

[C#]

*(chapters I - III)*

Fragments of a Novella

By

“Ching Rien”

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*Translated from the French by Hailey Lynch-Bastion*

## I.

### **An Introduction, Decidedly *Not* In C#**

“Oh, you poor thing,” was the mantra the woman awoke to. Some damp, warm entity was dripping slobber down her face from her forehead, running down her neck, pooling in the dent between her collarbones, and she was flat on her back.

“Oh, you poor, tortured boy,” came the chant’s sole permutation, and with it a further regaining of the senses. Some Other Thing weighed heavily upon her, obstructing her vision; the realisation of which brought her just enough frustrated vitality to mutter,

“Not a boy, you disembodied cunt.”

A gasp from the unseen was quickly followed by a shout.

“Fen! The wretched thing is awake,” said the voice, with the jubilant tone of carrion having found fresh carcass to consume. Shortly thereafter sounded an asynchronous metal cacophany not far off, replete with a hoarse yet hearty, “Fuck me!”

Rather concerned by the whole affair, she attempted to reposition herself defensively. However, having exhausted her store of stamina with defiant vulgarities, she slumped back into

unconsciousness. Sitting next to her on what was a mouldy twin-sized mattress, with a look of concern, was Gil Amante.

“Never mind...asleep again...but breathing steadily, my Fenix.”

“That’s to be expected, having gone through such an ordeal,” came a rich voice from just outside the room.

Turning the corner with an aluminium crutch and black duster came Pierce-Fenix Delugé, a man who towered above most in both height and intellect. The duster hid an amputated leg, and swept the floor with every crooked step. His teeth were perfectly straight, yet yellowed from tobacco & neglect; his hair was thick, slicked back, and blonde. His eyes were heterochromic, one blue and one brown; they quickly scanned the unconscious woman before settling on his beloved Gil.

Gil was three-quarters of a metre tall, strangely muscular, and with piercing eyes of brown flecked gold. His left hand, as well as his entire right arm, were gone; his left arm was patting a waltz on the wet cloth adorning the woman’s forehead. He was entirely hairless save some rather thin eyebrows, and on his head he wore the repurposed pillow of a ring bearer, a muted mauve cushion secured by a padded leather strap bolstered around his chin. For the rest of his clothing he wore naught but skin-tight short shorts and a pair of stained long socks.

“Decided to kick over half the kitchen on your way in, didjeh?” he chortled. A grin and swift reply from Delugé:

“Yes, actually, for I’m worried my football technique is beginning to grow dull. You wouldn’t mind picking that up for me, would you?” Another chuckle from Gil.

“Perhaps in a mo’, but I’ve got my hands full tending to the lass.”

“Why yes, of course...Her. How is our mysterious mademoiselle?”

“Her fever is down, blessed be, and during her brief moment of lucidity it seemed she has sass to match us, comfort that is.”

“Indeed, that is a comfort.” A deep sigh.

“Well then, let us retire for the eve, and pray she not awaken us with the screams of the damned.”

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Delugé awoke on the queen bed opposite his patient's to find her huddled in the corner of the room, shivering intensely and half-heartedly pawing at her bandages. Greeting the pale pink hues of the rising sun with two fists and a yawn, he said, “My darling, either you’re nearly frozen to death, or you’re screaming ‘help’ in Morse code.”

“I would be lying if I said it wasn’t a combination,” came her response, soaked in both stress and strength, yet with an undeniable air of underlying apathy.

“Where am I? Who are you? Why are my eyes bandaged? What, uh... what’s happening?”

Delugé, grabbing a moth-eaten blanket and his crutch, hobbled towards her.

“First things first, ma'am, you're fucking with the worst application of gauze I've ever done, so please refrain - oh, and do forgive me for the mediocre job, I was not quite sober at the time and didn't expect to have to be, well, anything above slightly cognizant - refrain from adjusting it thoughtlessly." He wrapped the blanket around her and guided her to her bed.

"To answer your questions, to the best of my ability and in reverse: I've just woken up to an unholy craving for some Irish creme & nicotine, with your sorry ass in a corner, and that’s as far

as my knowledge of 'what's happening' extends at the moment. Your eyes aren't bandaged, but removed, as we found you in the street, unconscious and de-balled; the bandages are either to help your wounds heal, or because we're in that accursed America during Fashion Week and you'll be on Runway J. As to who I am and where you are - I am Pierce-Fenix Delugé, and you are in the house I share with my other half, Gil Amante, who should be waking any moment." He spoke rather swiftly for somebody who, just moments before, was being coddled in the dual embrace of Hypnos & Nyx.

"I know it must be terrifying, having to trust somebody you've only met for the first time immediately after a tragedy befalls you, but you'll soon learn that your two captors - I kid! - have also had their physiques altered by the hands of odd fate. You shall find nothing but the warmest of companions in us."

After a minute of silence, les aveugles spoke up.

"How do...I mean...do you know how I lost my eyes?"

"I'm afraid not, my dear." Delugé's voice rose to meet hers in the vast nothingness of her vision.

"Do you not remember?" She shook her head, slowly. A sly smile formed on Delugé's lips, unseen by his conversational partner.

"Well, that's not so bad, is it?"

"And how do you figure that?"

He couldn't resist a chuckle. "I suppose, narratively speaking, it's essentially an indication that you're the heroine of the story - it basically suggests an amnesiac archetype, who must undergo a series of ordeals before their memory is regained in the third act - generally as a point of contention that resolves in the fourth."

She stuck out her tongue and said,

“Who would read horseshit like that?” The reply was astoundingly quick.

“Well, it’s not like you even have the option anymore.”

The atmosphere in the room changed instantaneously to that of the nano-second before The Big Bang. Then - howls of laughter from the pair that stretched into infinity, a tessellation that rebirthed the universe and held it anew. It also served to irritate Amante into consciousness, which led to him hurling obscenities at the gods of this new universe, which did naught but double the strength of the howling, as they found absurdity in his enraged corpulence.

However, it’s purity & beauty were such that even he, who had become La Colère de Le Monde, soon submitted to the power of the eternal sound, and began aiding in it’s production. After some time, Gil spoke through waning giggles.

“What’ve we tossed our marbles fer?”

“The phrase is ‘lost our marbles,’ Gilly,” began Pierce-Fenix, “and to be frank, we were laughing at the fact that she’s blind.”

“You may have lost them, I chose to throw them out.” Gil had grown grumpy again. “Anyways as regards her plight, you don’t exactly have a leg to stand on, d’yeh?”

“A fair point, if I’ve ever heard one -but as a matter of course, I do in truth need one - or rather two - legs, I mean. I believe it would benefit us all if I prepared some sustenance, would it not?”

A growl from Fenix's stomach mid-sentence accentuated his point.

His companions grunted and nodded in agreement. Amante slid off the bed, walking over to Delugé, who had grabbed Gil’s rather unique hat from the table dividing the space between the beds. Placing it upon his lover's head with something akin to reverence, he attached the clasps

under Gil's chin and stood up, the stub of his leg resting on the pillow. Delugé looked toward the blind woman and said, "Well, if you would be so kind as to take my hand - it's right here, darling - we shall lead you to the dining room - same room as the kitchen - and have a feast." His brow furrowed.

"By the way - it seems preposterously rude that I haven't yet asked - what is your name?"

She grabbed his hand and stood proud, though not without the slightest of tremors, declaring,

"Mat. My name is Mat Gemeaux."

And with that they walked, all together in the rhythm of a glorious waltz, to the next scene.

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They dined together, cross-legged save Delugé, around a low square table painted in a wild array of colours. The paint chipped off at frequent intervals made it look somewhat like a desecrated Pollock, repurposed for practicality. On top sat two empty wooden bowls & spoons, exquisitely carved; the men shared one set, as Delugé worked the utensil for Gil. Satisfied with their meals, they sat in silence, punctuated by naught but the rotating suction of their lips over a bottle of Irish creme.

A many few tastings of *elixir vitae* later, conversation began to wind its way through the molecules of the room again - an endless game of snake making pit stops at gas stations where the hoses dispense only empty air, devoid of any Breath of Fire, Breath of Life, Breath of

Liberty, et al. Of course this lasted only until the hemipenes found stimulation, and between the three snake-holes, it took very little time at all.

These Three Quings, the most beautiful trio this narrator hath ever laid eyes upon, soon settled upon a subject. Mat was rather curious as to the circumstances revolving around her companion's 'lost pieces'; she desired elucidation upon the matter, and by God, she would get it. "Prenez garde à l'eau!"

Delugé poured a belligerent amount of drink into Amante's eager orifice, an incestuous mother bird providing nourishment to her child. Wiping his mouth on Delugé's shoulder, whereupon a napkin had been draped ceremonially - a tradition that the bourgeoisie would find disgusting in its pragmatism, but that the pair found to be a bonding ritual - Amante slurred warmly.

"So, speaking of historical grotesqueries, which of us'll divulge'r or'gins to th' lass first?"

Pierce-Fenix emitted a chuckle.

"Let's you go first - the story is shorter - or at least the subject is - and more colourful than mine, anyhow. Allons y!"

"Yessir, doctor," came the reply.

## II.

### **Le Cirque Compact, ou L'Histoire de Gil Amante Pt. I (Translated Into Sober Speech For The Benefit of The Reader, But Most Particularly For Me, The Beleaguered Writer)**

“Let us begin, as magick rabbits transmute food into spirits. I was born some twenty-six years ago, at the end of the war and the beginnings of Dada, to a family I have never met. It was on a cloudy, rain-soaked, purple skied day that I was delivered unto my surrogate fa-”

His sentence was cut off by Gemeaux, incredulous.

“Okay, hold - hold on - hold on- hold on! How do you know the meteorological situation of a day you can't possibly recall?”

“Well, first off, through God all things are possible, so jot that down,” Amante snorted pejoratively.

“Mais pour être honnête, I was just peppering in some colour to spice it up for a fuckin' *blind* person.”

The air in any other room would've become tense at such a point, but this was no regular congregation. Even though it had been less than 3 hours since the primary cast assembled, a bond of - shall we say - metaironic dickishness, had already formed between the three. They ate each

other's sass as the Americans do during their music festivals. Chortles laced the room how autumn leaves sound after a deep sniff of ether.

"A little on the nose, but good enough," came the response from Delugé, wiping alcohol from his partner's face.

"That's our thing, the Belgian Dip." Amante hated comparisons.

A quick bout of silence, like John Cage as nightcore, followed. Gil coughed and continued.

"Anyways - I came down in a bubble-dog, wearing a crown. I was delivered unto my surrogate father by my progenitor. Son faux nom était Terri Charqueue, purveyor of oddities in excess, referred to in nationalist papers as 'The Mastermind Behind The Compact Circus'.

An astoundingly rotund man, it seemed as though his albino skin were stretched taut across his musculature, revealing the veins beneath to all unfortunate enough to be in proximity to he, the monstrosity. Not due to his visage, mind you, but due to his mind - For you see, he was indeed a monster, neurotic to the utmost and absolutely apathetic to anything but his francs. His neuroses mostly manifested in two ways: his obsession with what he termed 'Swift & Efficient Execution,' and his habitual Sharpening of all sharpenable things.

This habitual filing of tooth & nail recorded itself in the mouth of Terri and on the tusks and claws of the animalia, and the fancy for quick precision was not the same that one finds in the engine of a surgeon, but one fueled by malice and contempt. I imagine that if there were to have been made an x-ray of his brain, it would look as the machine of Kafka's Penal Colony - without the benefit de tatouages fantastique accompanying his pulp. He oft would leave le cirque

to be entertained by the guillotines in what he termed '*la danse de le lame*', being particularly ecstatic upon witnessing the death of Marie-Louise Giraud.

Efficient to the last, he did not cry out against her angel-making, but rather it was her 'inefficient disposal of perfectly good meat' that he found despicable - it was even rumoured by the circus crew that he tried to sneak away her head for soup stock when it rolled into the crowd, hence his ardent jostle for a front-of-stage position. It seems a non-sequitur, but to that point, let me speak of our elephants.

We had three; a male, a female, and their child, mon femme fatale. The mother we called Cioran, the young'un Evelyn Dresden. The father was called Sol Horse; he was barely more than a stud, a spermatozoic Pez dispenser to Charqueue. Evelyn was the only one used in the act, the mechanics of which I shall expound upon in roughly three pag-

"Let's try and calm it down - the meta-commentary, I mean - you're going to alienate our audience, who are no doubt the bastard spawn of fickle aristocrats." Delugé pawed at Mat half-heartedly, leading her to say,

"Oh, don't mind me. I don't even exist. *Ex nihilo*, they call me."

Amante broke into a half-visible grin.

"Who calls you that? You've regained mem'ry?"

His small smile was balanced by her larger frown. "No, I was just making a stupid joke, or in other words, I was imitating your speech. That being said, a single memory does now come to mind." Alcoholic sips all around.

"Please enlighten us, mon amor," said Delugé after a particularly large pull from the bottle.

"Well, it's not much, and it's rather recent..."

Eyes sharpened, honing in on the poor beleaguered woman, the men exclaiming in unison, “Do tell!” A snigger. “It’s just that I remember calling you a cunt in my delirium, Gilly-Suit, and having heard you speak for longer than the left leg on Fenix, I’m inclined toward finding my first impression accurate.”

Delugé fell to the floor in appreciative hysterics, and it took several minutes for him to regain his composure. When his laughter subsided, Amante was bade continue in his fancies by his cohorts. The instigator of the ruckus was quite enthusiastic. “I solemnly swear not to interrupt again - and in all twenty hours of my memory, I’ve never broken a promise!” This was answered with an exaggerated cough from Gil, who segued thusly:

“Ahem. Line!”

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“Charqueue was a horribly practical man, exploiting those he felt he reigned above with an ivory-flecked whip. You see, he was most particularly fond of ‘fine tuning’ the tusks of Sol Horse & Evelyn. He would sweep the shavings off the ground after filing their ivory and have them woven into a whip, composed almost entirely of the finest from his collection shaved hair - that way, he could always claim he suffered as much as his lessers, if not more, for he was the one who hand-braided the whip. Whenever he punished us with its lashes, he would make a point of telling us how much it had cost him - how much he suffered to get us to where we were. Where we were, of course, was at best a lice-lycée, but realistically we were in the heart of

darkness, with nary a tribe to save our ship. That is to say, nobody was coming for me, and indeed it was Fenix who came first, and that after quite a while.”

The dull thud of a steel-toed boot hitting genitalia rang out in Mat’s ears. A hollow groan immediately followed.

“Poor Cioran, the mama mammal, was forced into pregnancy at every junction. After fifteen months each womb was forcibly ruptured and the child aborted, to become the basis of our meals for the next year or so. Economical, and it bothered nobody save Cioran...but nobody seemed to give an iota of a fuck for her. She wasn’t human! And the general sentiment around the circus was that humans and animals were distinct for a reason - God chose whom was below the other.

Her first child was kept, of course. As you will learn, the circus tent could not contain a full sized elephant with everything else happening on the ground floor, and Charqueue’s ‘Efficiency’ demanded a diminutive employee, as to increase perceived productivity. That elephantine child was Evelyn. She was kept across the dust trail, eleven metres to my cage, and we spent many a day staring into each other’s eyes. She was my first love.

My cage was a mere metre high, and the many years I spent housed within it irrevocably altered my stature. I am not sure whether I would be much taller had I slept in a bed during my formative years, but I am of the opinion that the clowns with cots placed on top of the cages were not much more pleased than I. We all paled in the light of Charqueue’s luxurious lifestyle - an atrocity of gluttony even during such frivolous times as L’Années Folles, but with none of the panache exuded by even the most bourgeois of Parisians - and were hidden from view of the general public with a mass of tarps all painted to resemble the flag.

To count the cast & crew, who were one in the same, excluding our *Chōjin* captain: three elephants, six clowns, one black bear, and me. The bear was a nameless beast with whom Charqueue exchanged a free-flowing hatred. The behemoth, referred to at best as a savage, was considered by Charqueue to be so senseless and violent that at all times it was sedated by a red-nosed lackey. The clowns ate up the anti-ursine vitriol, and I confess I myself did not escape unscathed by the claws of bigotry. It has taken many years to dismantle the disgust thrust upon my young psyche, and in all honesty I now find myself quite the bears' fan...to the jealous amusement of our ever-smooth Delugé, of course. It should be mentioned, though, that the bear and I shared only a single, powerful trait between us, in that I had been purposefully left nameless by my captor as well.

Our tasks in the performance proper were quite simple when taken as separate pieces. The bear balanced upon a red ball, mockingly reminiscent of his sedationist guard's accessories. The clowns threw themselves around, tossing perfectly fine food into each other's faces and toward the crowd, although somehow never reaching them with their projectiles - at the very least, I never heard a word of complaint either way. These actions and similar silly stock doings provided the general 'fuzz' prerequisite for circuscity. Evelyn had no particular task, save to be painted in atrocious swathes of neon and bandied about the ring like your common *fille de rue* by Charqueue's nightmarish weaponry. My assigned role was to walk the tightrope some thirteen metres above the ground with my nose in the air, imitating the crowd's middle-class temperament, whilst juggling three balls of ever-varying sizes. I was terrified by these heights, and unsure on my feet, but during the training in my youth I was force fed coffee and banned from the bathroom until I made it across the wire. This method, while admittedly

effective, had a rather predictable drawback: four times out of ten it resulted in a downpour of urine upon the clowns, and to my horror, Evelyn.

The guilt I felt at repeatedly defiling my love and humiliating her, involuntarily or not, was at first such that my right arm bore roughly two hundred jagged memorials to penance by the time it was taken from me. After a certain point, however, I began to imagine that maybe she enjoyed my impromptu showers; the act and subsequent recompense were seduced by pleasure, which slowly masked the pain. The clowns considered this entire process to be an unfortunate side effect of an otherwise flawless system. Charqueue cared not one whit what occurred, so long as our bodies squirmed on time in his festering gut of a tent. The bear was too busy with opiate withdrawals.

Now, the reason for the company's name, the selling point of our circus, was our speed. The show was a mere fifteen minutes long - thirteen on a good day, sixteen on a bad one - and we accomplished this by performing everything at once. The bear balanced, my darling Evelyn walked while Charqueue whipped & commanded; the clowns acted inane, and I walked back and forth upon the rope while juggling, all in a polyrhythmic grotesquerie that the spectators devoured.

We performed this show twice an hour for fifteen hours a day. It exhausted me physically, emotionally, psychologically. My only solace was the reciprocation of sadness from Evelyn as we exchanged looks through the bars of our cages. If only we could have been together more than once...I yearn for her, even now."

### III.

## A Body With Rotting Organs

The bottle had run dry.

“Well, thass m’ story fer now,” said Amante, “An’ t’be frank, I’ve hadda wreck the loo since I started speakin’. Fenix, darlin’, perhaps yeh wanna give our new sis’ a tour of the house while I drain m’ milk bag?”

“Yes, of course,” said Delugé. Grabbing his crutch and attaching Mat to his right side, he led her away. The house they occupied was one floor, with a basement, and derelict. A modestly sized building with wood flooring, it was easy for Mat to memorise the layout after a day or two. The trick, she found, was noting the variance in acoustics between rooms. The bedroom, for example, attached very little echo to the noises made inside due to the muffling effects of the beds and blankets, whereas what Delugé referred to as his workroom was furnished with a wooden desk set and hollow brass sculptures, which amplified the thud of typewriter keys upon paper.

Holes punctuating a rotting wall in the dining room occasionally yielded to ejaculatory bursts of wind from outside; this rattled the various skillets above the sink, dangling like the gutted carcasses of swine swaying on their hooks.

As this author is morally upstanding - a paragon of virtue - the ethical opposite of that horrid wretch, the Marquis de Sade - a martyr devoted to goodness, ready to swing in the gallows for purity - a worshipper of platonic idealism - a lover of the Christ - such a one as who would kiss the feet of a prison bishop - a redeemer of humanity's sins - one who would take the lashings of another with joy - a lighthouse of truth at the shore of disaster - a beacon of hope for the depressed & forsaken tossed about by the tumultuous waves of all existential horror - an eternal smile of conciliation, gazing from on high - the Hegelian synthesis of all things good & proper - such a one as who would rouse children from their nightmares with sweets & soothing sentiments - the human form of a weighted blanket - the human form of running water in a warm bath - the human form of the Tao - the human form of the Te - the defender of all that is holy against those whom would blaspheme in the temple - an icon of temperance, and whom would never say so - and above all, a living chastity belt - there shall be no coprophilic analyses now nor at any other point in this work, so we leave the bathroom and Gil's grunts in privacy. However enticing all this cataloguing had been to Mat Gemeaux, a significantly more thrilling discovery waited for her in the living room, and it is there that we pick up the plot.

Her first step into the room was met with a simultaneous sound, something like a hollow metal growl. Her second step was met in kind, and her third. By her sixth step the noise had swollen to such an extent that it was abundantly clear something large lurked in a corner, wary of the intruder. Another step - another growl. Another step - another growl, and then a pause in Mat's movement.

"Tell me, Fenix, what is making these frightful groans?" An overactive imagination had started taking hold of her, as Delugé could tell by her tone and sudden perspiration.

"Mon amour, you exaggerate. Resume our walk and I shall bring you to your yelping fiend. Treat it kindly and you shall be allowed to stroke its maw, whereas any unkind gestures will be met with unkind howls. Please, come with me!" Reluctantly she agreed, and their death march resumed.

After some few seconds of walking - an ordeal which Mat experienced as an eternity of torment, wherein she was forced to endure an exponentially deafening roar - she was brought to a stop and made to sit on a bench positioned in front of the beast. Taking her hand in his, Deluge spoke softly.

"I am going to place your hands upon it. Be not afraid of what happens next, for that is entirely up to you." Mat nodded fatalistically, prepared to lose her limbs for the sake of maintaining her courage.

"*Ars enim enuit,*" said Deluge. He set Mat's hands gently down on her terroriser, then pulled his own away, taking a seat next to her.

“Your fingertips are now poised to caress its teeth. Go ahead, poke the sleeping bear, and awaken the delicate lust of its insides, if you so desire. I myself profess a small amount of adroitness when it comes to such tasks.”

Now there is a phrase, oft used by femme d’âge moyen exchanging their gossips over arbitrarily expensive wines, which denotes happenings of a scandalous nature hidden from the world at large. The saying is ‘If walls could talk,’ and while it is true that the room in which Mat & Deluge sat lay silent, we have for ourselves the benefit of authorial omnipresence, and need not attempt to animate any architecture for answers as to what happened next. If Gemeaux still had eyes, they would have widened with shock, for once her fingers touched their target she instantly recognized the monster underneath. The absurdity of her previous fear gave way as a cliff does an ocean, collapsing into waves of familiarity & comfort, the splash of land meeting sea being an embarrassed giggle.

“Ah, enfoiré, we meet again,” said she to the piano. Without further ado she formed her right hand into an elegant claw and pressed upon the keys. Only one note made the sound she expected; the others were either strangled in their cribs or made but a brief cry for help when the hammer struck. Her brow furrowed in perplexion under her bandages as she tried repeatedly to sound various chords, eventually settling into a position of mild frustration with which her companions would soon become quite familiar.

“Not even half of the keys function properly,” she sighed, “and those that do are out of tune.”

Despite this lukewarm reception, Deluge was delighted.

“So we have ourselves a pianist! How fortunate, for your Wretched Beast has long been severely neglected.”

“That much is apparent, but with it in such a state it would be impossible to perform any songs with it properly.”

“But how about improperly? It seems to me that this poor instrument is kin to you and I, and to Amante - indeed, to all of us who are forced to adjust to atypical lack.”

Deluge adjusted his position on the bench, leaning back on the piano with an air of feigned nonchalance that was thoroughly betrayed by the enthusiasm of his speech.

“There is a certain set of freedoms to be found in restriction, of this I am most ardently sure. Par exemple, let us take the Lurian concept of *tzimtzum*. The Lord pulls back from space, creating a vacuum in which it can Become. It is the creation of an artificial womb which is then impregnated with potentiality - an organism which grows in a vacuum that subsequently becomes its body. By this alternating subtraction and addition is the universe made and sustained. In conjunction with this alluring concept set forth by the Jewish mystics, let us look into the words of Lao Tsu, who says in his “*Daodejing*” the following:

*Reversion to Non-Being produces the movement -*

*It works through frailty.*

*All the world springs from Being.*

*Being springs from Non-Being.*

While I am no doubt misinterpreting my sources, no Sinologists or Judaic scholars are present to correct me, so I shall carry on using these bastardisations to supplement my point.

It seems to me that it is most often through the near-infinite Potentialities inherent in all of Nothingness that Becoming occurs. The moment a concept achieves fixity in its Being is the moment that it dies - it ceases to Be and now only Was. For example, a plot of land is a fertile Body within which one could place any of a myriad Organs - a garden, an outhouse, a well, a mass grave, and so on. But once the land has become impregnated by the grave, that is what the land has Become, and continues to Become. Now, let us take this mass grave of ours and stuff it so full of corpses that there is no room left to fill. The grave can no longer function as a grave in Becoming, and ceases to Be - Its functionality destroyed by the action of functioning. At this point the grave has only one option - to return, in its death, to its primordial state of being, and to become once again a plot of land.

This return to Womb-hood is not a return to the original state of Womb-hood, however, as the bodies still decay in its dirt. As a matter of fact, it is true that this state between Post-Being and Pre-Becoming inhibits the amount and type of Potentialities available for rebirth, but this is to ignore the boon it gifts the Ingenuity of Creation. It may be, for example, that the land's next state of Becoming is as a garden or similar vegetative plot, but the corpses have utterly destroyed the chemical balance of the soil, so that no typical orchard of fruit trees could spring from its loins. This restriction of a particular subset of Potentiality is matched by the freedom given by its other possibilities, namely -

- a.) some other type of vegetation properly suited to the soil content grows, or*
- b.) a permutation off the blighted Potentiality is created, i.e. new, greater variations of fruit evolve that otherwise would not have Become.*

It is in the second possibility that our kinship with this corrupt piano resides.”

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A belch from behind the pair signalled the return of Gil to the party. Mixed in with the foul-smelling exhale that followed was a question.

“Shall we piggup where we lef’ off?”

“An excellent idea, my love, but first allow me to grab a bottle of brandy from the kitchen cabinet for us to drink here - I wouldn’t mind a little musical accompaniment to undercut the next part of your story - and the brandy will continue to calm my speech.”

“Ay, an’ make me spark slarpi...slotta...slop speakier.”

A sudden bout of hiccoughs assisted Amante with his speech not one whit, but did much to evoke laughter de son copains.

“Aptly put indeed, my love.” Turning to Mat, Deluge nodded before quickly remembering that she couldn’t see him, and would never see him. He proceeded to raise two fingers and feign poking out her eyes for his own amusement, afterwards hobbling off to acquire the liquor.

Amante walked over and sat down in the spot Fenix had just risen from, while Mat began the arduous task of discovering which notes on the piano were cognizant enough to be played without modification.

“Amazin’,” he declared while she parsed out the available chords, “Simply amazin’.”

“And what would it be that you find so amazing?” muttered a distracted Gemeaux between her ivory proddings.

“Th’ way ya touch the keys...it jus’ reminds me a’ strokin’ Evelyn’s tusks all those years ago.”

“Oh.”

Gemeaux didn't know how to respond and didn't wish to speak, so they sat silently until Deluge returned, brandishing his beloved booze. Opening the bottle and taking a pull, his face contorted first into a mockery of an Oni mask, then into the visage of a shipwrecked sailor.

Handing the bottle to Gemeaux, he wiped his mouth and said,

“You think I'd be used to the flavour by now, but every shot is perpetually the tearing apart of my innards by the maenads.”

Mat took a drink herself and then held the bottle out for Deluge to take back, remaining mute save for a slight cough after swallowing her shot. A frown had been creeping across her face for several minutes, and it took several more for the men to finally realize her melancholia, so caught up were they in their usual bacchanalia. Upon observing her sombre state, Deluge desired nothing more than the ability to kick himself. Similarly, Amante contemplated throwing fisticuffs with the identical twin he housed in his imagination. Gazing at Mat with a raised brow in invisible sympathy, Fenix spoke, although not without first taking another drink of liquor.

“This may well be a foolish query, but - are you alright, dear Gemeaux?”

She shrugged half-heartedly, exuding the type of sigh one's body reserves for the most grievous of sorrows.

“I am that I am; I am blinded and increasingly in pain. Please do forgive me my gloom.” Turning to Gil and wrapping her arms around him, she spoke again.

“Amante, do me a favour and continue your story, for I wish to hear of love, in a bid to uplift my spirits.” Gil motioned for Deluge to pour him another mouthful, and grew serious.

“Yeh may not get whatcher wantin' out o' this m' life, but I shall do as y'ask.”