

Ev'ry Little Thing

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Manic Pixie Daydream

Long after changing majors I still played in the band, sang in the chorus, and occasionally took music classes, racking up a credit hour here and there and always earning an A. I also earned spare money accompanying my brass playing friends on their required recitals. So I spent a good deal of time in piano practice rooms.

Thus incompletely weaned from my former major, on Monday of the last week of sophomore year classes I passed through the lobby of the Fine Arts building. Its atrium featured a 20-foot-high glass wall and colonnades resembling Lincoln Center. Inside, the polished stone walls of the lobby framed the doors to a small theater.

In front of those lobby doors a card table was set up with a boom-box playing bucolic renaissance flute duets. Beside it a carefully hand-lettered sign entreated: “For Sale – Flute Duets – \$2.00.” A young woman doing a fundraiser for the Flute Club sat at the table, selling them like singing telegrams. “Buy a flute duet!” she demurely barked. “Surprise your boyfriend or girlfriend!”

People were buying them.

I thought it would be amusing if someone were to sell singing telegrams that weren’t anywhere near so peaceful. Someone who had time on their hands. Someone already extraordinarily well-prepared for the next week’s exams in music history, macroeconomics, introductory physics and pre-calculus. *But who could that someone be?*

After class I went back to White Hall to create a mix tape from a recording of ethnic music I bought for last year’s music appreciation course. I found a leftover piece of white poster board and wrote in ugly block letters:

“FOR SALE – Apache Rain Dances – \$2.00”.*

* Respect for indigenous populations had some ways to go back in 1980.

Wednesday morning. The last Music History lecture session of the semester was at 11:00. At 9:45, in time to catch students arriving for their ten o'clock classes, I set up my own boombox on the same little table in the lobby of the Fine Arts building; propped up my little sign; turned on this dreadful caterwauling; and waited for reactions.

Students flowed steadily out from their nine o'clocks and in towards their ten o'clocks for most of 15 minutes. Some sneered at my desperate efforts to attract attention. Most people laughed. I wasn't the only one who thought the Flute Club display was chuckle-worthy.

The right hand side (going in) of the Fine Arts building was the music department. The left hand side was *art* Arts, like painting and sculpture. I sat at my little table, the disembodied Apaches continuing to shriek out of the speakers, when out from the Art side walked this tall girl in a dark purple ankle-length skirt dotted with Hindu "om" symbols, her white puff-sleeve button-down shirt tied at the collar. Lacking book bag, she toted whatever she was carrying in a large circular hat box.

"Ooh! What have we got here?"

I thought at first she must be an instructor. There was no way a college student in 1980 Virginia would be dressed and accessorized in 1969 Woodstock couture. But the smoothness of her skin and the inquisitive abandon with which she carried herself chased that assessment from my mind. She flaked off from the parade of students exiting classes on the Art side and approached the source of the Indian drumming and howling.

I dropped my eyes back to the textbook I was reading and got back into character, playing the part of a bored sales clerk apathetically awaiting customers. I fully expected her to keep moving on. But no. She tarried.

I looked up, surprised to see a new face and unfamiliar form after spending a fair chunk of the last 20 months in this building. She had long brown frizzy hair, round hips, and striking Semitic features.

“Do you do these dances in costume?”

That I didn’t expect. “We could, I guess.”

“Oh, so it’s more than one person. What if I want to buy a rain dance for two different people in the same building? Is that \$2.00 each or would the second one come at a discount?”

Against my better judgment I played along. “Uh, where are we talking about?”

“Converse,” she said. Converse Hall was an old bluestone girls dorm. With only weekend visitation, it was usually called Convent.

She put down the hat box and began reaching into her purse. Before she pulled out money, in so doing creating a contract whereby I would have to do a rain dance somewhere at Convent, I had to think of something. But before I could formulate a response she said, “One other thing. Do I get my money back if it doesn’t rain?”

Holy crap. Was this chick sober? I put it to the test, telling her: “If it doesn’t rain within four weeks, you get a full refund.”

She was about to hand over a couple of dollar bills, then stopped short again. “Hmm.” She spoke haltingly but plainly in earnest. “As long as you’re offering guarantees, how about...say! Can you do a fertility dance instead?”

I could no longer keep pace with her, not unless I stopped thinking. I disengaged my reflective critical mind and followed wherever this Dadaist damsel would lead.

“Well,” I said. “We *could*. Bear in mind our fertility dance is only guaranteed to result in pregnancy. Not delivery.”

“Darn. Well, can you at least guarantee a boy?”

“Depends what you’re trying to achieve. Does your dynasty require a male heir, or are you just trying to avoid being drafted?”

“Among other things, yes,” she replied. “Avoiding the draft, I mean.”

I looked around. The lobby by now was practically empty. Everyone coming or going to class had disappeared into their holes.

“Well,” I told her, “I would recommend instead of going the fertility dance route, how about we line you up with our partner organization: The Midnight Cowboy Draft Avoidance Service.”

“And *that’s* guaranteed?” Her smile abruptly shifted to a frown. “Hey wait a minute! They aren’t drafting women, are they?”

“Hey, *you’re* the ones who wanted equality!”

“You have a point there. So...you got any 8-by-10 glossies of your midnight cowboys?”

I winked. “They’re all out sick at the moment. Except for me of course.”

“In that case, let’s just settle for the rain dance.”

I pouted. “Damn! Came *this* close!” With that, I pressed the STOP button, cutting off my Apaches in mid-ululation.

“What did you do that for?” she protested. “I was enjoying that!”

I gravely unplugged the boombox, grabbed my FOR SALE sign, and carried them to a black leather upholstered couch pushed up against the side wall of the lobby. “I have to stop selling these.”

“*Why??*”

“Because somebody actually tried to buy one.”

I sat beside my stuff, crossed one leg and set my physics textbook against it to read. She gathered up her things and sat next to me. We both sighed, then remained silent for a minute or two.

I thought... “Money back if it doesn't rain.”

I shut my book. “Who *are* you?”

“Imogene Klaben.* And who would you be, selling Indian rain dances? A boy named Sioux?”

* That much made sense. She definitely didn’t look like a Mary Jones.

“Quill Magnuson.” I put out my hand. She shook it. “What’s in the box?” I ventured.

“This? This is my sculpture project,” she said as she uncovered it and slowly raised it up. It was a mobile crafted out of half inch copper pipes, twisted steel cables, troll dolls and handmade cabbage patch kids. She explained that actual Cabbage Patch® dolls would have made her work of art cost thousands of dollars minimum. Suspending the entire monstrosity just high enough that the bottom didn’t touch the floor, she eagerly asked, “What do you think?”

I scrambled to come up with something pertinent to say without giving in to the temptation to savagely criticize. “I think you should call it ‘Alexander Calder and She Answered.’”

She smiled, carefully lowered it back into the box, and sat back down.

We proceeded to talk about everything and nothing.

“You know what’s always bothered me?” I said. “People referring to Paul McCartney and George Harrison as ex-Beatles. But nobody refers to Ray Manzarek as an ex-Door.”

“Who’s Eric? Is there a superhero named RayMan who has a sidekick named Eric?”

RayMan’s Eric. Cute. “Actually, he’s the organ player for the Doors. Maybe they should have renamed themselves The Windows after Jim Morrison made his exit.”

“I don’t know,” she said. “I think I’d prefer hinges to windows.”

“That might work. A delta blues rock group called The Hinges.”

“Or a stone group called The Henges.”

Thinks on her feet. Not bad. “Does anything bother you?”

She thought about it for a second. “I guess it would have to be that Hieronymus Bosch signed his paintings, so when you think about it he’s not Hieronymus at all.”

“Maybe he was secretly an alcoholic. So tell me: are you an art

major or do you just put dolls into nooses as a hobby?"

Imogene took a deep breath and lay back deep into the couch. "I wouldn't want to be an English major – I question the morality of anyone who would conjugate in public."

"Well you wouldn't want to be an economics major either – we extrapolate without going to the restroom."

"Oh, then discipline is laxative in the Business School?"

"I always thought Art majors wanted to leave an impression on your mind."

"They can. So can a shovel." Her eyes suddenly brightened up. "Hey! That gives me an idea for a performance art piece. You put a shovel up your rear end and paint your body green to represent earth's environment, and the shovel represents how Man is depleting the planet's resources."

If this shift of topic was intended to vex me, it fell short. I merely commented, "Well, which end of the shovel goes into the ass?"

The energy left her face. "Maybe it's not such a good idea."

We didn't say anything for a minute. There was something rare and special going on. It was not an *uncomfortable* silence.

"So you *are* an art major."

"This thing," she said, nudging the hat box with her toe, "is just for fun. My concentration is printmaking. Long-term goal's an MFA from either UNC Chapel Hill or Ohio State."

At last, a statement that wasn't a joke.

We went from comfortable silence directly into comfortable serious conversation. She elaborated on where she hoped to fit in the design world. I explained my major, how I was making use of the music courses for creative purposes, and my ultimate goal of working for the Federal government.

The next silence took on a different aura. Part of me took notice that this was a *young woman* I was talking to. With a quick glance I

sized up how much chest was hidden behind that white button down shirt. Didn't seem like much. For once it didn't matter much either.

"There's math involved in printmaking, right?" I said.

"Some."

I pulled out a blank sheet of paper. "Check this out." I wrote:

$$x = 1 \quad y = 1$$

$$x = y$$

"Given that X and Y are both one. So we multiply both sides by X..."

$$x^2 = yx$$

"...then subtract Y squared from both sides, then factor them out..."

$$x^2 - y^2 = yx - y^2$$

$$(x+y)(x-y) = y(x-y)$$

"...then divide both sides by X minus Y, and we're left..."

$$(x+y) = y$$

$$2 = 1$$

"...with this. Two equals one."

She took the sheet and scrutinized my work. Her index finger hovered from line to line, variable to variable.

"Quill. You know what this means?" she said, eyes widening.

"It means there's an error somewhere in the formula," I said in a low voice.

"No, it means every number is *every other number*." Serious conversation – out the door. "Which therefore means," she continued, words accelerating and tone rising, "given a coordinate plane on which we can exist in three or more dimensions –"

"– including time –"

"– any of the coordinates are simultaneously any *other* possible coordinate," she said, smiling madly, expecting me to say the next line.

“Therefore,” I said deliberately, grasping for a logical continuation, “we are everywhere at once...?”

“...time is meaningless...”

“...we’re all moving at the speed of light...?”

“...and we are gods!” she concluded triumphantly.

I had to correct her. Force of habit. “Gods *and goddesses*.”

“Do YOU want to be a goddess?” she said haughtily.

“Hell no,” I had to admit.

One of the glass front doors opened. A short young man with long wavy brown hair walked in, saxophone case in hand.

“Well neither do I,” she said with disdain. “I want to be a god.”

“Speak of the devil.”

“Okay. The devil has horns and claws and a tail – “

I shushed her. “Mr. Chaz Silverman,” I called out, standing up.

“Mr. Quill Magnuson.”

“May I present Ms. Imogene Klaben.”

“I give up,” he said. “*May you* present Ms. Imogene Klaben?” Chaz shook her hand anyway.

“You’ll have to excuse Chaz here; I taught him everything he knows about manners. My good woman, would you like to explain to him the good news of the miracle formula we have discovered?”

Imogene took over. When she was done walking Chaz through the scribbled equations and elucidating their divine implications, he began to slowly spin. His eyes and jaw pointed towards the heavens. His arms stretched out in beatific vulnerability and acceptance.

I cried out: “Can you even begin to comprehend the practical consequences!?”

Chaz’s hands fell to his sides. “Well for one thing, it means every man has two cocks!”