

I hope this will bring some comfort to you

By Joakim Dahlqvist

I feel a very familiar relation with you even though we have not met. Since it is likely that we will never meet I can be sincere, even intimate. I cannot assume that you have forgotten our mutual matters therefore I feel compelled to revisit some significant events (in retrospect they were detectable only by their subsequent effects). These are things I know first hand, the remainders are rumours well known to us both, for your benefit I have excluded all irrelevant details.

The airport was converted to civilian use nearly a decade ago. Since then the management have performed series of extensions and additions with admirable speed and generous budgets. Upon my arrival I am taken immediately to the press centre at the far west corner of the airport. It is one of the few buildings that disconnected from the vast amalgam of facilities and infrastructure.

It is a large room, perfectly square. A cobalt blue carpet spreads across the floor carpet which has a very slight inclination, invisible yet highly noticeable. The walls are white with a vague nicotine orange trim. A steel framed gypsum ceiling, fluorescent lights with bronzed mirror reflectors and louvers which gives a warmer tone to the harsh white light. There is a stage along the east wall facing west. It is built out of plywood, spray painted matt black and dressed in a red velvet skirt. On the left corner there is a clear acrylic speakers podium with an elegant microphone and a cigarette holder. On centre stage three very large leather chairs are arranged in an ellipse, white doilies with patterns of working people are draped over the armrests. Each chair has a matching foot stool and a dark oak side table with a drawer and low cupboard, a clever mechanism allows milk to be stored inside it for weeks without detriment to quality. Against the wall they have built a decorative backdrop which consists of a plywood frame and a red velvet curtain. The frame is part painting part sculpture part mission statement. The curtain has a modular system for letters and numbers that allow the organizers to announce the topic of the press conference, today the organizers have arranged the module letters to read: "Frank discussions promote the freedom of the people and the glorious future of mankind. Welcome International Delegates". The invitation I had received a month earlier read simply "There can be no responsibility without freedom". Facing the stage and rising along the incline a rigid formation of seats are filled with

local journalists. Behind them stand three camera crews; live feed, documentary, and archive. The live feed requires a small van to manage the satellite link and an operator. Documentary requires a narrator. Archive requires an official representative, several key members, a logger, and four random civilian witnesses. The team of translators are part of the airport staff.

I have been introduced to my translator; Baptist Yeo. It is not his real name, it is for professional use only and he is not a religious man. He stands very close to me and talks very excitedly. Distinctively unathletic, he leaves his arms by his side while he speaks with the spastic elegance of royals, being fairly certain he will not notice, I try to not listen to him. Born into the seventh generation of a family of bureaucrats and foreign emissaries, he finds comfort in the knowledge that very little demand will ever be placed upon him. When on holiday his staff put large photographic prints with erotic imagery along the corridors of his vast administrative office. His insignificant anecdote is cut short by the loud vibrations of a cellphone attached to his alligator belt. As he bends his neck I see five perfectly aligned reddish warts the size and shape of pinheads just below his ear. He covers them with his cellphone and begins a quiet conversation. In an unguarded moment he wipes perspiration from his brow with my business card.

I have been given a name tag and a pink orchid corsage. They introduce me and Baptist turns to me smiling. This is probably one of the happiest moments of his life, I feel good too, I enjoy my job. What I do saves lives and it has made me a very wealthy and satisfied person. I never get the chance to speak as I feel a peculiar nausea beginning with a prickly heat on my face. My cheeks sag as my teeth clench, parts of my body are out of control and contradicting one another. The skin of my upper arms seems to have melded with my body greatly reducing my ability to move. The tufts of blonde hair in my mouth only aggravate my thirst yet I find myself on the ocean floor. All the time I am keenly aware that I have lost my mind although I am able to reason with myself and feel no pain. Unable to conceal my condition any longer, I collapse. My fall is broken by Baptist and one of his deputies<sup>1</sup>. They carry me sitting in a clever blue plastic sling. As I am hoisted out of the square room we rush past a very tanned man. Perhaps Dutch or even American, in his late forties. Dressed in faded blue jeans, a short sleeved white shirt with all the buttons undone. He is gaunt and barefoot, his muscles are toned

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<sup>1</sup> Probably a young cousin or nephew.

and skin is thick like a tropical smuggler or oil driller<sup>2</sup>. In his hand is can of Anchor beer, he is noticeably drunk and strikes me as out of place but he is ignored by everyone but myself.

Outside I am placed on a long bench. The nurses arrive to smear my face with a foul smelling cream that leaves behind a thick oily membrane. Waiting for the medication to act, I become aware of Baptist, his deputy, and the nurses. I consider that they may have become offended, perhaps they are afraid or even concerned. It is unlikely they would ever admit to it preferring simply to smile or misunderstand. Eventually dismissing my line of thought, I ask if is possible to continue at the conference hotel. They oblige and politely escort me to a waiting limousine.

The car interior is bespoke, seating clad in cushioned white felt, all the details are brass or Spanish tan plastic. A simple fax machine is built into the upholstery. Constructed locally, it has large roses embroidered in the silk ceiling cover circled around a crystal cup housing a light. It is sturdy and fast. We speed past a properous industrial new town and fruit orchards lying fallow. The driver's assistant tells me I have a telephone call. There is no receiver but I hear a stern voice from the speakers and surround sound subwoofer. "Sir, I apologise for interrupting your drive. There seems to be an issue with your luggage. I cannot tell you more at this time. You will be provided with comforts at your hotel." My reply is a nonsensical mumble<sup>3</sup> followed by a long silence "Thank you, sir. I will keep you updated".

The hotel is situated on the frontier between town and country. This boundary is blurred but indisputable. To the west span large plantations and terraced fields. Some are housed in beautiful semi transparent ceramic shells in the traditional box shape with a pitched roof. To the east the city ends reluctantly in the sea. The coastline is already a mesh of reclaimed parcels, landfills, luxury seaside housing on sculpted peninsulas, jetties with highway traffic, airports, dry docks, an underwater containerport. It has no intention of stopping, the coast will accumulate and expand. To the north and south the carpet of infrastructure, stadiums, driving ranges, historical landmarks, mid-level housing, banks, and cleared sites, extend to

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<sup>2</sup> Only later I learned his name was Boris Daffy. He owned a drag line, in time he would come to own four. His death was premature though not memorable. His son Christopher committed suicide a few days later. The sum of his assets were awarded to the only daughter and myself. The sum was considerable.

<sup>3</sup> Often I fabricate words when I have no response, to instill an air of arrogance and power.

the horizon. The hotel complex itself is very impressive, perfection in modern craftsmanship, everything is wafer thin, fitted, clipped, laser cut, glued, grown, moulded, injected. The tallest in the city, yet its construction is not yet complete, a further twenty stories will be built.

I leave my shoes and socks with a hostess and step into a deep soft skin coloured carpet. Thousands of small fans underneath the carpet send up gentle thuds of warm scented air causing it to vibrate. The floor rises to a mound or a small hill. Standing ontop, with slight tingles beneath the arch of my foot, I can admire the record breaking atrium, an engineering marvel. Three hundred thousand cubic metres of enclosed space. Intricate geometric weave of balconies, gangways, spiral escalators, and yellow perspex elevator shafts ascending via irregular oblique paths into the micro-climate. To one side a party of Mexican tourists are resting in front of a colossal fireplace. The city is in the grip of uncharacteristic humidity and cold. Yet the sky is cloudless and the sun casts sharp shadows interrupting the reflections from the erratic glass façade of the entrance hall.

The suite consists of five rooms of equal size arranged in a single file. Each room has been given a distinct function and decoration. A multi-dominational chapel/shrine, a hall of vitrines display a collection of approximately three hundred porcelain figurines depicting contemporary professionals. Each figure is supplied with a label on the front edge of the base. There is one titled "Criminal or Thief"<sup>4</sup>. The third room is furnished with an oval meeting table, the light from the panoramic windows is sealed completely by heavy velvet curtains. In the next I find my luggage placed in the middle of the sunken bed.

The elevator from a corner of the lobby descends into the small marble reception of the baths. A man dressed in a fitted light blue cotton overall greets me with his pointed finger. His manicured nail guides me to a wide staircase to my right leading to the changing room. The room is clad in dark brown tile, dimly lit, warm and humid. The climate is controlled by an advanced system to stay at body temperature. On the wall, a large mural instructing me to undress completely, place my clothes and belongings in a plastic bag, and slip into a pair of red sandals. In the mirror I notice humidity is causing the oily membrane to loosen from my face. I peel the film off in one piece, fold it carefully into an envelope. I wish to preserve it as a reminder or souvenir. The bath house seems an endless labyrinthine spiral of rooms descending deep below the ground as if it were housed in an abandoned

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<sup>4</sup> My family has always been active in crime.

mine. A variety of treatments and apparatus are on offer; salted steam baths, cold mineral streams, sun beds, and dark room the size of a tennis court, a grid of comfortable faux leather chairs. They are similar to the three I had seen at the press conference. The only light is coming from five large back projected televisions. I can see several people sleeping. The hospitable staff provide complimentary cotton buds and cigarettes.

My pilot, Aisha, bought a Gulfstream G550 with money she acquired by stealth and ingenuity. Already in her mid forties, she spent the next few years in solo flight for most periods, preferring long haul. Loaded with fuel, a bed and an alarm clock, she spanned the earth on the most mundane requests. On her own she would sit in a large chair enjoying the sunrise, survey the vast dry tundras and ranges, the pacific and all the large metropoli. The hum of the Rolls Royce jets complemented her sense of sound.

She had a theory of the deaf, believing they sought and deserved world domination, planning to systematically marginalize the hearing based on the “superiority of the visual-physical over the aural-spiritual”. Within three generations all children would be born without hearing. Sign language would develop into a much more complex system composed not only of singular entities but of configurations of people, mass constellations and choreographies. New forms of notation, and changes in the written language and form, allowing for several revolutions within mathematics and computing. She believed that death did not actually exist. She was a self taught expert on the amygdala<sup>5</sup> and avid reader of scientific journals, especially articles concerning neurology and theories of sleep. Air force pilots undergoing G-force exercises lose consciousness during which the brain inhibitors fail releasing a crescendo of neural connections. This reaction is believed to be similar to what occurs in the brain at the moment of death. The pilots interviewed describe the experience as a vivid dream, usually a very pleasurable experience: a warm summer evening at a fair ground, eating cotton candy, holding hands and so on. She interpreted this as scientific hypothesis of the afterlife. From this point of view recomposing your life again can be heaven, it can be hell, or both depending on the subjects experience and capacity for fantasy. I would ridicule her but she remained adamant, persisting to develop these theories and gathering evidence well into old age. Her meticulous documentation and collected materials now reside in my library. I consider them a treasure and a mild cause for concern.

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<sup>5</sup> There was a well kept study and a small laboratory in the aft of the cabin

In general, I am optimistic, the work that has been done was not in vain<sup>6</sup>. (your experiences in Vienna may give you cause to disagree). What we need is simply a change in perspective, to see that everything we have been striving for was always already existing. Everthing is getting better and it is in this light we should consider our crimes, are there not mitigating circumstances here? I know you will not let me suffer. Unwittingly, we became complicit in eachothers transgressions.

I was prepared for the worst, in fact I was counting on the worst to happen, therefore I became determined to provoke it. Despite my best efforts, I failed in all of these attempts and the situation never deteriorated, instead it steadily improved. It surprised me how easy it was. The talk of impending doom, catastrophe, and dire consequences now seem pathetic. They were perhaps constructed for unspoken purposes, would you not agree that the reasons of something is always outside of itself? Nonetheless, these fantasies have shaped the current situation. Having frantically been carving out a space where I could achieve a distance from the consequences, I arranged several parallel lives in the past eight years, only to find the efforts and contingencies redundant. I was even married, then divorced<sup>7</sup>. My former husband had no interest in my past. The small scandals I participated in there would protect me from the considerably larger ones.

Relationships often fester and rot. I'd much rather we dissolved what we have built seperately and keep the loose ends loose. Your love is more important to me than your trust. I hope this will bring some comfort to you.

Sincerely,

Your friend

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<sup>6</sup> I waited on the pedestrian overpasses while the local authorities went inside and did the work, happy to have left the years of credit card fraud behind me.

<sup>7</sup> I read this somewhere "There are women for whom it holds that, in order to be allowed to fuck them freely and repeatedly, one would be ready to calmly observe one's own wife and child drowning in cold water"