

Sketches of the Inchoate

Black Tree



By Charles Davi

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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.