The past as immutable, and a light that shines upon those who listen closely.

Shadows represent prior events, and ghosts represent the force that allows for the current realization of a prior event, despite the event being in the past.

The idea of music as driven by a ghost is specifically alluded to in the scene in the studio, where Emilie Nicolas’ music animates the air around us, like a ghost, bringing physical reality to what I view as the substance of a human soul:

The force that ultimately animates our bodies.

This is indirectly alluded to in many scenes, where we appear as, “lit up cutouts”, suggesting this force can at times be observed.

Message in a Bottle and Blind Faith

Though the lyrics aren't explicitly referenced, the plain implication is that I'm sending out an SOS -

That art is in danger.

I think this is serious, and I think artists are also in personal danger, as the political enemies of reason and art use economics to stifle the arts, and perhaps worse.

The scene is meant to operate as a reclaim -

Where did the arts move?

Right here, in the middle of the street -

The kids show up, and own Bowery, again.

The What

I did both -

The dialogue of the text references the lyrics, and the lyrics foreshadow events in the text.

Christine references the lyrics, which I suggest was inappropriate, because she should know that I'm married -

I'm presumably wearing a ring.

Further, if you unpack what she said, it's, "What do you ask the world for?", and the corresponding lyrics are, "Fuck the world".

As a result, her statement arguably changes the context of the song, suggesting quite plainly, in my character's imagination, that she is saying that she wants to have sex with me, which I allude to in my response.

Further, the lyrics, "Like trees to branches", my favorite line in the entire song, save for Method Man's intro, over his first verse, foreshadow the artwork to come, which is comprised at least in part of fallen wood and leaves.

The selection of, "The What" and, "Trap Queen", was also deliberate, to follow the evolution of hip hop, from the sampled, looped beats of early hip hop, to the highly produced, cinematic beats that we're now accustomed to, that are often performed by live bands, arguably blurring the line between pop and hip hop, which I'm sure at least in part explains its commercial success.

Wicked Son

This is intended to operate twofold -

My character is obviously a bit wicked, and male, and so the song clearly references me.

There's also a subtle reference to another Biggie song -

"He's gonna be a bad boy."

However, Christine is certainly wicked, arguably malevolent, totally indifferent to the fact that I'm married, and it therefore fits well with her character as well, in part in title, not in substance, since she is clearly a woman.

Deja Vu

This is wonderfully self-explanatory, and oddly enough, the image of the video on YouTube looks exactly like what I imagined for Christine's character -

A Swedish Ava Gardner.

Just Ride

This is intended to suggest that the environment is pointing me into indiscretion, that I should, “Just Ride”, as if Christine had selected the song, and is seducing me through it, though my conduct suggests that’s not likely to happen.

The song is also intended to convey my non-zero temptation, as she is incredibly beautiful, and aggressively interested.

I am aware that I say, “which I like” , in a few scenes, but there’s no deliberate connection -

You could argue it means I’m thinking of Ida, having just seen a work of art that references our relationship, but that was not my intent.

You could perhaps argue it means the song is somehow like indie beer?

Clark is definitely indie, and music is intoxicating, but, no -

It doesn’t mean anything at all, and it’s just how I talk in real life, and I actually like the song, and beer, and Varvatos, and Ida, so, there it is.

The deliberate symbolism in the text is fairly overt, e.g., using the color blue to convey the concept of the light of ideas, or bronze to convey motherhood -

This kind of thinking can always go too far, and the Mø sequence is intended to make fun of over-analysis, but it’s also a natural part of literary analysis, and I don’t want to tell people how to think, even about my own work, but I have no problem telling people what I actually meant:

It means I like the song.

Finally, there is a reference in the lyrics to discussion without words, so I thought the song was an excellent fit for the scene overall, since there’s clearly quite a bit of communication through music in the scene between Christine and myself -

He also says, “baby”, repeatedly, so, that’s obviously an in.

Trap Queen

The title, “Trap Queen” itself works for the scene, though not the song on substance, and actually sets the stage for a fantastic misunderstanding:

Christine thinks I acknowledge the song, because I like her, whereas I think she looks at me, because she’s admitting that she’s a trap -

We split the title of the song, I take, “Trap”, she takes, “Queen”, causing both of us to look at each other, creating perfect misunderstanding, given the same set of environmental facts.

This is something I allude to several times -

The news coverage of the Andreas sequence;

Thai food;

The Mø misunderstanding.

The general point being that having the same information could still lead to errors, if you don’t share a context.

It also alludes to the power of art, which is to create a shared context for life itself.

This is why I wrote this story:

It’s for every American, precisely because the breadth of genres addressed is insane, and deliberately pedagogical in drafting, allowing anyone to simply pick up the book, and learn about everything, from information theory, acoustics, Zen Buddhist theories of psychological well-being, to Ravel and Fetty Wap, all in about 200 pages, while unconsciously learning about Scandinavian culture, which is a part of the world I think Americans could learn from, despite the fact that they’re obviously basically all about as white as you can get -

They take care of each other, and don’t fight over nonsense, which is something that Ida and I are supposed to represent as a couple throughout the text.

Paper or plastic?

Who gives a shit -

We’re speeding home, because car, baby powder.

My opinion is that American life is deliberately over-complicated, to ensure that we fight over nonsense, because it makes the U.S. less competitive economically, and that if instead every American knew they’d be cared for, the way

they are in Scandinavia, life would get a lot simpler here, just like it is there.

Let You Know

I knew I wanted a London Grammar remix for the scene, and when I was listening to, “Let You Know”, I said to myself, I know her voice, but I don’t know the song, and instantly realized, that’s the story of the sequence -

It’s the same ghost from my past, and so I leave.

Said otherwise, I’ve been with this woman before, in different forms, and though I don’t know this particular person, I know where my time with her goes, because I already know who she is, in some sense. †

Musical references

Note that song titles are hyperlinks

1. Elton John, [“Your Song”](#) (1970). †

Sketches of the Inchoate

Seeing

What I've found,
Inside my mind,
Has found its own way out -
Its own path through time.

It bounced back round to me,
Like moonbeams from the Sun,
Round like echoes,
Mirrored by your minds -
Sights and sounds of your designs.

Like morning's light on tired eyes,
It wakes me up,
All at once.

Diffraction breaks distraction's rut -
We've found our way out,
Now it's obvious.

The path is long,
Though its end is clear -
A home for us -
Better suited there.

Bright, diffracted morning Sun,

Cuts through curtains towards our eyes,
Illuminates the way out,
Showing that which must be done. †

Sketches of the Inchoate

For America -

If you disappoint me,

I swear to God,

I will find a way ... †



My playlist for Ida

The story is ultimately told from my perspective, arguably even when told from the third-person, because I don't claim omniscience, and make errors, suggesting I don't have perfect information -

For example, the scene with Christine.

To provide more depth of character, and as an experiment of art, I've put together a playlist that follows roughly the development of Ida's character, throughout the story, transitioning from having a secret, confronting trauma, to ultimately motherhood, and grace -

The moments when she stares out windows, singing to herself.

What I imagine happening in those moments, is the future singing to Ida, causing Ida to sing along -

That Ida can hear her future children singing to her, at times, from a point in the future itself, pulling her toward the realization of motherhood:

Note that song titles are [hyperlinks](#)

1. Emilie Nicolas, "Nobody Knows" (2014).
2. Susanne Sundfør, arr. by Astrid Smeplass, "Delirious" (2015).
3. Röyksopp, "What Else is There?" (2005).
4. Petter Carlsen, "Pull the Brakes" (2008).
5. Jónunn Vidar, arr. for Aarhus Girls Choir, "Vökuró" (1967).
6. Ola Gjeilo, arr. for Aarhus Girls Choir, "Ave Generosa" (2017). †

Her father's home

Make this one -

Everything you saw:

The wood, the stairs, the view on the fjord,

The boat, with the huge sails -

It's on its own, afterward.

You play it for Ida -

She knows Sigrid, though she doesn't know the song.

She expected teenybopper nonsense, but she loves this one.

Dad is tired, goes to bed;

Though you're an alcoholic, you love Ida, and can't sleep around her, because
you're always too excited -

Everything is so new, so you eventually become exhausted.

You're not drunk, because dad, but now, yes, a little bit, because he's out
of the picture, and he doesn't care -

He loves you.

You're sitting on the floor of his home, couch cushions on the floor;

You're drinking beer, she's drinking beer as well, and you're sleeping in this
room, because you're lazy, and because it's OK -

He doesn't care.

TV suspended, from a single thin mount, from the ultra-high ceilings, over-
looking Oslofjord.

You play the song, you made a little bed, out of cushions laid upon the floor,
and watch the music video, together.

You see neighbors across the fjord, turning lights on and off, going to bed, as
you see the tide, gentile, but churning, crashing up against the rocks, foaming,
up against the hill.

Stepping back, for a moment, realizing, how weird your life is -

A broke kid from Queens, in a rich man's home, in Oslo, Norway, why?

I grow certain, of myself, and less certain, of my story, with each moment that passes -

Ida is my point of access, to the life that was stolen:

My real family.

She makes sense -

My desperation, no one else makes sense.

She is missing information;

She is a shift in context;

She is my echo:

When I look at her, I know exactly, who I am.

...

Her father makes us breakfast in the morning, and I can hear the sizzle of a frying pan up the staircase, that he took the time to design, for them, for us, for the family he loves, because he really, does love us.

Note that this one is dynamite

1. Sigrid, "Dynamite" (2017). †

Infinito particular

You both made dinner, she's exhausted, because car, baby powder, the night before, but she's in the kitchen, with you, chopping things up -

Oysters, already shucked, about to be placed on a warm, smoke-filled grill, lined with woodchips, just for a minute, shells closed, already seasoned, with lemon and a touch of sea salt, that we plan to eat at room temperature;

Fennel salad, chopped grapefruit segments, olive oil, sea salt, with just a bit of goat cheese and mint thrown in;

For the close, a super fatty ribeye, we're going to split between us, also grilled, but at a high temperature, leaving the inside close to rare, with copious charring outside.

I'm pounding the leftover Mikklers, so I feel really fat at the moment, and we're definitely not staying up late after dinner.

The kitchen sink has a window just above it, that I've left open, overlooking the beach just beyond the house.

It's summer in Sweden, so the Sun never really sets, completely, and though it's not terribly late, the Sun is definitely on the decline for the evening, with the light in the kitchen primarily coming from the common area behind us, though the area near the sink and pale wooden counter beside it is lit from outside, through the window -

A bee comes flying in, and I see it land near the oysters, on the table behind us.

I completely lose it, scan the kitchen for a magazine, spotting some nonsense coupon circular -

I want to kill every bee that's ever lived, spending the last 30 minutes of my life, carefully preparing these things, to be grilled, for just a moment, so that I can be fat, for just a while, and truly enjoy my life.

Ida immediately intervenes:

"Charles! What is wrong with you? Just leave it alone."

"It's a bug."

"It's a bee, you moron -

Do you like honey?

Consider the source, and reflect upon what you're about to do."

Unfazed by her logic, I simply point at a random spot on the wall and shout,

"What's that?"

She turns to look, so I immediately take a swat, at the bee, but miss -

She hears the smack of the paper on the table, and turns around to see me, totally livid, holding the paper, just waiting to strike again, like it's the most important job in the world, both laughing and annoyed at me, at the same time, already walking towards me, she snatches the paper from my hand, and starts to hit me with it, as the bee takes off, eventually flying out the window.

...

We eat dinner on a blanket set up outside, just beyond the kitchen, on a small wooden porch, resting just a few feet above the sand below, tealight candles lit upon the blanket, Marisa Monte playing, "Infinito Particular" -

The clouds occasionally breaking, with the perennially setting Sun casting broken beams of red and orange throughout the sky, the subtle chill of a breeze enough to warrant sweaters, but not enough for long pants, leaving both of us beyond content:

We're close enough now that apprehension's faded -

The bee is long gone.

And in its stead, a pair of butterflies, lifting up, twisting up into the air, like a helix, as we stare, wondering whether there's a purpose, beyond our amazement.

Note that this one may require translation

1. Marisa Monte, "Infinito Particular" (2006). †

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Sketches of the Inchoate



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