

Sketches by Zod:
THE WEDDING

Chapter One

By
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For my mother,
matron saint of basements

THE WEDDING

PROLOGUE

It's a midsummer's evening, seven fifty-eight to be exact.

The setting is a historical estate in southern Georgia; it's a sprawling, beautiful place, the boyhood home of such and such a senator. There are fields and oaks, wooden fences, disappearing lanes, and covering it all like cheese is that rare breed of tranquility that can only be achieved when humidity is at one hundred percent.

A wedding!

There's a wedding tonight!

The guests are arriving. A band is playing. The world is full of peace, small talk, and sherbet tones...

But there's a snag in the serenity: that Garden. Lord Zod. Who commissioned that?

Scythe-like fronds replace feathery oaks. Paths are small and graveled. It's labyrinthine. Deep. Huge. Walked into like a church.

And at the center
of this Garden
is a Pond.

Yuck!

And at the center
of this Pond
is a Statue.

Eww!

And a storm is coming too....

What will happen when the Zodiac Women arrive? Will they behave? Or will they choose to revel in the wilds of the night, the Garden, the storm, and ultimately themselves?

Oh Venus Night.

Oh zither me standing.

Oh holy Zod in Zen.

It's eight o'clock, ya'll.

The Zodiac Women are here.

May Zod help us.

May Zod help us, every one.

This is...

Sketches by Zod:

THE WEDDING

CHAPTER ONE

SUNSET

CHAPTER ONE OF ARIES

IN WHICH

*Aries considers receptacles,
Leo considers herself,
and neither considers Sagittarius, yet.*

The content of an event isn't nearly as important as its containment. Action needs to be contained. It needs surroundings, hmmm.

Settings, hmmm.

Housing, if you will.

A receptacle.

Yes. A receptacle.

Action needs receptacles. Otherwise, it's abandoned to randomness and nobody cares.

Now, I, me, Aries—caring foster parent that I am—I'm more than willing to adopt orphan actions, bring them into a home, and raise them into full-blown situations.

Flat-out developments.

Full-throttle proceedings.

Happenstances, in a
word.

Except we're at a wedding.

The guests are already set in the matrimonial receptacle. They drink. They dance. They judge. They don't feel the need to do anything else.

So, what to do?

What can I do?

I, me, Aries, need to do
something.

Zod.

Leo returns from the bar and slouches into her would-be cleavage. She's wearing the black dress. I can't believe it.

"You said black," I say to her.

"So I wore black."

"But you said black, Leo."

"So I wore black, Aries."

"But Leo, you said black."

"So I wore black, Aries! Venus Night! Is there an echo or is this the Wailing Wall? Zen off."

She quiets. Her silence falls like a curtain and she exits the scene.

Now, I'm not a violent person but a fight would be nice. Lovely. Conflict is perfect because it develops in stages that require various receptacles.

The pre-fight stage is delicious with ripening energy, hmmm.

Blossoms and buds, hmmm.

Beautiful, hmmm.

People need things to clasp in their anger. They need chairs to lean into. Ottomans. Senseless little candies to unwrap and suck.

Then, the post-fight stage is an entirely new set of energies in which people need space for reflection.

Medical attention.

Sex.

Chess, what have you?

Leo's curtain rises.

"Don't be pissy, pussy," she says.

"I'm not being pissy and don't call me pussy," I say.

She scoffs and her curtain falls.

"I'm not being pissy," I repeat to the curtain—I don't want to lose her involvement.

"You're planning," Leo slides the curtain back, "What are you planning?"

"None of your business," I say.

"You're always planning, Aries. Never playing. Here's a Leo Fact for you: the universe exists. Here's a Leo Option: be the sun or someone else's anus. Involve yourself. That's how you evolve yourself. Quote me, baby. I do."

She smiles and it's dazzling.

Now, with a fight, I could take one or more concerned persons into receptacles I've discovered, hmmm.

Rooms, hmmm.

Hedges, hmmm.

Maybe I could ask the staff for the keys and take one person to the cellar and the other to the Garden—for the first stage—and then switch it up when things get stale, or heated, or just change—when they change.

Then, I'd create a second receptacle for the second stage.

The bar.

Perhaps that Pond with the
Statue thing.

The veranda, hmmm,
hmmm, hmmm.

Leo straightens from her would-be cleavage as her curtain rises: the two Bridesmaids are approaching the bar.

“Why are they out here?” she asks loudly.

“Leo, hush,” I goad.

“I hate them. Why are they out here?”

“Leo. Tsk. Shh. Stop.”

“But they should be with the Bride, Aries. They can’t be out here. What rude shakalahkah does that?”

I ignore her and she quiets. Her eyes are fiery and unreadable as the curtain descends.

So, I’ll orchestrate a fight. Yes.

I’ll seek out separate entities with nerve appendages tapering in opposite directions, hmmm.

Coordinates, hmmm.

Latitudes, et al.

And I’ll grab these tapering nerve appendages and tie them to something greater—like the reins to a horse—but I won’t connect them to a horse—I’ll connect them to a receptacle that leads them *like* a horse into the even greater receptacle that is Circumstance.

Yes.

Brew-ha-ha must be elaborated and I, me, Aries am that elaboratour.

A fight.

An orgy.

An emotional ejaculation,
if I may be so bold.

Yes. Something.

Recruitment must begin immediately.

CHAPTER ONE OF LEO

IN WHICH

*Leo hates the Bridesmaids,
Aries hates Leo,
and Sagittarius isn't a hater, yet.*

No one is paying attention to M-E.

I say to them, I say, "L-E-O, as an anagram of O-L-E, should be exclamationized no matter where it occurs in a sentence or the world. LEO! OLÉ! LEO! OLÉ!"

They stare.

I star.

But then they stop.

So, I do it again, I yell, "LEO! OLÉ! LEO! OLÉ!"

But they've stopped staring, damn it.

LEO QUOTE: My preferred mode of transportation is parades.

Aries turns to me, I hear, "Does this mean you're going to be yelling more than usual?"

I say to her, I say, "Yes, Aries. Yes, it does."

Aries hates me right now.

This morning, I called her, I said, 'I'm wearing my modest black dress to the wedding,' when we both knew I'd wear the silver dress because it's the hotter dress. So, Aries wore her silver dress assuming I'd wear mine too, but I actually did wear my modest black dress, thereby making Aries look overdressed and inappropriate, which means I can do anything I want now because standing next to her makes me look like a Mother Theresa Mahatma Ghandi.

So, I laugh loudly. I roar.

They stare.

I star.

Everyone approves
of modest M-E

Because Aries looks like she'd sex your father in a Denny's.

LEO QUOTE: If I were a piece of fruit, I would be a steak.

I announce something, I say, "When I'm nervous, I imagine everyone else

imagining me naked because it gives me confidence.”

“Leo, don’t be embarrassing. Please lower your voice,” Aries says.

“LEO! OLÉ! OLÉ! OLÉ!” I respond.

So, there are two bridesmaids drinking at the bar right now. There's a Blonde Bridesmaid and a Redhead Bridesmaid.

The Blonde Bridesmaid looks like a constipated ballerina and it’s really sad because I use similes but I don't. It’s even sadder because she’s handling the attention like the ugly child at a parent’s funeral — not used to the stares — way too aware. When it comes to attention, here's a rule for you: Awareness is awkward. A star of the scene is always a stranger to it. Your indifference equals their interest. That is a rule. I don’t give a damn about T-H-E-M and they love M-E for it.

I say to Aries, I say, “I should be a bridesmaid.”

“Please be quiet,” she says.

“You don’t put up with friends like me just to shove ‘em in a pew like every Dick and Celeste. I need to be presented. That’s what I’m for.”

“Leo, please. Your voice.”

I say to her, I say, “A hot bridesmaid makes you look hotter. A hot friend, no. But a hot bridesmaid, yes.”

“Leo.”

I continue, I say, “If I look bad, I want people to tell me.”

“Leo.”

“If my bridesmaids look bad, I still want people to tell me.”

“Leo.”

“That's not gossip, Aries. That's guidance.”

“Leo, please. Your voice.”

“OLÉ! OLÉ! OLÉ! LEO!”

And they stare.

I star.

But then they stop

And it’s this dress.

No one is looking at me tonight because I’m wearing a modest dress.

So, the Redhead Bridesmaid is good. She knows how to handle the attention. She knows how to cultivate their admiration with rhetorical questions like ‘Isn’t it beautiful tonight? Don’t we clean up well? Isn’t everything gorgeous?’

As a juicy red grape, she's choosing to swell the moment instead of forcing a squeeze.

Top of the game. I hate it.

I hate T-H-E-M.

Here's a LEO grammar lesson for you: 'T-H-E-M' absorbs its 'E-M' out of a mirrored 'M-E'. And since Leo is always mirrored, it's always M-E that gets screwed.

LEO QUOTE: My health insurance people send me coupons and I'm not even that poor. That's how big of a deal I am ya'll.

Sagittarius gets back.

She's always telling me to think about something greater than myself, but I'm already great *as* myself so I have difficulty seeing her point. Things that don't involve me make me sad. I divorced Facebook for this very reason. No one was paying attention to M-E.

Just like now, damn it.

No one is paying attention to me.

What is wrong with the world tonight? Is it really this black dress? Is it really because I wore a modest dress? Is that really all it takes to disappear?

Zod damn it.

Maybe I should've worn the silver dress.

CHAPTER ONE OF SAGITTARIUS

IN WHICH

*Sagittarius can't liken Love,
Leo drinks,
and Aries directs.*

Our wedding gift doesn't represent Love. It doesn't express what Love is. It's just a crystal bowl wrapped into a drum.

"One gift. Two uses. Boom baby," Leo had said, playing it on the way over.

And in that sense, it is nice—but even if I used the bowl to drum the most beautiful rhythm of love, it still wouldn't capture what I needed it to capture.

You know?

It still wouldn't say what I needed it to say.

You know?

It would still just be a bowl, and something as huge as Love has to translate into something more than just a bowl.

You know?

Love must be like...

Something.

It must.

I won't accept Love as unlike nothing. I can't. It's too doubly negative. It doesn't make any sense.

Love has to be like...

I don't know.

The simile always falls apart.

For example, many guests have assembled for the wedding tonight. Together we say, *'Love is a miscellaneous collection of semi-erotic hopes, huzzah!'* But take each of us aside, and ask us as individuals, and our message loses strength. We don't have the language. Love becomes empty like our bowl is empty.

Oh!

If I could only express myself in a fuller way!

Sometimes expression is so cruel.

You know?

Think about it: it's effortless and beautiful for some people, but impossible and excruciating for others.

Oh!

It's just like...

Something.

I'm glad I hid our bowl in the palm fronds. It cannot be presented on the gift table. Not yet. No way.

I find Aries and Leo near the bar:

"Our gift, ladies, our gift is total shit," I say, "It's not what Love is like."

"It's fine," Aries says, "Where have you been?"

She slams my drink in front of me. Her force tells me she's been fighting with Leo again.

"But it's not representative," I say, "It doesn't translate what Love is. It's barely a piece."

"It better not be a piece," Leo says, and I hear the extension of their argument in her tone, "Zod knows we dropped enough on it for shitty one-shot cocktails."

"Leo, don't be embarrassing. Please, hush," says Aries.

"You hush," Leo responds, "I should've brought my cask flask."

"You mean your thermos?"

"Yes, Aries. Oh, but it would've clashed with the elegance of my black dress, no?"

Aries turns back to me and the force of her swivel confirms their fighting status.

"Where have you been?" she says.

"I've been at the gift table," I say, "Thinking..."

"Wow. For Zod's sakes, Saggy. Calm down. Don't worry. We got the bowl monogrammed. They're gonna love it."

"But it doesn't say anything, Leo. It's just a bowl. And a bowl is the emptiest representation of Love there is. Holy Zounds! A bowl is the shape of emptiness! A bowl accentuates lack! Oh, I have to smash it!"

Aries puts out a hand.

"Sit," she says, "empty or not it was still expensive. Sit. Stay."

I sit. I try to relax. I watch the sunset.

Oh, the sun!

It's so miraculous!

Think about it: it's a universal and expansive force, illuminating all who turn their face to it, prejudicing no one, totally powerful no matter where it is in the entire world, a mighty thing maintaining its beauty even while it breaks...

Oh!

I can't help but think it's like...

I don't know.

My thoughts return to Love.

"But this is important!" I say, "This is a marriage! This is Love! Our friend is committing her life to this thing and I don't even have a simile to put it on the map! So what's it like? Don't you care? Don't you wanna know?"

Leo leans across the table and picks up my empty glass.

"Honey," she says, "We're here for the wedding. Not the marriage. Now, I don't know what a marriage is, but I know a wedding is drinking and dancing and judging. So, another round of Comets? Hmmm? Samsies?"

She clinks the glasses and exits toward the bar.

"She's right," Aries says, "Relax. Chill. Have another drink. It'll be OK."

"Ok," I say, "One more drink. But then I've got to figure this out, Aries. I've got to know what Love is like."

What it resembles...

Or has connotations of...

"I've just got to know."

CHAPTER ONE OF TAURUS

IN WHICH

*Taurus sips,
Capricorn uses,
and Virgo faints.*

Being a contented materialist is good.

If I were more creative, I'd say being a contented materialist was like being a garden because it means accepting the bounty of one's boundaries with a sunny heart. We can't all be Amazons, and a garden doesn't attempt to expand into an Amazon because it's already full of itself and peace thereby.

I sip.

This Garden is nice. I like being a contented materialist within it.

If I were an artist, I'd paint the scene.

However, I'm not an artist.

I'm a contented materialist.

So instead, I simply view it.

This morning my room was full of summer breezes. I smiled before I opened my eyes.

It was good.

I sip.

If I were skillful with linguistic acrobatics, I'd say the palm fronds hang over this Garden like sultry bangs. I'd say this Garden was a lounging man with bangs in his eyes. I'd say I'm the sexual carnivore who strokes them with a ringed finger.

If I oversaw sexual séances, I'd definitely perform one here.

However, I'm not a sexual
séance overseer.

I'm a contented materialist.

So instead, I sip my Comet.

For lunch, I made blueberry muffins. I unrolled the tinfoil and intentionally burned the tops for afternoon coffee dipping.

It was nice.

I sip.

Virgo is stressing again.

I try to calm her—not for her sake, for mine. It makes me uncomfortable to watch people stress. My hand goes to my phone when I'm uncomfortable. I wish I

could say it went to my heart, or perhaps to the nearest religious icon, but I can't: my hand goes to my phone because in that moment I'm an uncomfortable materialist.

Oh my phone.

I take it out.

I unlock.

I sip.

My phone's background has been the same shade of blue ever since I swam off the southern coast of Cyprus. It's a plain choice but I like plain choices because they inspire me to stay the same.

Capricorn asks me to count the bricks.

Easy.

"Two thousand and six," I say.

She smiles and continues circling the Pond.

It's a nice Pond.

There's a Statue in the middle of it. This Statue presses into me with the effect of pressing me out of myself; perhaps this is what Beauty is.

If I were less inhibited, I'd scream.

However, I am inhibited.

And I'm OK with this.

So instead, I sigh and
caress my phone.

I love my phone.

Its value is my value. I do not exist outside of it because my entire life is inside of it.

If I had to spend a day without one thing, I'd gladly give up my body to keep my phone. I don't value freedom if it means I can't enjoy my things. I'd accept other people's tyranny with a smile if it made my life more comfortable.

Capricorn asks me to count the bricks again.

Easy.

"Two thousand and six," I say.

I don't use a calculator to do the math. I erased the one on my phone and now I use that space for pictures of well-plated sushi. I order it with red wine instead of white wine because white wine washes out in the camera flash.

Although it is true that white wine is better suited for sushi's gastronomic subtlety, however, red wine enriches the overall aesthetic of the sushi-eating experience. Sometimes, I don't know which I prefer to embellish.

Usually, I give the wine list to the best-dressed person at the table and let them decide.

Virgo faints.

I sip.

The silk lining of my brassiere is contrasting the humidity nicely.

It was a risky choice.

I almost went with cotton.

But Zod knows a contented materialist can't always be practical.

I sip.

CHAPTER ONE OF VIRGO

IN WHICH

*Virgo copes,
Capricorn intervenes,
and Taurus suggests.*

I keep Legos in my purse.

When life overwhelms, I take them out and I build a tower: Blues on blues. Followed by reds on reds. Finishing with greens on greens. I don't use yellows because yellows show smear lines and I haven't yet learned to cope with smear lines.

I build them into a tower. I make the tower's edges straight as a razor. I trace the edges with my finger until the skin slits. Then, I look at my blood and I suck my blood and I visualize precision.

It's a coping process that never fails me. Some people use inhalers. I use Legos.

Surviving life is about recognizing your specific discomfort and coping.

And I cope consciously.

I'm a conscious copier.

I swear.

"Can we please focus on the bricks?" Capricorn asks.

"No," I say, "We absolutely cannot focus on the bricks."

Capricorn huffs and continues circling the Pond.

Capricorn has no room to huff. Capricorn cannot tell me anything. Capricorn has donated bricks to the Garden.

This is not OK.

Bricks make interacies.

I cannot cope with interacies.

(Not intricacies.)

(Not interspecies.)

(Interacies.)

(I cannot stand interacies.)

Interacies are the spaces between adjoining brick or tile. They can be shaped like stop signs. They can be shaped like shit. They come in many shapes. All of which are flawed. And their flaws get into my bones and I have to

crack them. I have to crack my bones. I have to. I have to clench my fingers and crack them into fists. I have to rotate my fists and crack my wrists. I have to pull my shoulders back and crack my shoulders. I have to twist my rib cage and crack everything connected to it.

It's how I cope.

And I cope consciously.

As I'm a conscious copier.

Scouts honor.

(Also, I have trouble with uneven corners. I carry sandpaper like other people carry tissues but I am not ashamed.)

"Please don't step on the interacies," I say to Capricorn.

"But I have to count the bricks," she responds.

"Ok. But please avoid the interacies. Don't step on the interacies."

She huffs and continues to step on the interacies.

I squat.

Squatting lessens my aerial view of the interacies. I do this in bathrooms regardless of a clean toilet seat. It's an opportunity cost with which I've learned to cope.

"Virgo," Taurus addresses me, "You should try meditation. I think it would calm you."

Taurus cannot tell me anything either. She's too complacent. Complacent people cannot tell me anything. I know she looks down on me in my squatted position much like she looks down on me in our friendship but I am not ashamed. I remain squatted.

I start to sweat.

"Try counting the bricks," Taurus continues, "Counting is meditative."

"Why would I count the bricks?" I ask, "The bricks have interacies, Taurus. I would only be counting interacies. Why would I count interacies?"

"Then why don't you leave the Garden? Go to the bar."

"I can't! I can't! I can't!"

"But why, Virgo?"

Because the interacies swell out of their cruelty like welts from a whip, you cow!

(I tell her half of this.)

The floor is lashed but I am the one writhing, you witch!

(I tell her half of this.)

“I cannot cross the interacies,
Taurus, because I cannot cope with that
situation. I simply cannot.”

Now, I’m a conscious copier.

True.

But

I didn’t know these interaces would
be happening tonight. If I’d known it was
going to be a problem, I would have
brought more Legos. But I didn’t know,
so, now, I’m forced to employ my final
coping option:

I close my eyes.

I visualize my brain as a bone.

I stress my body and push all the
blood to my brain.

I attempt to break this brain-bone
with the force of my blood.

“Stop her!”

I stress harder.

“She’s making herself faint!”

“Virgo!”

The pristine black of my
unconsciousness rises in a smooth
swell.

Oh I want it.

Oh I need it.

Woah I need to bathe in its
uniformity.

Fading, fading, come blackness
come. Wash over me. Make everything
lovely and smooth.

I hold my breath to expedite the
process.

Because this is how I cope.

Usually, I’m a conscious copier.

Usually.

But damn thse cursed interacies —
Capricorn — this world — everything
flawed that is now washing into
nothingness as I cede into a medicinal
black...

CHAPTER ONE OF CAPRICORN

IN WHICH

*Capricorn enumerates,
Virgo instigates,
and Taurus counts.*

Two thousand and six was the year the Bride and I graduated high school. That is why, as my wedding gift to her, I chose to donate two thousand and six bricks to the estate's botanical fund.

I wanted to

1. Celebrate the love of my best and closest friend, the Bride,
2. Memorialize her special day, and
3. Establish myself as the Runner Up Bridesmaid* in the eyes of everyone who will witness my Brick Bequeathal Ceremony*.

*Runner Up Bridesmaid and Brick Bequeathal Ceremony henceforth referenced as RUB and BBC respectively.

I had all two thousand and six bricks laid right here, in the center of this Garden, in the center of everything, where everyone will see them and come to know of our friendship.

I order Taurus to do a recount.

"Two thousand and six," she says.

Wonderful.

"Why didn't the Bride pick you as a Bridesmaid?" Virgo asks.

"Because she picked her sisters," I say.

"Impossible," Virgo responds, "There's no way those two Bridesmaids are sisters. The Red Head Bridesmaid makes the Blonde Bridesmaid look like a charity contest winner."

"I meant sorority sisters, Virgo. She went to a different college and met new people, OK? We grew apart, alright? It happens."

"Which means you and the Bride aren't close anymore."

"We are close, Virgo. We've just grown apart."

"Which means you're far away now. That's what that means."

I ignore her and focus on my objective: establishing myself as the RUB in the eyes of everyone witnessing the BBC.

It's an act that requires

1. Exactitude,
2. Perseverance and,
3. Poetry.

Exactitude can be checked off the list because Taurus has already assured me that two thousand and six bricks are here and accounted for.

Perseverance is an evolving attribute that lasts as long as the process.

Poetry, as the third and most important requirement, additionally involves

- a. Inscribing each brick with lines from well-known love songs, which I've already done, thereby ensuring that,
- b. The witnesses to the BBC have something immortal with which to equate my position of RUB, as well as that,
- c. After having performed the BBC, the witnesses are so changed by the experience as to acknowledge and answer to my title of RUB as instinctively as they acknowledge and answer to their own name.

"It means you're far away now, Capricorn," Virgo says, "If you were close, the Bride would've picked you as one of her Bridesmaids. That's what that means."

I focus on the bricks, OK. My bricks. *Our* bricks. The Bride and I, OK. The bricks I donated to prove our friendship to everyone who will witness the BBC, OK.

The Bride and I are still close.

Dry spells happen in every relationship. I know the Bride like the back of my handbag and she knows me and everyone who witnesses the BBC is going to know this too.

"The point is, Virgo," I say, "if she had another Bridesmaid, it'd be me, OK. I'm the third girl, alright. The Runner Up Bridesmaid. RUB. That's me. End of story."

"Really? Is that what the Bride said to you?"

"The Bride will know what she says after I tell her."

"I don't think that makes sense."

“Well I don’t think your opinion is correct.”

“Well I don’t think incorrect opinions are nearly as sad as incorrect facts.”

“Well I don’t think this conversation is going to continue.”

“Well I don’t think that you really know what you’re saying.”

“Thank you, Virgo. Thank you very, very much.”

I order another recount.

“Two thousand and six.”

Perfect.

Everything is perfect.

The BBC will go off without a hitch and the Bride will acknowledge me as the perfect RUB. I know it and everyone else will come to know it too because that’s what happens with facts: people eventually come to know them.

Oh, I can’t wait.

CHAPTER ONE OF GEMINI

IN WHICH

*Gemini follows her inner
Buddhuzzah,
Aquarius speaks too little,
and Libra speaks too much.*

ZOD. ALMIGHTY. AQUARIUS.

I don't want to be judgmental or anything but I'm pretty sure Aquarius defaults on her inner Buddhuzzah more often than a vegetarian tanner vacationing amid the gores of Pamplona. I mean look at her. She doesn't speak. It's like her linguistic currency is tied up in some hoity toity metaphysical quaff bonnet that won't depreciate into language until the largest meltdown this side of '08 forces her to swim head first against the resulting tide—which I'm not against. I'm totally an advocate of swimming against tides. Embracing contradiction is exactly what prevents me from defaulting on my inner Buddhuzzah, like legit, I've never defaulted on my inner Buddhuzzah precisely because I've never believed in a single thing long enough to do so. I never default. I just keep going and going and don't even get me going on the Energizer Bunny, who, in my mind, has always been a more appropriate mascot for battery than batteries because let's face it ya'll: if you're the sort of person who equates long lasting life with a need for senselessly beating a drum in sandals, then you have serious issues you need to confront in a supervised setting.

VENUS. NIGHT. AQUARIUS.

She's the worst.

Well, no.

False.

I amend.

Like Aquarius could be worse.

Like she could be the opposite.

Like more talkative than a two-headed parrot hopped up on speed, which would either be the worst or best pet ever depending on whether or not the heads fought or registered their pitches

into harmony but it's whatever. Who would buy a two-headed parrot anyway? Who? No one.

Well, no.

False.

I amend.

Maybe Siamese twins who wanted to make themselves feel less uniquely analogous would buy a two-headed parrot, but even then I think stuffing two beaks with fortified seed while your partner yapped about incompetent seamstresses would be a mocking reiteration of an already overly apparent condition, and, even if the two parrot heads chose harmony over discord, there'd still be the issue of rhythm, which I think would be really difficult to maintain for anything with one body and two minds, parrot or otherwise, I mean, do you follow professional three-legged racing because I do. I don't follow professional three-legged racing as committedly as I follow my inner Buddhuzzah, but I still follow it pretty hard-core because yah unusual sports tots interesting.

UGH. LIBRA. STOP. TALKING.

Shoot me in the striking face ya'll.

Seriously. Libra talks more than I breathe and I breathe a lot.

Well, no.

False.

I amend.

I don't breathe as much as I probably should.

But going back to Aquarius, it's kind of admirable how calm she can be in stressful situations that would seize normal women into witch-hunt hysterics that I'm sure past ages have repurposed into every trip of heinous interpretation imaginable, but I won't try to imagine them because that sort of creativity puts me at odds with my inner Buddhuzzah, and I've already almost defaulted on my inner Buddhuzzah today when the barman attempted to transplant his neurosis into my process of patient investigation, I mean, I was trying to decide which drink I wanted, and decisions require precisions, so I had him rate the menu in descending caloric order from the perspective of Him Being a Female Required to Wear Tighter Fitting Aprons, so what? So shoot me in the striking liver dude, but don't yell at me in front of the other guests for being

intolerable or whatever, I mean, that's totally rude, right?

Zod.

HOLY. ZITHER. YA'LL.

At least if the barman had shot me, then I'd be excused from enduring this funk cloud formally zoned as Aquarius.

SPEAK. AQUA. SPEAK.

The way she breathes makes me feel like I should be apologizing for my life.

AND. SHUT. UP. LIBRA.

It's like I'm listening to Metallica with really good headphones but only the right side works because my left side is Aquarius — Aquarius mute as a Mormon thrice house-wifed.

Was that offensive?

I think it was.

Polygamy isn't wrong if I understand it from the perspective of my inner Buddhuzzah. It's only wrong when I understand it from the perspective of a female because seriously ya'll 'each to their own' is fine, except if someone interprets this as 'each to their ownership,' which I just can't stomach so yah shoot me there.

AND BLAH

AND NADA

AND BLAH

AND NADA.

And zither me standing ya'll.

OMZ.

This Gem needs a re-fill STAT.

CHAPTER ONE OF LIBRA

IN WHICH

*Libra tells a story,
Aquarius doesn't hear,
and Gemini doesn't care.*

Gemini sits cross-legged in her stockings, her shoes flung elsewhere, de-segmenting an orange. Aquarius trails a finger in the Pond. I circle the Pond and ask myself one question: fountain or memorial?

Fountain?

Memorial?

Fountain?

Memorial?

The Statue in the middle of this Pond is either one or the other.

"It can't be a fountain if it isn't shooting water," I say, "However, it can't be a memorial if no one remembers what it's for."

Neither Gemini nor Aquarius responds.

In all, it's an overlarge Statue, in the middle of an overlarge Pond, in the middle of an overlarge Garden. It's an ambiguity that engages guests as we sip at our one-shot cocktails and wait to see if this wedding is still happening or not.

I weigh it out:

Fountain?

Memorial?

Fountain?

Memorial?

"I know what it is and it has nothing to do with either of its possibilities," Aquarius says.

"Ah. Well," I respond, "If you know what it is, Aquarius, then it's likely no one else will ever know."

It's true.

Aquarius' wisdom is like the rain: it falls plentifully enough, but the dithery nature of its delivery makes it difficult to cup in cohesive quantities.

I prefer intelligence I can cup.

Knowledge is nothing if it can't be cupped.

So, which is it?

Fountain?

Memorial?

Fountain?

Memorial?

“You know,” I say, “This reminds me of a story.”

“I don’t care,” Gemini responds.

“Hold on now,” I say, “Stories are effective vehicles of communication. To bring clarity to this situation, I feel like I should tell a story.”

“I don’t care,” Gemini says again.

“I once knew a girl who wanted a butterfly tattoo,” I begin, “However, she didn’t know where she wanted it. So, she started drawing erasable ones on different parts of her body to see what she liked. One morning, she woke up and found the butterfly on her shoulder. Strangely, however, she hadn’t drawn it there.”

Gemini chews on her orange peel. The gears in her head turn more like windmills in fields of poppy than metal cogs.

I continue:

“The next morning, the butterfly had moved to her collarbone, then to her hip. She couldn’t explain it. Every morning this butterfly tattoo was in a different place. One day, it had moved to just under her eye, the tip of its wing substituting for her bottom row of lashes. It was beautiful, however, since face tats are frowned upon in Western society, she couldn’t go to work. Then, it was on the sole of her foot and she couldn’t walk without smashing it and staining the carpet. She decided she wanted to get rid of it. She tried swatting it but self-flagellation proved too painful. Then, in an attempt to fight fire with fire, she started drawing other tattoos to get rid of it. She drew spiders to eat it and cats to catch it. She even drew a flower with the hopes the butterfly would sink into its color and get stuck. Unfortunately, these additional drawings became just as unruly, just as autonomous, until the art of her began to overcome her use as a human being. As she turned more and more into a Thing of Beauty, people stopped needing her, and therefore noticed her less and less. Finally, in a depressive last-ditch attempt, she gave herself leprosy to degrade everything that had superseded her worth as a human being, and, in consequence, was

forced to hide under the mountainous canvas of that disease for the rest of her days. Eventually, this woman died, although not from the leprosy; she died from the controversial prison sentence.”

I step back from my story and let my words sink in as Gemini stares.

“Wow. Ok. Great story babe,” she says, throwing her orange peel at Aquarius before exiting toward the bar.

I continue my walk around the Pond:
Fountain?

Memorial?

Fountain?

Memorial?

I wish I knew which it was.

If I knew which it was, I’d be able to cup that information more effectively and everything would be better.

“Hmmm,” I say, “Tilapia. Hmmm.”

CHAPTER ONE OF AQUARIUS

IN WHICH

*Aquarius thinks,
Gemini pelts,
and Libra talks.*

*My thoughts as they be ‘The Thoughts of
Aquarius,’ are a conversation between
Light and Sound, with Light being the
voluptuous introvert while Sound yells;
Sound yells but is never seen.*

Whereas,

Light whinnies as it wanes,

Marionette of golden reins,

But never says a thing.

Sound wants to join with Light.

*Light leaves the sky and people
mourn. Sound leaves the sky and people
cheer. It isn't fair. Sound wants to be
cherished like Light is cherished. Sound
wants that adoration too.*

*Sound says, “Light! Look how your
leaving grieves the world! Look how
they love you! I’ve never seen anything
so loved! Light? Are you listening? I
have something to say! Will you hear it?
Light? Speak! Speak so I know you’re
listening to me!”*

But

Light does not respond,

Past dancing on the Pond.

It doesn’t say a thing.

Sound wants to join with Light.

*Light is effortless and eternally
young. Sound isn’t. Sound is old since
forever. Sound wants to join with Light
and be young too.*

*Sound says, “Light! Listen! I have an
idea! Let’s join together! Greatness
joined becomes more! Let’s join and
grow, Light! What do you say? Speak!
Speak, Light. Speak so I know you hear
me!”*

But

Light sparkles in its play,

As sparkling is its way.

It doesn’t say a thing.

*My thoughts as they be ‘The
Thoughts of Aquarius,’ are often
interrupted:*

Gemini has pelted me with an orange peel.

“Don’t hit me yet,” I say.

“I don’t hit people unless I’m hitting on them, you know that,” she smiles, “I never give violence except as a compliment.”

She pelts me again.

“Interestingly put,” I say, “Good form, Gemini. Touché.”

She pelts me again. I ignore her. She pelts me again. I ignore her. She splatters me with the remainder of her orange and *Sound wants to join with Light.*

Light is fast and free. Light can travel miles from its creator. Sound can’t. Sound is chained. Sound wants to join with Light and be free too.

Sound says, “Light! Are you listening? We both know I can’t catch you! But that doesn’t mean we can’t be together! Combination would be a complement! Light? Speak! Speak so I know you’re listening to me!”

But

Light slides within the sooths,

It washes as it woos.

It doesn’t say a thing.

Libra finishes circling the Pond and sits next to me. We watch the sun set.

“It will rain,” I tell her.

“Is that so?” she says.

“Yes,” I say, “And it will thunder. And there will be lightning, too.”

“Really?” she says, “You mean tonight?”

“Oh yes.”

“Well that is very interesting, Aquarius. I wonder what will happen.”

“I just told you what will happen, Libra. I said it will rain, thunder, and...”

“You are right,” she says, touching my elbow in a diplomatic way, “You are absolutely right, Aquarius. Thank you.”

She raises her glass and we chin-chin.

“Good form, Libra,” I say, “Touché.”

She exits toward the veranda and *Sound lives a thousand lives. It dies a thousand deaths. Light keeps eternal. Sound knocks. Light refuses entry. Sound loses patience, catches a rocket, booms into space and addresses the nearest star:*

“Light! I’ve traveled long distances to be here. I’ve left the realm of my fury. I’ve left laughter and bird song. I’ve suffered through cold spaces of feeble

You, and I've done it to meet you at your boldest, Light. So, now, Light, as boldly as you exist, act upon that boldness and accept me. Join with me, Light. We're the same. Please. Speak. Speak so I know you're listening to me."

But

Light twinkles as a little star,

As near to Sound as it is far.

And nothing happens.

Evening is landing like a bird, flashing its colors before settling into a bulk of gray.

"Good form, evening. Touché," I say.

I throw my shoes into the Pond and exit toward the veranda as *Sound weeps through violins.*

CHAPTER ONE OF CANCER

IN WHICH

*Cancer explains Dimplification,
Scorpio defies,
and Pisces personifies.*

I imagine them as children.

I bring them back to doughy flesh
and small-toothed smiles. I give them big
eyes and laugh-away curls. I de-spike
vodka with juice and devolve mature
speech patterns into gurgles.

Hark!

*A gurgled phrase,
Signals a child to raise,
as Mom-Mammy
was wont to say.*

Indeed, it does.

Lo, in order that I may care for the
chickens as Cancer is wont to do, I must
put them through a rigorous process of
dimplification.

Verily, I must dimplify the chickens
so that I may comfort them more
exceptionally, as Cancer is wont to do. To
give them the comfort. The Sigh. The
Honey. The Darling. The Wrap-Around
Hug that contents like a shawl—and
Cancer knows contentment as given by a
shawl.

Hark!

*Ne'er does an ill befall,
She who keeps beneath
her shawl,
as Grammy-Toots
was wont to say.*

Indeed.

I turn my attentions to Scorpio.

She runs her hand along the
museum's wooden planking.

"Don't get splinters, honey," I warn,
attempting to dimplify her.

But, alas, Scorpio is impossible to
dimplify. Her eyes refuse to soften. Like
now, she is attempting to heighten my
warmth to a sizzle, but, verily, I won't
allow it.

Hark!

*To give in to whim,
Is to give in to sin,*

as Mammy Superior
was wont to say.

Indeed.

Of course, Scorpio's seedy breed of audacity wouldn't be a problem if I were wearing my shawl.

Absolutely not.

Whilst wearing a shawl, matronly mastery flattens such fiddle-faddle like a pancake.

Zod give me strength.

A shawl does for women what pipes do for men. I'd be edified as a pillar of stability and comfort. I'd acquire a scent that people were reminded of when opening phonographs or sifting through well-preserved tissue paper.

Indeed, matronly mastery as ascended to by virtue of a shawl is indomitable once attained.

I'd rule Scorpio without need of a ruler.

But, sadly, lo, I couldn't wear my shawl tonight. Crochet clashes with stilettos.

I turn my attentions away from Scorpio.

Pisces is easier to dimplify. Her emotional state hovers at a consistent cradling point. The poor girl struggles to keep herself together.

Hark!

A Pisces to her caprices,

Is a Pisces falling to pieces,

as I'm wont to say.

Like now, she's sobbing.

I take her into my arms because she needs me. I handle her like a package of crumbled macaroons.

"Darling, what's the matter?" I inquire.

Her sobs are unintelligible but I understand. I absorb her heaves like smoke signals thinning into the sky. I read them. I return their request with more of my maternal being.

"There. There," I coo.

Then, Pisces begins to articulate herself through the sobs by using real words. And, hence, verily, to comfort as exceptionally as Cancer is wont to do, I must negate this sign of maturity—I cover her mouth:

Her words devolve into gurgles.

"Momma understands," I say, clogging her mouth, "Momma's going to care for you."

I draw her close, squeezing her as if
tears were her juices.

Scorpio laughs.

Zod Eternal.

If I had my shawl, I could flap it
around myself and show Scorpio who's
who in this mother-flock relationship.

Verily, the Flap and Wrap.

Then they corral themselves into my
arms like so many sheep.

I ignore Scorpio and muzzle Pisces
further into my bosom.

Hark!

When life throws you off,

Find a bosom and quaff,

as Olden Saggy

was wont to say.

'Tis true.

Pisces releases herself from my
tender embrace and walks out the door.

"My child," I inquire, "Where are you
going? What? What?"

She doesn't respond. She's overtired,
the poor girl. That's what happens when
they don't take their naps.

But, alas, it's my duty to follow her,
so, I throw one last disappointed glance
at Scorpio before covering my neck
against the chill and following Pisces
with the utmost curiosity and haste.

CHAPTER ONE OF SCORPIO

Good versus Teeth

I've been such a silly stupid good girl.

Oi.

I can't remember why I chose to be so silly stupid good today.

I woke up. I made sure the trash threw itself out. I made coffee. I stretched. I smoked. I turned on the radio. I turned it on with my big toe and I sang.

Then I burned

toast

just to have something to

Crack

with my

TEETH

Black coffee

in

white porcelain cups

like

me.

But

No. No. No. No. No, Scorpy.

Scorpy be good tonight. Stay silly stupid good tonight. Being bad is bad.

"Pisces," I say to my own surprise, and turning to the girl, "Pisces, if you keep crying like that you'll never stop."

She plugs herself for a moment. Our silence hangs on invisible eaves until:

"I know, Scorpio!" she screams, "That's why!"

"Well if you know and continue, then you deserve your pain and I have no sympathy."

I turn back to the window. The sun is turning gold in its attempt to fall away. The sun is a miracle that falls away. I've tried being such a silly stupid good girl because everything always falls away.

And so

TEETH

But

No. No. No. No. No, Scorpy.

Scorpy be good tonight. Stay silly stupid good tonight. Being bad is bad.

But

Oi.

when Scorpy gets bad

it feels
so good.
So bad. So good.
But
No. No. No. No. No, Scorpy.
Because
then
Scorpy's heart
eats her
Scorpy's heart
has
TEETH

Made
toast

crack it with my

"It might rain!" I yell above the noise
of Pisces, "The sunset. It's wet like that.
Oh I like a wet sunset. The mood. It fits a
cap on things. I like caps."

I run my fingers through my hair.

Oi.

I like hair. Mine pulls so well

un

like

"Cancer!"

I stand up. I need to stretch. I need to
smoke.

"Cancer, get Pisces to stop crying.
She's a siren for Zod's sakes. I can't take
it."

Cancer crosses the room and pushes
me into a sitting position.

"You could be less tense, darling,"
she says, "We are at a wedding."

"Are you really saying that to me?"

"Hush, chicken," she says, "Pisces
cries because she needs it. You cry
because you don't know what you need."

"Am I crying? I'm not crying."

"Not right now, no."

She starts to massage my back and

Oi.

Oivey.

Cancer becomes uncomfortable and
goes back to Pisces. I turn back to the sun
but the sun is going back to wherever it
goes back to. The sun is a miracle that
goes back.

So go back, Scorpy.

Go

baaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaad

So

bad.

But

No. No. No. No. No, Scorpy.

Scorpy stay good tonight.

Then
Scorpy can smile into
dry
pillows. Not

bite
them.

TEETH
Bitey-
bite
them

No.
Just a ickle

bit

No. No. No. No. No.

But being good is so hard. It's so
boring. Scorpy just wants to have fun like
she likes having fun.

No. No. No. No, Scorpy!
Please stay good tonight!
Bad brings the

TEETH

But
TEETH
Stops the bad.
Oi.

Somebody CRACK
me!

I wave my hand for Cancer but she doesn't come. She's leaving with Pisces. They're leaving through the door. She's leaving like the sun is leaving. Leaving like they all leave. Everything leaves.

And so

Silence

drip

drops

from the

tick

tocks

I run my fingers along the
waaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaalls.

Prick.

“Waiter?” I say, drawing my fingers to my lips, “Waiter, where’s the coffin? Bring the coffin. And the scream, please. We’ve finished eating and it’s late.”

Scorpy needs toast.

“And I’m tired, waiter.”

Scorpy doesn’t have toast.

“I’m so so tired, waiter.”

Doesn’t have black coffee.

“Oi, waiter.”

No white porcelain cups

just

“TEETH.”

CHAPTER ONE OF PISCES

IN WHICH

*Pisces is disgusted,
Scorpio patronizes,
and Cancer matronizes.*

How could they?

Dirt floors. There's not even a door. It's a pórtico. No. Worse. It's just a hole. For animals. This is a room for oxen and ewes. I'm appalled.

How could anyone allow this?

"I love the walls," Scorpio says, running her hands along the bare, wooden planking—how could she?

"Tsk, tsk, honey. Don't get splinters now," Cancer says.

Scorpio stops and sucks her fingers suggestively—how could she?

"Excuse me?" I say, "Do either of you understand what's happening here?"

Scorpio releases her fingers with a pop.

"What's the matter, PC?" she says.

"What's the matter?" I say, "Dirt floors. No doors. Can't you see? This is an outrage! How could anyone be forced to live in these conditions! This whole situation is disgusting!"

I feel a prick in my left eye. And I might cry—but no. I can't cry. Crying accomplishes nothing.

Don't fall to pieces, Pisces!

I close it. I repeat my Anti-Cry Mantra:

INSCRUTABLE

PHARMACEUTICAL

CUTICLE

It works. I don't cry.

And then, just to be safe, I close my right eye and recite my Reserve Anti-Cry Mantra:

OPALESCENT

EVANESCENT

PRE-PUBESCENT

It works. I calm down.

Cancer crosses the dirt (the floor, supposedly) to hug me.

"What's wrong, darling?" she asks.

And I don't cry. I won't cry. I refuse. But then Scorpio lights another cigarette and oh! Her rag thin dress! Her dirty choices! The disgustingness of the sight is too much!

I sob!

"It's these darn living conditions, Cancer," I say, "Look at this place. This is worse than when we shared a dumpster with that hoarder, remember? We didn't know the harm our ignorance was doing until the health inspector told us. Then, we started throwing our trash away at local facilities and everything got better!"

"Oh honey," Cancer repositions me into a side hug, "Momma's here."

Scorpio exhales like a manikin chimney.

"All better, PC?" she says, "Need a kiss?"

"No."

"How 'bout a go downer?"

"No."

She pouts and looks out an open square (the window, supposedly.)

"These are the old slave quarters, Pisces," she says, "They're kept like this for historical accuracy."

"They can at least put in a proper window."

"But it's to remind us of humanity's naughtiness."

"They can at least put in a proper window, Scorpio! It's disgusting to keep things this way. How could they?"

"Don't be an idiot, Pisces. No one lives here anymore. It's a museum. Look. There's even a plaque on the wall."

"What, so they can afford a plaque but they can't afford a striking window to keep the elements at bay? That's disgusting!"

I kick the dirt (the floor, supposedly.)

How could they?

The guests at this wedding must not know these disgusting things are happening. Someone needs to tell them. Holy Zounds. I need to tell them. I'd be in on the act if I didn't tell them. I might as well go bathe in a tub of bloody beaks at the Chick-fil-a factory or invent a dancing handshake with the Koreans, the evil ones.

I feel the prick in my left eye—BUT NO! I recite my Steel Mantra:

AWFUL

FALAFEL

BROTHEL

It works. I'm steeled.

I go to a hole (the door, supposedly) and look out. The guests are collecting near the bar, and on the veranda, and in the Garden—it's disgusting. Their ignorance rises and pricks at my nostrils, my eyes—but no.

"Look at them," I say, "they're so happy. So care-free. They really must not know about the disgustingness."

"Pisces, please."

"But they need to know about the disgustingness."

"Don't be an idiot, Pisces."

"I will tell them about the disgustingness."

"Unbelievable."