HIC SUNT DRACONES
CHARLES

Still there?

I don’t know if you still use this number, but even though it’s been a while since we last talked, I dreamt about you last night

and I awoke, drunk with a strange certainty

I knew I had to write to you

to tell you about my life, to have you tell me about yours

for that is indeed the only source of meaning

two strangers, that seek to fool one another into intimacy

I now ask the only important question there is

I ask not if you suffer, for that much is obvious: we live, we suffer, these are but synonyms And so instead of asking if you suffer, I ask why you suffer

RHIA

Well, well, well, look what the cat dragged online! You couldn’t stay away, could you?

Interestingly enough, I have received a number of messages from people from my past these last few days

I guess it’s one of the secondary effects of covid: there is too much time now, people hoard time like they would gather goods during a famine… indeed, the past is invading, infecting the present

In fact, do you know how viruses work? They hijack the cell’s machinery and use it to reproduce their own genetic code instead of that of the cell. Viruses trick the cell into believing they are part of itself.

I guess we do that with lovers.

But Time works in the same way. It goes into us, infects us, makes us aware of its presence through terrible physical effects and finally discards us like a tissue. It needs us to live; without human beings, Time would not exist, at least, not as we understand it, for we wouldn’t be there to understand it
Whatever the reason, old friends now haunt the hallways of my mind; old flames burn me anew and people who once ghosted me come gliding though my corridors like specters, shrieking a blood-curdling cry: ‘hi we should skype soon, it’s been so long!’

But I shall stop soliloquising

HI! Good heavens, yes, it’s been so long

And yes, of course I suffer. Why, do you ask? Well, there are only three things that worry me immensely: the past, the present, and the future. But fix those three things, and I’ll be great, fit as a diffle

*A fiddle

Or a diffle, why not? Are diffles fit? What are diffles? What are words? What is anything for that matter? Are things

How are you? What makes you suffer

*?

C

Tk, only cowards proofread

I’m one step closer to Nirvana than you. I suffer not due to three things, but
two Myself

Everything else

But I have news: in the calm sea of my days, I have finally been able to fish out something other than the customary old boot. Like the fisherman in the Arabian Nights, I found a treasure that has hurled me into the whirlpool of life

R

Good heavens! What happen?

*happned

*Jesus Christ, happened!!!1!one!

Also kudos on respecting proper MLA citation guidelines in your texts: which begs the question, how do you set text in italics on Whatsapp?!

(This question is just as important as the one about your life)

Tuesday

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Today

3
R
harrumph

C
Oh my god, I cannot believe I forgot to reply!!one!
I swear I started typing out a reply but I just forgot to hit send

R
I’ll pretend I’ll believe that
But at any rate it is not to me that you should make your excuses; this is between you and god At any rate, I still want to know how you make the text appear in italics and you keep avoiding the question. Although my harrumph was in bold and the only thing I did was put asterisks around it, so it must be something like that

   Also, let me just say that it’s so strange talking to you again. I feel like we hit pause on our friendship five years ago, and nothing changed during that time, no loss of intimacy; I can still reveal the hidden treasures of my depths to you at the drop of a hat; but you’re a stranger now, you must be. You must have lived so much. Who are you WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE?

   But yes, so, what makes YOU suffer? What are your newts? You contact me, drop a cliff hanger at the end of your message, and suddenly the second season is cancelled. RUDE *news

C
My lack of salamanders is indeed deeply disturbing, and perhaps the root of all my sufferings Many a time have I said to myself, ‘Charles, you need to settle down and finally get a newt. It will solve everything’

   Unrelatedly, do you ever wonder if the medium is the message?
   But in other newts, and to everyone’s shock, I got myself a girlfriend

R
I have often found in life that the medium is the message, however hard we try to make it the message.

   Btw I like the fact that most people wouldn’t react to finding a romantic partner with quite that level of disbelief
C

Yeah, but most people aren’t cursed. Need I remind you that I hadn’t even kissed someone in the last 7 years?

I did tell you about the curse, I believe?

R

Do tell me about the curse. I’m eager to learn about the curse. What’s the curse *?

C

Something like seven years ago there was an earthquake and the pallid bust of Aphrodite that I kept just above my chamber door fell to the floor and broke apart. I had the augurs examine it and they predicted seven years of amorous disasters

R

Well, I believe that man is the architect of his own destiny. What did you expect? Should have bought a bust of Pallas, not Aphrodite.

*a pallid

C

No pallid bust of Pallas just above my chamber door. Nevertheless, there was one of Aphrodite, but it broke apart and not to be mélodramatique, (he said in gratuitous French—oh I live in France now, did I tell you?), but ever since, I have been cursed in love

Read: 12.00

Wednesday

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Today

C

Why hast thou forsaken me

R

I’M SORRY, I FORGOT TO REPLY. Or maybe I just wanted to give you a taste of your own medicine, as you forgot to reply last time. You’re a poet, learn to enjoy this bit of poetic justice. At any rate you should learn to find meaning in the suffering

There is so much of it, that you’ll never run out of meaning. You’ll certainly never run out of suffering. Voilà the elusive perpetual motion machine the world has been searching for since time immemorial.
Anyways, you’re in France you say? How Why You traitor! I’m still in the US; how do I get out its an emergency
*it’s.
I swear I know grammar.
See? I even added a period at the end of that sentence though some people consider it rude

C
Suffering to meaning…. interesting, but how to manage such alchemy?
And yes, I abandoned the sinking ship that is the US and I’m currently studying an MA in literature or whatever. But honestly, it’s more a master’s degree in Sightseeing and French Pastries. Lots of madeleines. Fun fact: the madeleine has a higher literature-to-butter ratio than any other dessert.

R
I’m on the bus, so let’s just get down to it, shall ew? Tell me about the girl.
*we

C
Well, I’m living in France, so I was more than ready to fall in love. You can say ‘ew’ now.

R
Ew.

C
One night I went to a concert. The concert hall was full of people in their 60s. A row behind me, there was a girl. I saw she was alone

R
Aren’t we all alone?

C
Don’t interrupt. I saw she was alone and though I normally would not have the guts to do something like this, I went up to her. Perhaps the overwhelming octogenarian component of the audience served as a *memento mori* to motivate me. (You can get italics by surrounding text with these little guys /* */) I asked who her favorite composer was. We started talking, about music, art. She told me music was the only art that is not imitative. It’s a symbol pointing to itself
Everything about it seemed so easy so natural with her so much so that I couldn’t understand why I struggled so much with love and romance these last few years.

R

That’s nice! Will you see her during the lockdown

C

Well, that’s just what I wanted to tell you. We’re kind of living together now

R

WHAT

C

SOo, we had been at a house party two weeks ago, before the lockdown. And three days later she started showing symptoms, confirmed covid. A day after, I felt like I had been hit over the head with a train; I got the test, and upon reading that I was positive I just smiled. It meant I could be with her.

I don’t know how we decided it, I don’t even know if we decided it. Perhaps it was simply the Invisible Hand of the Market that took care of things. She didn’t want to infect her roommates, so naturally we moved in together… after two weeks of dating

R

WHAT!

You just moved in with this random girl after seeing her for two weeks?

That’s so weird

So impulsive

So absurd

Soso much exactly what I’m doing right now. I just packed up my things. I’m moving in with my new guy. I’m tired of spending the quarantine with my parents. Funny how covid is forcing so many of us into positions of instant intimacy. I guess it’s the age of Mechanical Reproduction…

C

It’s the age of Nescafé.

Monday

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Today

7
C
How is married life? Also exactly who is this guy?

R
Well, I’m asking myself the same question. It’s… kinda weird?
   I’m realizing I don’t really know this guy. 😊
   And the worst part is that now he really gets to know me, which is scary.
   For both of us, probably.
Lmao
   But though I may not be able to tell you who he is, I can tell you what he is. He’s Greek. An exchange student at the university here, so our love is imbued with the tragic knowledge of death at the end of the semester, when he goes back to his country and stops stealing our women (me) and/or jobs

C
You must be really in extremis. This is the first emoji you have sent me ever. Yes, you realize you don’t know him. But we can never truly know anyone? Or the thing in itself for that matter?
   In a nutshell, it’s all a mirage.
   Everything is, so might as well push on.

R
Is the nutshell a mirage?

C
No, the nutshell is real. Perhaps it’s the only thing that’s real.

R
I’m still terrified he will know me.

C
Do not worry, there is no chance of this happening.

R
I’m all for the epistemological impossibility of knowing people.
   People should keep their things-in-themselves to themselves.

Friday
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8
Today

C

Any netws?

R

No netws. I’m pretty happy but I maintain some skepticism and reticence, otherwise I’d be too happy and I can’t be having that. I have to think of my brand, ya know?

C

*scepticism

R

Ah, that’s your brand.

C

AT any rate, what is it that makes you suffer specifically? Assuming you’re staying on brand, which implies a lot of suffering, you must be doing really great on meaning. Full tank, I assume?

R

What makes me specifically suffer is the fact that he’s a lot like my first ex. It’s getting quite strange, really; they have a similar voice, style and mentality on certain things. It’s kinda weirding me out.

C

Fear not, the Greeks tell us it’s impossible to bathe in the same river twice, so it’s probably nothing.

R

Well, asides from that, I’m pretty happy. He’s sweet and very good looking, which is problematic for me bc I like to look at his pretty face but I don’t want him to look at my face I should start lingering in doorways to take a peak

C

*a peek

R

Anyways, I’m also working on self-confidence, though talking to such a grammar nazi as you does not help. At any rate, I’m working on at least being at peace with myself, or a more nihilistic accepting that I’m flawed and not the perfect transcendent form I feel I have to be to be worthy.
It’s not going great as you can see but I’ve stopped barking at Chris when he makes me compliments, or at least I’ve stopped becoming immediately suspicious.

But it’s important to remain vigilant. You never know if your partner is only manipulating you with compliments to lull you into a false sense of security and steal your kidneys. Also, the language barrier is a bit of a problem sometimes.

C

Don’t worry. It took me years before I eventually accepted that I am a perfect, transcendental form. You’ll get there one day.

But speaking about the language barrier, it kind of led to my first fight with Isabell.

R

A misunderstanding?

C

Uh, no.

We actually fought about Shakespeare. Our relationship is very literary, you see?

R

How does one even fight about Shx? Oh. Oh, no. Please tell me she’s not a Baconian. You have to break up with her.

C

No, I just quoted something to her which she disliked.

R

What?

C

Well, we speak to one another in a mixture of imperfect English on her part and imperfect French on mine. You see what I’m driving at?

R

Mutually assured destruction?

C

I was trying to be cute and I said: ‘Come, your answer in broken music, for thy voice is music and thy English broken’
I choked

Funny joke, right? Well, she got mad. I thought she knew her English was broken; looks like she didn’t, but this small lovers’ tiff made me realize something big. I thought I would know how she would react when I made that joke. I thought I could anticipate her reaction

But now I realize that is not the case at all. It’s all a gamble. You cannot know people

Maybe you can know them synchronically, but not diachronically. That’s the hardest thing to understand about love. I personally believe that all the promises of eternal passion, the desire to melt into the other person, I believe all of this is real, but only in the moment, for an instant, only when it happens. People break up and think that everything that happened before was a lie. But it’s not. The forever that is promised is short-lived. It dies upon contact with air. That is all

You do know them for an instant, but the moment you observe them, they change, for time plays upon them, Tempora mutantur, after all

One way or another, your observation in itself changes them. Indeed, it is impossible to know the mass of mutability that is another person

Indeed, everything is incommunicable, but perhaps we can communicate that. I feel it the most at our most intimate moments. During love-making, there is a Dionysian madness that descends upon one, where the body rules supreme; but after such exhaustion, there follows a calmness, and as we stare into each other’s eyes I realize I have no idea who she is, no idea what she’s thinking

I stare into her big, ocean-blue eyes, and a single phrase comes into my mind: Hic sunt dracones, here be dragons, what ancient cartographers would write upon uncharted areas of a map. At those moments, as I stand in the evening light of her, I realize that I know very little about her. That even though I have explored her body and explored her mind, she remains terra incognita. And then I understand that the only thing we have in common, the only thing indeed that we can share, is our solitude. It’s the only part of her that does not cause me cultural shock, not because she’s French, but because she’s another human.

Yesterday, during one of those moments, she gave me a poem she wrote. It’s a sonnet, as like me, she does not believe in innovation of form
Inconnaisable

Distance terrible entre moi et les autres ;
Avec les mots d’un tout fictif langage
Je cherche toujours à découvrir ton être,
Mais je suis condamné à y faire naufrage.
En vain chaque fois que je regarde tes yeux
   J’essaie de pénétrer dans ta pensée
Comme un augure qui interprète les cieux
   J’y vois de tout et ma folie est née.
Comment te plaire quand on n’peut pas connaître
   L’essence fugace qui fait un moi d’autrui ?
   Ainsi tous mes espoirs vont disparaître
Même si tu m’aimes, c’est de l’idolâtrie,
   Car on est seul et tout amour est fou
Et chaque essai de nous connaître échoue.

What do you think?

Read 14:00