

S+P

(Σύννεφο και Πρίαπος)

An American Epic Poem

Nicholas Syrianus Katsafanas

Cloud was sitting at Seventh Heaven
drinking a Fernet on the rocks
engaging in light conversation
with a cocksucker he'd never even met
about a Queen's Blood play-in game
that he'd—this particular cocksucker—
requested to be put on the TV at the bar.
Well, actually Cloud corrected,
for the record,
that he'd actually been reading
a few pages of Timaeus
prior to all this,
making a few disparate notes,
finding himself puzzled at
the sensory information
that continued to be relayed into his brain.
Cloud basically alleged he was flummoxed
about the sensory information that became,
in some way, relayed
to what he guessed was his brain?—

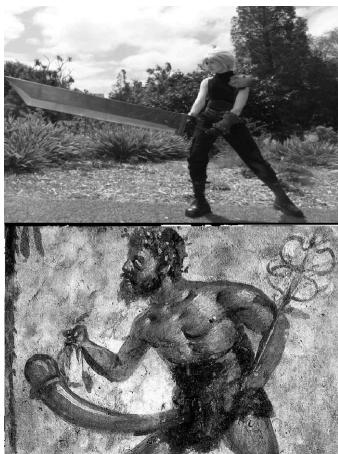
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Part I: The Madness of a Cloud

Canto I
“The Nice Man with his Wife’s Last Name’s
Form of Annihilation”

1859:2546 .730

Cloud was sitting at Seventh Heaven
drinking a Fernet on the rocks
engaging in light conversation
with a cocksucker he’d never even met
about a Queen’s Blood play-in game
that he’d—this particular cocksucker—
requested to be put on the TV at the bar.
Well, actually Cloud corrected,
for the record,
that he’d actually been reading
a few pages of Timaeus
prior to all this,
making a few disparate notes,
finding himself puzzled at
the sensory information
that continued to be relayed into his brain.
Cloud basically alleged he was flummoxed
about the sensory information that became,
in some way, relayed
to what he guessed was his brain?—
how any of that was corroborated,
but more so Cloud contemplated
the static nature of said images—
that’s what he was specifically contemplating
when a guy with a round-ass face
leaned onto the bar,

seeking to close his tab,
obviously excited to tell the bartender
that he may need to show her his ID,
just because he took his wife's last name
and hadn't had a chance to change
his license yet?

The patron with the round-ass face
noted how nice the bartender was (Tifa!),
but what was her name again?

He could definitely display his ID
if she really needed,
just because, again,
his last name was different now—
taking his wife's name and all!

Of course, Cloud noted,
that it was clear that no one gave a fuck
about the printed name on a credit card in that bar,
and Tifa, for her part,
didn't exactly seem like she was ramping up
to suck this dude off
just because he was a radical feminist.

For Cloud's part he was still, you know,
attempting to get behind the blunt sensations
being smuggled relentlessly
into his so-called conscious existence.

Everything was an image to some extent,
right Aerith?

Touch itself was a fucking sensory image.
It was a quaint Spring evening
where Cloud felt more or less
destined to philosophize,

having started drinking wine
in preparation for a Friday night dinner,
only to have Tifa bail last minute,
because she needed to pick up a bar shift—
leaving him completely free
to continue this wine drinking
in a ritualistic way
that would be conducive
to philosophical ideas.

Yes, Cloud continued to Aerith,
it was basically only via drinking alone,
but in a ritualistic fashion,
that he'd achieved any sort
of philosophical inquiry.

You couldn't just sit at a desk
and "become philosophical",
at least not for Cloud!

Maybe some people could!
But, no, not Cloud.

He'd imagine that there were probably
a litany of possible ways
of becoming philosophical—
like, for instance,
for the round-faced albino chap,
perhaps telling Tifa
that he'd taken his wife's last name,
maybe that could be seen
as possibly ritualistic in a way,
a gateway to some sort of
becoming philosophical.

This was "actually science",

Cloud told her he thought at the bar,
successfully avoiding making any eye contact
with the round-faced man.

Was it necessarily strange at all
that once the Greeks went extinct
philosophy went more or less
completely and utterly downhill
and never looked back in the least,
that the last group to really reach
much of any philosophical success
made a sincere effort to conjoin
getting fucked up with
contemplating intelligible phenomena?—
that these Greeks attempted
to marry inebriation and rigorous dialectic?
That all thought since—
to paraphrase North Whitehead—
had been a minor footnote to Plato or whatever?
The thing was, according to Cloud,
you just couldn't willy nilly
"delve into metaphysics"
completely sober!
But that wasn't to say a person
should necessarily become some
degenerate alcoholic either,
because a degenerate drunk
would in no way make a great meta-physicist either—
that was basically impossible, because,
like Cloud said,
the solo mode of inebriation
should be done ritualistically,

in spurts, at certain times.
You couldn't just be like
hitting the bottle
as soon as you woke from a slumber!—
after said inebriation sessions
you'd require sobriety
to parse through whatever it was
that came to you
via said contemplation, no?
In fact, the actual science
was nothing beyond this parsing through
of inebriation sessions
of rigorous contemplation!
That was it—
what laid behind logic and metaphysics,
in Cloud's mind at least!
But inebriation could be anything really—
Cloud could enter a state of inebriation
in a car alone on a Tuesday AM,
without consuming a damn thing.
Aerith more or less agreed,
adding that on the one hand
a philosophical mind
should be able to analyze,
interpret, extrapolate,
all of that scientific stuff—but,
on the other,
if you fail to place yourself
in a position to receive anything to analyze,
interpret, or extrapolate
then you were basically screwed!

Cloud more or less agreed
but added that—sans this type of
“inspiration,” so to speak—
they’d be stuck sitting
at a table just noodling
around nonsensically,
vacillating back and forth
between two types of nothingness,
and then just probably knocking off
someone else’s work by accident.

But none of this was new!

It wasn’t like Cloud was breaking news
in any way.

At this point Aerith asked—you know,
was this albino douche bag,
he was an element of this analysis?
No, not really—according to Cloud—
maybe the guy was trying a tad too hard?—
to present himself
as a specific archetype
to the general public,
as a guy who decided
to spit in the face
of his own chromosome count,
which was something Cloud
"personally endorsed!"
Granted Cloud probably
wouldn’t do it by taking his wife’s last name,
because Cloud personally
was obviously more prone
to a type of isolated

and overly dramatic
self-annihilation
than a subservient
and disingenuously muted
feminist annihilation,
but he wasn't ipso facto
opposed to either!
Aerith agreed
one hundred percent!
But Cloud still would go
a little further,
noting that in the intelligible sphere,
as someone like,
say, Proclus would note,
that so-called forms
were somehow able
to participate in one another
without mixing,
whereas within the sensible realm
they participated in things
and subsequently got dirty.
But Cloud thought that it was worth
going one step further—
since they were discussing
annihilation and stuff anyway,
that the perceived mixing
between forms that took place
in the sensible arena
was itself just a projection
of mixture but not actual mixture.
The intelligible sphere,

being purely emanated,
participated within itself
without mixing itself,
while in the sensible sphere
it didn't seem like that was possible,
that by participating
within sensible things
they became essentially mixed
with them,
assuming they were categorically sensible.
Essentially nature was tainted,
which of course
Cloud and Aerith knew all too well!
Way too well!
Hence their shared acquiescence
toward occasional annihilation!
But even this sensible filth,
so to speak,
Cloud thought,
this perceived mixing up
in the participation of sensible things,
wasn't it also a projection?—
an emanation,
just as the participation
of the intelligible sphere
was also an emanation
of the primary unity of all things?
Which, yeah, brought Cloud back
to that albino round-faced fuck
at the bar,
taking his wife's last name—

because ultimately
the albino's vantage point
wasn't remarkably divergent
from Cloud's or Aerith's,
Cloud thought.

This albino was promoting
a certain type of annihilation
of their cultural-sensible realm,
thinking that the patriarchal lineage
of their society was basically
something objectionable,
something essentially tainted,
that should be annihilated
in the service of something more pure.

Okay, well, Cloud thought
that made a modicum of sense!
Maybe taking his wife's last name
was in a sense a greater form
of purity than locking a woman
in a kitchen and expecting
a blowjob every other evening,
Cloud thought.

Just as Proclus and Socrates
sensed that the intelligible sphere
participated with itself
yet not in a way
where it mixed with itself,
that this was distinct
from our further descended,
sensible sphere
where things participated with

one another but got mixed up
in the process—well,
maybe this albino man
was noting that the patriarchy
was a participatory mixing
that left unseemly cum stains—
"for lack of a better phrase!"—
on human experience.
Patriarchy, in the albino man's mind,
should be annihilated
because of this sensible mixing up,
this putrid tainting
of what would be better off pure.
And taking your nice wife's name
was a proper mode
of annihilation in response.
Aerith remarked that she knew
Cloud would inevitably bring
the discourse back to this poor chap
closing his tab,
but, just to be clear,
what Cloud was saying was that
this mixing that occurred
in the sensible realm was itself
just a separate projection—
just a lesser mode of projecting!
So while the material world
may have disgusted them,
perhaps moving the two toward
some sort of all-encompassing
conceptual annihilation,

and as much as the patriarchy
might have seemed putrid
to the albino husband at the bar
who looked to annihilate himself
by taking his nice wife's last name,
it could be wise to consider
that these disgusting aggregates
were themselves simply derivative projections,
that they weren't actual mixtures,
that they were just derivative emanations
as opposed to tattoos
of what they thought they despised.
Aerith was aware—
she wasn't distressed about it,
but she knew this poor albino guy
would in time
take the brunt of it from Cloud.
Cloud questioned whether he didn't deserve it?
Plus like they'd already implied—
they must to proceed
from the immanent
to the transcendent, no?

Canto II
“Tifa’s Dream”
η/ω 2174:3037
.716

Cloud found it a tad befuddling,
just because
Tifa said she’d had an odd dream
about him the previous night,
and he’d replied bluntly
that he “didn’t usually have dreams
about people he knew”,
somehow completely purging the fact
from his mind that,
just that night,
he’d had a vivid dream
involving one of his first girlfriends
and her current
(to the best of Cloud’s knowledge) spouse.
How could that have possibly
slipped his memory,
given the vivacity of the dream itself?
Barrett didn’t have a clue either, really.
His ex and her husband
were living with Cloud
and his fictional wife
in a modest condo
they’d been leasing
in Upper Midgar,
yet he told Tifa he “never dreamt”
about people he knew,

yet perhaps the most befuddling aspect
of it was that when he'd said that
to her he actually believed it!
Cloud's ex-girlfriend
and his fictional wife
had become somewhat friendly
in the dream, in the condo,
and the whole ordeal—in Cloud's dream—
struck him as totally fine initially.
His fictional wife was obscured,
a pure mirage,
while his ex was an image
of how he'd known her in the past,
not how she was now
(not that he knew how she was now!),
but eventually Cloud began to come
to the realization that this was his
ex-romantic interest
, and that his current wife
and ex-girlfriend becoming friends
was an absolutely
"cataclysmic development"
for him socially,
that it was probably
the worst thing that could possibly
happen to his marriage.
He wondered what the husband
of his ex was thinking—
Cloud was wondering
how it was exactly
that he got roped into this whole thing

as he was exiting
this apartment into
an Upper Midgar that, of course,
wasn't exactly Upper Midgar at all!—
yet only hours later when
Tifa told Cloud she'd had a dream
with him in it that night
he claimed to never dream
about people he knew.

Odd! Barrett noted that he just did, though,
right? That his statement to Tifa
was false, no?

Um, yeah, that's exactly
what Cloud just said!

Cloud reiterated that it was
"literally that night"
that he'd had the dream,
further emphasizing the absurdity
of his statement to Tifa.

Maybe, Cloud thought,
it was closer to a coincidence
than an acute misremembering
or forgetting? Was that possible?
Memory was elliptical sometimes.

But in any case,
he told Barrett he'd had another
dream recently—if Barrett was
by any chance interested
in listening to more
"bullshit about his dream states?"—
where Cloud had discovered a glowing,

fluorescent insect
in one of the drawers
on a screened-in patio
that didn't exist in so-called "real life",
and Cloud tossed the fucking thing
outside onto the grass,
kind of disgusted by it to be honest,
only to discover
that same insect
just a few moments later—
but now appearing in a humanoid form,
standing outside the screened-in patio,
hoping to be let in.
Now, in the dream
there was a little get-together
on this patio,
so Cloud was a little wary
of letting this being—
who was female, to be clear—
into the party, but curiously
everyone else at the pow-wow
seemed totally incapable
of perceiving her, even after
Cloud allowed her in?
Yes, Cloud allowed her in
and the form of communication
between himself and the entity
was simply a series of
"vague feelings",
perhaps, he thought,
this was some kind of reminder

that you couldn't just, you know,
create things—
that refreshing syntheses
are the best we could do?
With that said,
they started copulating on the patio.
Barrett wanted to clarify
that it was the butterfly woman
that Cloud was fucking?
Or whatever she was?
Well, Cloud noted, only
when she became a human being,
of some sort,
that that was when
the copulation occurred, obviously!
But, with that said,
it was actually (kind of?)
intriguing to Barrett, to be honest?
But, more importantly,
Cloud really wanted to know
how Seventh Heaven
was last night,
because Barrett stopped by there, didn't he?
How was it? Well. Let's see.
Barrett definitely
felt the purity of the booze expand
within his chest upon his first sip,
and while the bartender
(obviously not Tifa,
but he didn't catch her name)
was slightly more affable

than when he went there with Cloud,
but she didn't actually ask
what fruit he wanted in the drink.
Sitting alone at Seventh Heaven
Barrett took note of himself
tossing the single orange slice
onto his thin, now immediately moist
napkin and manually extracting
the single seed
that had been expelled
from the orange into the liquor
from the glass,
and in doing so,
he noted
that all that he'd accounted for at the bar—
the affability, the fruit, the seed—
that extracting those ideas
out of the air was basically the same
as the "coordinate-tracking"
reported by remote viewers.
He glanced back at the bar
and took brief note of the bartender
chugging a shot of booze
with a customer
and was violently
smacked in the face
with an acute memory
of ripping similar shots
with a specific bartender
from his past,
which was basically

just another set of coordinates,
but these particular coordinates
returned to him,
he didn't pluck them
out of the air.

He didn't pluck these ripping shots
with a bartender coordinates
from a rapid rush of information—
no, said coordinates returned to him
as he sat in solitude
at the bar totally involuntarily,
violently smacking Barret
in the fucking face
and somewhat rudely
collapsing time itself in the process,
right as Barret sat at that tiny table
alone, innocently sipping his drink
in Seventh Heaven.

Barrett then went on to tell Cloud how,
before the bar,
he'd seen a bunch of people
with Mako poisoning
that he hadn't seen in months,
and Cloud noted
that's how they knew Spring
was approaching, right?!
Yet, on that note,
it was kind of funny because Cloud
was actually thinking to himself
the other day—
what was the

"exact definition of sobriety"
anyway—like how could they actually
"distinguish sobriety from intoxication?"
Barrett perked up a bit.
Cloud made it clear that, no,
he wasn't necessarily
like talking about smoking crack,
or exposing yourself
to high intensity mako shards
for decades on end,
but maybe just drinking white wine
or something?
Because Cloud was crossing
the Washington Street bridge
contemplating a particular vision
of indivisible Oneness
the other night,
as Barrett knew too well
that Cloud was apt to do
from time to time,
and believe it or not
he was actually discovering
a decent amount of enjoyment
in the material world at the time!—
drinking a mini water bottle
filled with Mezcal,
but also attempting to gauge
whether he'd have the time to grab
just one more beer before
Tifa was supposed to be at his apartment.
Cloud was contemplating

the nature of an indivisible Oneness,
but he was also comforted
by the material realm
while coldly calculating
his odds of being able
to chug another beer
while still making it back
to his apartment before
Tifa was supposed to arrive.
And as Cloud was contemplating
this nature of an indivisible Oneness,
crossing a Washington Street bridge,
drinking Mezcal from a mini water bottle
Cloud remarked to Barrett
how he'd started to question
this very definition of sobriety.
But it was here Barrett began to question—
well—what did Cloud actually mean by that?
Well, what Cloud was trying to get at,
Barrett, was that sobriety itself
was supposed to be a baseline of sorts, no?
Of course it was!
Yet how could
they measure this baseline
exactly?—was there a
measurement at all?—
was sobriety to be defined
by a lack of passion,
or a vague sense of the “even-keeled”?
But the problem was,
in Cloud’s mind at least,

that there was no universal emotional baseline with which to define sobriety. Some people—he meant, even Cloud himself could be totally unhinged emotionally on occasion while quote-unquote “completely sober”! Furthermore, even if they—Barrett and Cloud—could define some baseline emotional status as axiomatic, then they would still have to combat philosophically with external substances that weren’t considered intoxicants that would obviously shift this emotional baseline.

What did Cloud mean? Well, like, a lack of food could alter mood. The same could be said of caffeine! Consuming dirt would probably shift someone’s emotional state.

Historically, according to Cloud, people ate fucking plants with small doses of psychedelics embedded within them

and probably thought
very little about
"intoxication" proper!"

People used to fucking sanitize water
with alcohol!

Smoking tobacco altered mood.

Basically, Barrett,
"anything we ingest
alters our latent state
of existence and therefore
changes us in some form
or another, which in most all cases
probably filters into our mood."

Cloud noted,
for him personally,
a shift in his diet could do wonders
for his intellectual disposition—
so then what was sobriety?

It seemed impossible to even think
about sobriety as a thing at all!

Well, Barrett hadn't exactly
considered it like that
and wasn't sure if he would.

But Cloud thought that maybe
they'd taken a false baseline
of sobriety conceptually, no?

After all, what technically
was an external substance?
Could they dig even further
and consider the definition
of an external substance?

A conversation could certainly
alter a person's temperament
exponentially as well!—
but did that technically
count as an exogenous substance?
Did words not carry weight?
A vociferous thought
or even a fleeting memory—
especially in Cloud's case!—
could often toss a person completely
off-kilter, yet they still
for some incomprehensible reason
clung to an idea
of an objective sobriety,
and then they subsequently
targeted select substances
as intoxicating,
while deeming so-called
"other" substances—
which also altered temperaments—
as totally fine! Well,
this was what Cloud was thinking at least,
as he walked over the Washington Street
bridge—that if people didn't
view consuming fresh vegetables
as something fundamentally
mind altering,
then it was possible,
in Cloud's mind,
that they just experienced
the world in vastly different ways,

and Barrett for his part
found this to be
intriguing yet unconvincing,
but Cloud insisted
that there simply
was no true and extended stability
of our mental states—
even if they were hypothetically
deprived of external tinkering,
because even thought itself
was fundamentally external
to some extent, was it not?
And people on average
were constantly accosted
by specific thoughts,
were they not?
Thought almost never ceased
accosting these people,
which were all people?
And even if they confined themselves
to commonly agreed upon
material substances,
then there was still no consistent way
to calculate the degree
of alteration to a mental state
across people of different walks
of life, period.
Barrett might not experience
the same mental shift
after the consumption
of a fresh stick of celery

that Cloud would,
even if the celery itself
remained entirely static.
Walking across the
Washington Street bridge,
Cloud drank from a tiny water bottle
filled with Mezcal
and didn't feel intoxicated
in any way, shape, or form—
any more than had he been
drinking a cup of coffee,
or eating a delicious snack,
or receiving a specific thought.
In his mind at the time
there was no true division
between intoxication and sobriety,
and this was Cloud's final conclusion—
regardless of whether or not
Barrett agreed—as he
somewhat anxiously sent
Tifa a text message
letting her know he was
"taking a walk", just in case
she arrived at his apartment
before he finished
slugging down one last beer
at the bar that he was walking to.

Canto III
“Dinner & Drinks”
1403:1994 .704

"Well, no," were the two words
Cloud began with as he explained
that his point was that
there was a significant distinction
between the two,
meaning dinner and drinks!—
that if you make it out like
it's "just drinks"
and then last minute
it becomes dinner?—
then yeah Cloud's gonna be
a little fucking pissed off!
Especially if he didn't know
the fucking people, you know Aerith?
How did that make
any sense?
He found it a bit absurd,
frankly. Sure,
he'd go tie one or two on
with a total stranger, that was fine,
but to sit down and actually
engage in a dinner?—
that was an entirely distinct level
of socializing,
and it was one that, frankly,
Cloud didn't particularly care for.
And he wasn't ashamed to admit it!—

that, frankly, he felt this Philistine notion
of just "going out to dinner"
with any and every acquaintance,
that if you didn't acquiesce to that
standard then you would be deemed, what?—
anti-social?

Well color Cloud anti-social then!
But Aerith noted that while, sure,
to be fair, it was a different level
of socialization,
if he truly didn't know the people,
but, you know,
if it was her personally?

Supposing it was Aerith,
then she'd hope that it wouldn't be
that big of a deal to Cloud?

To just go out to dinner?
Was she kidding him?!
Oh, of course not, Aerith! With her?

You fucking kidding?
Cloud was always down
to grab a nosh with someone like her,
no, it was just that the

hypothetical notion
of eating supper
with a complete stranger

("a more or less complete stranger")—
what were they discussing?

Cloud and the hypothetical stranger?
Did he have to come prepared
with a portfolio of talking points?—

Cloud couldn't imagine that
they'd be super intrigued
with anything he had to say,
or that they'd end up
on the precipice of any revelation
that he'd conclude to be
particularly enlightening either.
Cloud was simply
going by empirical evidence really.
That was all. He wasn't, like,
trying to be a dick or anything!
Just that, empirically speaking,
it seemed unlikely
they'd have a lot to converse about,
Cloud and this hypothetical stranger.
But Aerith added that,
to be fair, wasn't Cloud
the one who was always railing
against so-called sensory data?
Yet, in this case,
he was all bent out of shape
about this impromptu dinner
because, in his own words,
because of empirical data?
Of past experience,
which was sensory data?
Memories, right?
Which, wouldn't Cloud agree,
was some of the most
unreliable data available no?
Of course he did! Aerith,

even fucking quantum physics
was still fundamentally
sense-forward, in the sense
that they were beginning with
sense perception—
this was what contemporary
so-called science
had achieved of course!
Placing sense perception
as an apex predator
until finally, with the discovery
of quantum physics,
it'd reduced the observable world
to a degree that even linear
sense-perception no longer
made any fucking sense
in the upper worlds!
That was what they'd done,
and quite smugly at times too!—
but wasn't that what Cloud was doing
with this impending dinner?
Aerith queried him on this point.
Well, Cloud supposed that,
thinking about it again, yeah,
he was kind of acting like a
quantum physicist a bit, wasn't he?
Well, Aerith was just saying—
to the extent that his argument was
fundamentally empirical,
but it was kind of intuitive
in a sense too, his argument,

in Cloud's opinion.

He agreed with Aerith
to the extent that, yes,
he was basing his disgust
partially on empirical evidence,
but he'd also allege
that he felt an intuitive disgust
with these types of social gatherings
as well, and then he,
to her point, to be blunt,
did tend to dip into the world
of empiricism to validate
said intuitive disgust.

Although, technically,
they should probably be
a little cautious to even employ
the word empiricism here,
because he didn't think empiricism
necessarily needed to be
restricted to sense-perception
necessarily, you know?

Aerith supposed there, yes,
was probably an empiricism
of the intelligible realm as well?

Honestly, to Cloud—
it was certainly possible
that he maybe wasn't even
in the best mind state to even
assess it one way or another.

Aerith took advantage of this
capitulation to say

she'd recently had a dream
about Cloud—
would he mind hearing her out?—
where he was emailing her a
question about
whether a specific action
was defined as
‘insider trading’, while she was
processing some non-descript
‘orders’ for something
in a bath tub,
which consisted of,
for some reason,
washing large chocolate cookies
down the drain,
watching them
as they slowly disintegrated
under the hot water, then,
after that, realizing that
the cookies related to
Cloud’s question
about insider trading,
she contemplated
if she should have flushed them
all down the drain
before answering the question?
Did she do wrong by Cloud
by washing these cookies
preemptively down the drain?
If Cloud truly wanted
the “order processed”, so to speak.

In a sense Aerith
felt an affinity for the cookies,
didn't she, Cloud inferred.
Cloud postulated that she felt like
they were actual beings
as she crumbled them
down the unforgiving drain
with the scorching hot water?
In retrospect, Aerith admitted
that that may have been the case.
Cloud noted that there
was a certain "level of gnosis"
achieved through
contemplating your dreams—
yet was there any to be gleaned
from participating
in double date dinners?
Aerith admitted she'd been clinging
onto the fact of the cookies
being washed down the drain,
and she knew Cloud
had a particular talent
when it came to interpreting dreams.
Well then let's see here,
Cloud contemplated,
the dissolution of a sweet food
in an apparatus usually used
to clean yourself?
But with a transactional,
abutting capitalist
undertone. And Aerith was doing it,

perhaps unintentionally,
for someone else (Cloud),
without their knowledge,
and not only
without their knowledge
but while ignoring their inquiry—
actually, Cloud guessed
it was his inquiry technically,
about whether it was legal,
as apparently
this was somehow potentially
‘insider trading’?
So she was repurposing
an apparatus
for cleansing the body
to destroy large, life-like
pieces of unhealthy food
for Cloud, without his consent,
Cloud meanwhile wondering
if destroying this junk food
in a bath tub
was actually illegal?
Of course in any dream
they also should consider
whether what was represented
was a representation
of another representation,
meaning maybe not
an analogy at all?
But if they proceeded
as if what was represented

in Aerith's dream appeared
as it was intended to appear,
then that would be a decent start.
So, in a sense,
Aerith thought,
that she was cleaning
particular attributes of Cloud
without his permission,
while Cloud was thinking—
perhaps suspecting—
that cleansing himself
in this way may have actually
been a type of insider trading,
it could have been
a very serious crime.
Cloud noted that—Aerith,
cleaning yourself was
"basically a crime
against the state these days".
No surprise there!
Although Cloud liked
a nice cookie every now and then,
he didn't necessarily
find anything
that bad about
eating a few cookies on occasion,
but Cloud also found it
intriguing that Aerith personally
identified with the cookies
as they broke apart
and tumbled down the drain,

that she saw a certain goodness,
a specific being within them,
and subsequently felt
a sadness at the fact
they had to be washed
down the drain of this bath tub.
Even what's fundamentally
bad for you
isn't necessarily bad,
Aerith noted.
But yes, it was sad to see
them fall apart
in a bath tub faucet, huh?
"Even the running shoes
you need to toss into the trash
are eternal," Cloud said.

Canto IV
“Institutional Norms”
1332:1960 .680

Cloud was for sure fine
with whatever Tifa wanted
to say to him
("I always want you to speak
your mind!"), but he just wasn't
going to back off
his well-developed
(in his mind) idea
that the institution itself
(as a concept)
was basically restrictive,
that they shouldn't
necessarily care
what's there in the container
("Category theory!"),
but also that
"eros was a gateway".
Tifa just wasn't certain
that engaging in that
in the bar, after hours—
she didn't know, was that
actually appropriate, Cloud?
Even if she wanted to do it!
In the bar?! Of course,
Cloud totally understood,
but, again—just to reiterate—
"eros was a gateway".

It didn't have to be about,
you know, purely that.
What?—was Tifa now gonna allow
herself to be tyrannically restrained
by the institutional norms of Shinra, et al?
Was that now how
she was gonna live her life?—
by the contemptuous rules of Shinra?
She could "pop that pussy wide open"
whenever she wanted to!—
if she really wanted to,
even if it was just super quickly!
(What exactly was
the temperature in the room?)
There wasn't anything inherently
out of bounds about
any of that, assuming
the correct context, because—
well, no, Cloud wasn't saying
he was in support of
indiscriminate promiscuity—
no, not at all! It needed to be
rigorous—perhaps "even ritualistic",
and he wasn't even suggesting
Tifa should ipso facto
just quote-unquote
pop that pussy open
to spite the moral norms of Shinra—
it was actually the opposite!
No, Cloud was simply asserting
she "shouldn't not make" beautiful love

in Seventh Heaven simply because
of some societal Shinra code—
she shouldn't allow herself, Tifa,
to be regulated by
an institutional entity
whose primary purpose
was the employment
of the universal restriction.

To Cloud it wasn't in any way, shape,
or form Shinra's place
to enforce
any universal restrictions
whatsoever. Fuck Shinra specifically
and fuck the institution
in a more generic sense.

Ugh, shut up Cloud!

He was kidding, wasn't he?
Oh yeah!—Cloud admitted it
was certainly possible
he was exaggerating certain elements
of his argument intentionally,
in terms of the whole—

well, "you know"—no,
he wasn't suggesting
Tifa should "pop that pussy"
in the bar!

No, that was absurd!
Unless she wanted to!
Because if she wanted to Tifa
should know that Cloud took no
offense, like, at all!

They both laughed at themselves,
but didn't he, Cloud,
in the abstract
kind of have a point?
No, just listen for a second,
Cloud said, please Tifa—
he knew she felt an anxiety,
from time to time,
and according to Cloud
it was actually entirely possible
that it was the anxiety
of the younger Socrates.
Namely, it was this anxiety
that Tifa, she felt like
she might have fallen
into a pit of "bottomless nonsense"—
this idea that there could be
an "actual conceptual idea"
behind all phenomena
that had ever occurred,
that every action she took
had some "capital-I" Idea
behind or above it,
that every single sensory perception,
every single moment
of their lives emerged
from some conceptual Idea
behind it, that ideas themselves
became sub-atomic particles
which become multiplied
into an infinite ("seeming!") nonsense.

It was an extreme vertigo
to experience that
without a doubt!—
and Cloud was all too familiar
with that type of madness himself!
In fact, his entire experience in the ether,
so to speak,
was fundamentally in agreement
with this anxiety of young Socrates.
But what Cloud would say in response,
to Tifa, to himself, to Socrates—
what Cloud would say in reply
is exactly what Parmenides said
to this young Socrates himself,
that this anxiety was an anxiety
of youth ("Cloud,
we're basically the exact same age . . ."),
one that would be extinguished
when she'd
"learned not to despise
any of these things".
In short, Tifa shouldn't allow
Shinra mores—or, frankly,
institutional mores from anywhere else
for that matter!—
to interfere with her own processes,
that was all Cloud
was saying really.
If Tifa wanted to do that at
Seventh Heaven, then, sure,
that was fine!

Well, Tifa appreciated the kind words,
even if it was
an awkward subject for Cloud
of all people to be broaching,
given the fact that
it was kind of blatantly obvious
that it was Cloud
that Tifa would probably do that
with in the bar.

Why would they
kid one another about that!
But for Cloud's part—no,
he didn't care one way or the other—
he just thought that
when someone spent
a decent chunk of time in the ether
that it changed their perspective
on that kind of shit—
what conclusion, after all,
should they draw
from the "contemplation
of sensible objects"?

If she wanted to bend over
in her own bar,
it wasn't philosophically
out of bounds to him
in the least. Like he said,
to some extent
"eros was a gateway"—
they shouldn't view it simply
organically or purely sensibly

even if it was to some extent
existent inextricably
within those realms,
at least from their perspectives
in their bodies or whatever.

A gateway to what though,
Tifa wondered.

To a different type of knowledge
Cloud confirmed.

Wasn't he against sensual empiricism,
Tifa queried—but Cloud quickly
countered that it was
by amplifying
the sensory experience,
by speeding it up
that the sensory experience itself
was transcended—
that was the whole gateway part.

Again, Cloud wasn't
arguing for any of this indiscriminately!—
he was instead making the case
that these amplifications
couldn't be completely cut off!—
that if "other bitter and bilious humors
wander about in the body
and find no exit or escape,
but are pent up within and mingle
their own vapors with the motions
of the soul,
and are blended with them,
they produce

all sorts of diseases".

That just like particles of matter
could be sped up to create
anti-gravitational waves,
the sensory organs could be
similarly sped up in order
to transcend themselves,
basically. Cloud made
a decent point,
but had he heard back
from Biggs and Wedge—
were they going to make it
to the little thing Tifa
was hosting that Sunday?
She just needed to, you know,
get a definite head count
so she could know
how much food she'd need.
Cloud hadn't heard back,
and frankly he was finding it
a little ridiculous at that point—
because at the very least,
to Cloud,
they could at least RSVP
one way or the other.
Sure, of course,
eros was a gateway—
there couldn't be
a totally universal restriction
oppressing every single member
of a society,

but at the same time
if a person couldn't RSVP
to an event
they basically should start
eating mud out of troughs with pigs,
in Cloud's view at least!

People who refused to RSVP
to events in a timely manner
really had no place in polite society!—
or, for that matter,
in any society!

That was Cloud's perspective
at least! And Tifa agreed!

Frankly, she was getting a little frustrated
with the whole process.

She was, in her mind,
doing a nice thing—
throwing an Avalanche quote-unquote
Sunday Funday, but she just needed to know
a head count ASAP.

It was already Wednesday night!

Cloud noted that they'd
sent out the invitations,
like, two weeks back,
and they hadn't even heard back
from half of the potential attendees,
which actually moved Cloud
to think that maybe Tifa
should just cancel
the whole damn thing!
But, no, Tifa was right—

it was too late to cancel,
because then "she'd look like the asshole".
Cloud thought that
maybe that was preferable!
Maybe that's what needed to happen!
There needed to be
some rules to this shit, right?

Canto V
“The Memory of Capitalism”
1768:2478 .714

Cloud asked Barrett point blank
right in Seventh Heaven:
What "was capitalism" really?—
because that's what he was
actually philosophically opposed
to vis-a-vis Shinra, no?
The mass production of mako
energy—was that not fundamentally
just free market capitalism at its finest?—
and therefore wasn't capitalism
just fundamentally
a singularity of sorts,
just a complete evisceration
of memory,
to the extent that
memory is the context
in which we construct ourselves,
our societies?
Cloud asserted that capitalism
didn't give a fuck about that at all!—
simply because
capitalism couldn't,
because if capitalism didn't
ruthlessly pursue maximum profits,
then someone else would.
Cloud eventually asked Barrett
if capitalism actually

consisted of memory at all?
But Barrett didn't fucking know.
The fuck did he even care—
he was attempting to make
an active difference in things.
No, it didn't at all, did it?
Capitalism was the singular focus sans
memory par excellence—
it sought an increase
at whatever the cost,
regardless of the context—
driven by the hypothetical other,
the hypothetical other
moving capitalism to completely ignore
memory holistically,
the only context in which capitalism
would even remotely consider memory
was in its future forecasts,
but even those types of reports
were fundamentally myopic in character,
weren't they?
Plus "past performance
isn't indicative of future results!"—
and even a five year forecast
would basically just cover
the attention span of a beta fish
in the grand scheme of things.
No, Cloud said,
capitalism clearly operated
sans memory, as a singularity—
and therefore was fundamentally

an agent of destabilization
from a political standpoint—
he was agreeing with Barrett!
Barrett wasn't seeking agreement
when Cloud then asked
if there wasn't also something abutting
divine to that type of singularity—
to Cloud it was almost like
the radiation poisoning of pure mako
itself and shit, no?
Capitalism as a singularity contained
a divine element,
in its radical rejection of memory
capitalism was certainly divine-adjacent.
It was like capitalism as an unfettered
seeking of increase
of expansion
was in itself something
worthy of praise in the abstract,
but for an actual sensible society
the "employment of unrepentant capitalism"
was the most "destabilizing and self-destructive"
political philosophy
you could ever subscribe to!
Capitalism was magnificent in the abstract,
but if you actually subscribed
to the theory in practice
then you would almost definitely,
in due time,
totally destroy yourself
and everything around you!

Ultimately, Barrett reiterated that he didn't really have a ton of time to discuss these types of details—philosophical discussions wouldn't, after all, fundamentally alter the rapid environmental destruction that was ongoing at the hands of Shinra! Cloud didn't disagree, yet, at the same time, weren't the two of them at Seventh Heaven drinking fucking beers? How many draft beers had they drank at that point? They weren't gonna slow down Shinra's degradation of the planet via consuming draft beers either! Shit, bro. It was like—Cloud actually woke up that morning thinking about memory—not capitalism, but memory at least—about how he could be himself across multiple platforms and shit, but how, with that in mind, memory perhaps wasn't "attached to Being itself either". Cloud was always concurrently multiple iterations of himself, and he to some extent partook in Being

across those iterations,
but at the same time—
the thought occurred to Cloud
that memory wasn't necessarily
attached to Being
at all times either?
Being and memory—
what was their exact relationship?
That the soul could fundamentally
be eternal,
but if its being
was disassociated from memory
as we understood it
then obviously
it would kind of be difficult to verify!—
as we tend to confirm experiences
via memory and shit.

Barrett gulped down his eighth pint of Midgar Light,
but that didn't deter Cloud
from prodding further at the point—
namely, that fundamentally
capitalism contained no memory,
and Being itself
perhaps only partially partook
in memory?

Was capitalism a form of being? No,
it couldn't be!—not unless
they took a static vantage point
on an infinite urge
to increase and expand,
which, to some extent,

wasn't that the drive of the infinite,
which was fundamentally
the transcendent,
which was—no Being couldn't be
transcendent, not totally, right?
Cloud didn't think so.
Barrett had had enough
of this fucking shit!—
and he slammed his mug of Midgar Light
on the counter and moseyed
out the bar
(he'd heard about
"some new Queen's Blood thing"
that was being introduced
to Sector Seven
that he wanted to try anyway).
Tifa took the opportunity
to ask Cloud if he'd had
any encounters with—you know?—
those ruthless apparitions
that seemed to be haunting him
intermittently since returning to Midgar?
Well, Cloud was after all
a "remade man"—
in more ways than one, but no? Why?
Who else around the slums
had seen them recently?
It was weird to Cloud,
a little curious,
he noted to Tifa,
mostly because it seemed like

sometimes (a) he'd see them,
yet sometimes (b) no,
he wouldn't necessarily see them
but intuit them, but then other times—
like the other day—(c) the apparitions
would be everywhere for everyone to see,
and he'd whip out
his fucking Buster Sword
with Tifa by his side.

Tifa asked him to extrapolate
on the triad of a-b-c, if he could.
She clearly wanted to assist Cloud
in reaching the bottom of all of this,
so to speak.

Well, to Cloud, it was almost like
the Eleatics were correct all along—
that this type of phenomena—
where sometimes (a) he'd see them
and she wouldn't,
sometimes (b) he wouldn't even see them
but he'd feel them,
and then other times (c) they'd appear
to the public at large,

well, phenomena like that
basically undermined the entire idea
of empiricism via sense perception, no?

If sense perception
was something that they could reliably employ
as a first principle to gather data
and then arrive at conclusions
regarding the nature

of the corporeal world—
then shit like
what Cloud just described
couldn't be possible, right?
Cloud asked how could it possibly?!
There had to be a separate first principle
they'd need to reference.
Also, he'd "switch to Fernet"
if that was okay with Tifa?
But the problem with this notion—
both he and Tifa agreed
(Tifa reluctantly agreed)—
was that (a) there was no evidence
that he saw them when others didn't,
and (b) there was no evidence
even to himself that he felt them
when he didn't see them.
Cloud could see them
and he'd be sure
that he saw them
even if Tifa didn't—
he'd have an empirical data point
that he just couldn't prove!—
but when Cloud simply felt himself
to be in communion with something formless
and incorporeal,
then even he couldn't be sure,
from an empirical standpoint,
what it was he experienced,
because his experience lacked a form entirely—
he didn't have a sense-based

empirical data point
to even prove to himself
that he experienced anything!
Tifa poured the Fernet
and said something about
wanting to believe Cloud.
At that point Cloud said,
hearkening back to the point
that previously caused Barret
to stomp out of the bar,
what was memory anyway?—
if not this type of communion
with a formless and incorporeal
experience like these ruthless
apparitions?
After all, he remembered
a boatload of shit that didn't
necessarily have images attached!
A lot of his memories
were in fact formless feelings,
but then—like some of Cloud's other
encounters—did indeed
contain images,
but they featured images
that only appeared to Cloud,
just like Tifa's image-memories
only appeared to her!
So Cloud was of the "acute opinion"
that memories themselves
were to some extent
like these ruthless apparitions

he'd been experiencing?—
yet Tifa quickly corrected him,
aptly pointing out
that Cloud's memories,
to the best of her knowledge,
had never swarmed around Seventh Heaven
and attacked innocent civilians?
He had to grant that as true!—
"but you know what I mean, Tifa".
She did. Cloud's memories were
similar to those ruthless apparitions
in terms of (a) and (b),
but not in terms of (c).
Cloud continued on to say,
sipping a fresh Fernet,
that the point more or less
remained, that while sure
memories were distinct,
these apparitions—
these unidentified flying apparitions,
they fundamentally undermined
the utility of our sense-perception,
which was something,
to Cloud's original point,
that the Eleatics really emphasized.
Tifa acknowledged
Cloud's point about memory—
she didn't necessarily disagree with it
just because memories,
to the best of their knowledge,
never physically manifested themselves

in corporeal forms,
that it struck Tifa as basically true
that memory was a similar type
of experience,
something that they interacted with
sometimes via an image
that wasn't sensible to anyone else,
and sometimes via a vague feeling
that they couldn't even corroborate
themselves!—
even memory to some extent
completely undermined the idea
that our sensory faculties
were reliable instruments to use
to come to accurate conclusions
about what we perceive to be
the corporeal world.

Canto VI
“Yellow Flower Gossip”
1247:1707 .731

Cloud knew that of course
Aerith was suffering from this gnawing inkling
that, you know,
Cloud may have gone and given away the flower,
or perhaps that was a tad too strong a phrase—
maybe "passed along was a better way
to put it", that's what Cloud postulated
at least, but in any case
he knew that Aerith knew
that he forwarded the flower, right?
But how did she come
to possess that knowledge exactly?—
could it have possibly been
via the under city whisper network?
Or did Aerith come to realize
Cloud gave the shit away
via some sort of divine intuition?
Basically, Cloud was attempting to ascertain
the source origin of Aerith's knowledge—
was it opinion or intuition—
whereas Aerith was chiefly concerned
with the "implications of the knowledge itself".
She actually made it quite clear
that she wasn't sure if Cloud's prevarications
were really the point she was attempting to make
when she brought the whole flower
re-gifting up to Cloud—

that the issue at hand wasn't,
perhaps, "how she obtained this particular knowledge",
but instead "whether or not
Cloud gave the flower away",
which to be fair she wasn't,
like, offended by—
Aerith was just a little curious?
Who'd Cloud "forward it to" anyway?
Tifa, right? Of course it was Tifa,
which was totally fine!
They were actually friends!
But Cloud, if possible,
wanted to stay on this prior point—
this epistemological point—because
he thought there was a pretty important distinction
to be found there,
between knowing something via opinion—
because, for instance,
some Sector Six dipshit
was yapping his fucking gums in the slums—
or, by contrast,
becoming familiar
in a more pure fashion.
There was pure knowledge of things,
and then there was bullshit
you heard third hand from douchebags
in the Sector Six Slums.
Cloud felt like Aerith
probably knew via the former method—
could she confirm though?
Instead Aerith chose to posit

the radical notion that maybe
it could have been both?
Sure, Cloud thought that was possible
(he guessed . . .),
but he didn't think so—
it was possible yet not probable—
in fact, Cloud felt like he knew that Aerith knew,
no, not via some whisper network,
no, not by opinion at all,
but instead by direct intuition,
and it just so happened that it was
by his own intuitive capabilities
that Cloud knew that Aerith knew
that he gave that very fucking flower away
via her own intuition,
not by any lurid rumor monger
frolicking shamelessly in the slums.
Were there any rumor mongers
frolicking shamelessly in the slums
though? Spreading disinformation
about Cloud giving away flowers
to a plethora of women in Midgar!
No, that wasn't the way
Aerith had accessed her knowledge—
not at all. Anyway,
Aerith thought maybe
Cloud should consider thinking twice
before giving away flowers again.
That was all. Not that she
was particularly perturbed.
Not in the least actually!

But maybe Cloud could just,
hypothetically,
if a girl like her were
to "give him a beautiful yellow flower"
in the middle of Midgar,
maybe he should hold onto the thing!
Or at the very least
don't go and give it
to some other fucking chick!
Was it really that difficult
to just continually keep a single flower
on your person?
Not that it was Aerith's business anyway,
because clearly if Cloud wanted to gift the flower to
Tifa—
sure that was fine,
it was totally his option
if that's how he wanted
to go about it, but didn't Cloud think
it was just a little rude?
No, instead he thought
that there was a notable distinction
between the two types of knowledge,
but if Aerith did so happen to hear
it in the street,
then would she be willing to tell Cloud
who was flapping their lips?
Was anyone out in the slums
specifically looking to rat his spiky ass out?
In any case, regardless of all that,
Cloud totally understood

where Aerith was coming from,
and he guessed he just wasn't
really thinking at the time,
when he re-gifted the flower—
Tifa took note of the flower,
and he didn't want to go into
"the whole flower girl anecdote",
so he figured it might be kind of nice to,
you know, pass along the love?
Aerith repeated the phrase
"pass along the love" in a way
that, quite amazingly,
wasn't completely filled to the brim
with consternation and contempt.
To Cloud there was something ineffably true
about contemplating the female form,
in its blunt physical iteration—
there was no lurid opinion
present within it,
although Cloud didn't
explicitly express this idea
to Aerith at the time,
given her reticence
to engage in the opinion
versus intuition
dichotomy he started the conversation with,
yet he was still obviously contemplating
her form as this back and forth
occurred. Her typical philosophical disposition
when it came to love triangles
was waning just slightly—

this little flower incident
seemed to "almost rile her up" emotionally,
although it was clear to Cloud
when she repeated the phrase
"pass along the love"
that she wasn't entirely riled up.

Not yet at least.

Aerith finally confirmed for Cloud that, yes,
it was via pure intuition
she'd surmised her flower
no longer resided
on his person, and, sure,
she agreed that there was a certain
distinction between the two types of knowledge.

Cloud then asked Aerith
what she thought was the cause
of each type—well,
obviously opinion consisted of
literal whisper networks,
she said, from what people saw
and heard and all that.

This allowed Cloud
to note that wasn't everything
Shinra was working on—
especially Hojo—
was that not basically another whisper network,
that Hojo,
despite being a so-called scientist,
was simply working off of what he
and his associates heard and saw?
Aerith was tempted to say

Hojo's operation
was a more systematic version
of that, yes, but instead abruptly cut
herself off, because
when she considered it further
she concluded the under city whisper networks
were actually quite complex themselves!
So instead she accused Cloud
of changing the subject,
then she noted that, actually,
she wanted to shift topics,
but not to the so-called whisper networks
of Hojo versus the well-known
whisper networks
of the Sector Six Slums, no! No,
Cloud understood.
Even he didn't even really want to
talk about Hojo!
Maybe he was obfuscating.
Cloud apologized,
but Aerith said it wasn't necessary,
there was no sorry needed really—
they probably shouldn't beat a dead horse,
so to speak. But, ugh,
what a horrendous turn of phrase.
No, Cloud agreed—
it was a terrible saying,
a scumbag saying, really—
Hojo probably would do it though,
beat a dead horse?—
and then fucking, like,

inject it with mako or some shit,
make it a mutant steed! Gross! Fucking loser!

Canto VII
“New Co-Op Cashier
False Doppelganger Arguments”
1227:1739 .706

Cloud just at that moment
had begun to recapitulate,
this time to the two of them—
Aerith and Tifa—
how it wasn’t actually the case
that he’d seen the being,
no, there wasn’t in fact
an actual physical being
in that sense of the phrase—
it wasn’t like the men in the black
cloaks they’d be following in Rebirth
(were either of them
familiar with that plotline yet?).
He’d just began to explain this
to the both of them,
and Cloud didn’t feel any different
about it necessarily—
the fact that he was telling
the both of them—Tifa was behind the bar
and Aerith just happened to be there.
It was fine. Were they familiar
with Rebirth yet? Probably not, right?
But no, in this case Cloud had been
fucking, you know, just sitting
on this carpet in Wutai at the time—
he sat on the carpet cross-legged,

and then he suddenly intuited
a "purely divine being" emanating
in the triangle head encapsulated
in the perfectly square design
that repeated endlessly
throughout the entire carpet.
This triangle head was what
Cloud could only describe
as a "laughing Allah",
that's how it struck him—
there wasn't really a question about it
in Cloud's mind, and it was actually beautiful.
Yes, a "laughing Allah"
was the only way he could describe the divine being,
which certainly "communicated with him"
as he sat cross-legged in Wutai
in a somewhat mystical manner,
albeit not quite verbally,
but the being certainly
communicated in a way
that caused Cloud to smile.
Cloud—smile?! The two women
found that totally hilarious!
Tifa nearly fucked up
the beer she was pouring
she was so surprised to hear
Cloud of all people
talking about himself "smiling",
but neither Tifa nor Aerith
found this anecdote of Cloud's
to be disingenuous in any way—

in fact they both fully supported
Cloud's confessions and more often
than not even found them
legitimately intriguing
(but there were, of course,
some exceptions!),
albeit they generally
found the anecdotes intriguing
in a one-on-one setting,
as opposed to this FFM arrangement.
But that was clearly fine!
It just so happened Aerith
was around and she popped in the bar.
No big deal at all!
Yet, while contemplating whether or not
another Moscow Mule
was advisable or not,
Cloud expressed quite vigorously
that he wanted to relay
a subsequent anecdote
that he viewed apropos
of the carpet encounter,
if that was okay? Of course!
Well, specifically
it was that when
he popped into his local co-op
grocery store that morning,
for just a few minor items,
a couple hand fruits really,
and the new cashier asked him—
right as he shifted his headphones

up off of his ears
to start the formalized sales transaction—
if his "brother or something"
went there sometimes?—
to the grocery store?
Did Cloud "have a brother" by any chance?
Because she, the new cashier,
felt like she'd seen him before?
Well,
Cloud said to the cashier,
thinking about it for a second,
he found it quite possible
that this alleged
doppelganger was actually
fucking just him!—Cloud himself!—
that the cashier was
in that particular instance
confusing Cloud "for his actual self",
that this cashier
"only believed she'd seen"
someone who looked "just like Cloud" before
because she'd, in fact,
seen Cloud before.
He walked away just momentarily,
he told Tifa and Aerith,
just to toss his basket back
into the stack of baskets
behind the automatic
doors. Yeah, he'd take one more
Mule, please Tifa?
The new cashier was chuckling

when Cloud arrived back
at the checkout counter
ready to pay for his shit—
she was in the process of entering
the item number for his red quinoa,
chuckling alone—
"it could've been you" she repeated,
chuckling, but then,
Cloud relayed
to Tifa and Aerith,
she actually came around to Cloud's particular
hypothesis.
The new cashier,
after thinking about it,
came to agree with Cloud,
that she actually probably had seen him
in the grocery store before,
and that she'd just now erroneously
figured he had a brother,
when in fact this hypothetical brother
was "actually just Cloud himself".
Tifa considered,
after she'd ingested the full anecdote
and served Cloud
his refreshed Moscow Mule,
that it was somewhat likely
that the cashier wanted to
quote-unquote suck his cock,
and Cloud didn't necessarily
disagree with the notion!—
he certainly considered it

possible, that this cashier
may have been amenable
to something like that,
but that wasn't quite the point!
There was a type of wisdom
latent in the exchange,
wasn't there?—
regardless of whether or not
the cashier wanted to
"perform fellatio" on Cloud?
Aerith, by contrast,
took a more philosophical angle
to her analysis
of the encounter,
because she agreed with Cloud
that the cashier exhibited
a certain spiritual insight,
even if it was inadvertent.
Aerith, for her part,
didn't put much of any stock
into the cashier's intentions,
whether or not they were sordid,
benign, or simply indifferent.
Upon acknowledging this
Tifa noted that she recognized
Aerith's point of view as valid,
that it was probably
the "right way to take it in",
even if she, Tifa,
wasn't personally at the point
of participating in quite that level

of objectivity
(if they could, in fact, call it that).
Cloud noted that,
at the end of the day,
he couldn't help it if
a "certain person felt an urge"
to suck his cock—that whether or not
someone wanted to suck anyone's cock
is something ultimately unknowable,
that he couldn't simply
toss potential spiritual encounters
to the wayside purely because
of a purported sordid subtext
or intention. Both women
agreed with this,
yet perhaps Aerith
just a tad more than Tifa?—
not to say Tifa was somehow
beside herself with jealousy
in any material way—no,
this distinction between Tifa and Aerith
was probably rooted more so
in Aerith's basically absurd ability
to remain philosophically
undeterred about other women
while steeped in an obvious love triangle.
Did she even like Cloud, really?
Because it was really quite evident
that Cloud, Tifa, and Aerith
were "collectively entwined
in a sort of love triangle",

but Aerith, for her part,
maintained quite the unique ability
to remain essentially
philosophical about it all—
she didn't seem to allow feelings of jealousy
to overcome her in the least
when Cloud relayed anecdotes
about cashiers that,
if the three were being honest,
clearly wanted to whip
the guy's cock out and suck on it
for an extended interval of time.
Did she even really like Cloud?
His individual feelings on the situation
were a little ambiguous,
even when he was all alone—
Cloud was of course incapable
of assessing his own feelings
for somewhat obvious reasons.

Part II: Koreatown Bok Choy

(Subtitled: “Chapter 6: What is the point of numbers?”)

(1) Abstract
(unmetered)

In 387 BC, around the age of 40, the renowned Hellenist philosopher Plato (428-348 BC) founded his Academy in the then flourishing city of Athens, only a dozen or so years following the execution of his mentor Socrates, whose purported last words were, “Crito, please remember we owe a cock to Asclepius.” By contrast, around 390 AD, on nearly equal opposite sides of the so-called Christ event, the Neoplatonic philosopher Plutarch of Athens (350-430 AD) would re-establish the Platonic Academy in Athens, at age 40, where the last of the great Late Antique philosophers—Syrianus and Proclus and Damascius—would work in the shadow of Constantinople. The last of the Academies were shut down by the Imperial decree of Justinian in 529 AD. Yet the birth of Parmenides, one of the great mentors of Socrates (and, via osmosis, of Plato), is believed to have taken place somewhere between 540 and 520 BC, on the equal opposite side of the so-called Christ event as Justinian’s decree.

Canto 1.1
(.769)

Araqi told Jo Yu-ri,
as they sat in the small hallway wide
Udon Lab on West Thirty Second,
right next to the Martinique,
how he had no recollection
of re-reading Rings of Saturn whatsoever—
in fact the only reason
Araqi even realized
he'd started re-reading Rings of Saturn
at all was a sole blue pen underline strike
under the word Rumelia,
right on top of page ninety nine
that, now re-reading it yet again,
Araqi knew all too well
he would have never made
when he initially read Rings of Saturn,
because at that time
Araqi barely knew what Rumelia referenced,
but upon a second reading,
assuming said second reading
took place when Araqi believed it did,
he was totally balls deep in Rumelia lore.
For all of these reasons
Araqi believed
he'd only began his
second reading of Rings of Saturn
when he picked up the book again
just the other afternoon,

but in actuality,
according to this particular blue underline
on the ninety-ninth page of the novel,
it seemed like he'd actually,
in fact,
recently started a third reading, not a second,
but wasn't it a bit befuddling,
a tad disconcerting perhaps that a person
could have absolutely no recollection of reading
a whole fucking hundred pages
of a novel less than five years prior,
Araqi thought, a sentiment he expressed to Jo Yu-ri,
and she agreed that it did seem egregious,
but also perplexing and maybe even,
not to be hyperbolic, but a bit ominous?
But all this,
the entirety of the pair's specific stream of dialogue
was abruptly interrupted
when Jo Yu-ri noted Araqi's
visibly concatenating frustration
as they were suddenly, violently
upstreamed at the bar
by some greasy fuck in a cobalt blue
soccer jersey—
the fact of the matter was
the two friends only popped in the spot
to begin with to take a quick listen
to a particular "xylophone jazz trio"
Araqi and Jo Yu-Ri heard playing
from the foyer as they walked past
on West Thirty Second,

Araqi being intrigued by a trio
led by xylophone,
but once in line at the bar
they both slowly realized
how loquacious
this bartender was with each customer,
Araqi's frustration concatenating
with each second he continued to wait for a beer,
and now, this customer in a cobalt blue soccer jersey,
popped up out of seemingly thin air
to upstream them, this customer,
who, for his part,
had apparently been repeatedly
scorned in his quest to get a second
beer himself,
by none other than this loquacious bartender,
who kept continuing on about
checking the pipes in the basement,
and now this customer
in the cobalt blue soccer shirt
audaciously cut them both in line
to ruthlessly expedite his
subsequent beverage.

Araqi was abutting an audible complaint
but remained unwilling to abandon
his just-discovered excitement
for this "xylophone jazz"
as Jo Yu-ri noted that there was a
Vietnamese food truck outside,
right on the corner of Sixth and Thirty Second,
that she could go get a few egg rolls

if they wanted?
Araqi wasn't really in the mood,
but this didn't deter Jo Yu-Ri
from ambling outside to see
"what was up with their dumplings",
right as the bartender finally attended to
Araqi's pending request
for an overpriced quote-unquote
Italian style beer,
which didn't taste like Peroni at all,
and by the time the two got to a seat
the jazz trio finished its first set
and began its break,
lighting cigarettes and walking back to the bar
for their respective,
Araqi assumed,
free refills.

Canto 1.12
(.775)

Of course it was the case
that Araqi, despite his agitation
at the fact he and Jo Yu-Ri
entered this establishment
with the explicit intent of listening
to this "xylophone jazz trio",
only to get stiffed
by a prevaricating bartender,
by a mysterious shit stain
wearing a cobalt blue soccer shirt,
to the extent that by the time
they were seated with an overpriced beer
and a handful of subpar Vietnamese egg rolls,
the fucking trio itself
stopped pounding xylophones
and ceased playing jazz.
But Araqi had other more pressing
and dire topics of discussion,
despite the sudden silence
in the corridor wide restaurant,
specifically about Jo Yu-Ri's
new so-called employee,
Πρίαπος,
because the fucking guy
had been talking his ear off about Soju
for like the whole last week.
Jo Yu-Ri
nodded at the comment

without even an inkling of a hint
of shock in her gaze.

She wasn't caught off guard at all,
as Araqi continued to recapitulate
the guy's monologues,
about how this country,
if this nation had any chance at all
whatsoever, then it needed to immediately
adopt Soju as its national drink,
that there was no other option
but to adopt all iterations of Soju,
of Korean Rice Wine
as the proper Bud Light replacement,
to co-opt this Korean wine
and rebrand it as essentially fucking American,
Araqi said.

That the Joe Rogans of the internet sphere
had prescribed the Donald Trumps
of the physical world
as the panacea this country needed,
via reactionary channels
posted on a platform
that ironically enough
started as a CIA front,
yet the reality was the true corrective
could never be found in a Donald Trump.

No, only in Korean rice wine,
according to Πρίαπος,
people needed to start drinking it in bars
and restaurants in place of carbonated light beers!
Araqi and Jo Yu-Ri both noted

that they respected the passion of Πρίαπος,
and that he was essentially correct
in his assessment
that nothing was more American
than stealing the domestic culture of others
and rebranding it as our own,
and Soju was in fact, after all,
an optimal bar drink,
as it was specifically designed
to provide more of a buzz than beer,
but not quite the ill-advised lift
of the average eighty proof
grain alcohol.

Yet, according to Araqi,
Πρίαπος was dubious that the country
could actually adopt Soju,
primarily because of people,
he said, like the median second cousin,
people who would be reticent to drink
something quote-unquote Korean
on the regular,
people who clung to beliefs
that people like Ted Cruz
actually had decent ideas
about the world,
that any person who found Ted Cruz
to be philosophically intriguing
would obviously be a little reticent
about imbibing Soju,
when it was obviously the case that,
in fact,

Ted Cruz was probably one of the top ten
most despicable people on the planet?

Πρίαπος noted Cruz's prevarications
when asked questions
like 'Does AICAP ever interact with Israel,'
saying how it once again demonstrated
the innately despicable baseline
of his personality.

But people like the median second cousins
of America would actually prefer to discuss
Ted Cruz with a modicum of nicety
than just imbibe Korean rice wine
as their default drink of choice,
which was clearly why this country
was on the precipice of an
irreversible decline,
if not in the midst of it already!

This country was clearly fucking finished,
Πρίαπος said,
and it was solely because of this intersection
of Ted Cruz, Soju,
and the conceptual second cousin of course,
Araqi repeated,
slowly almost believing
what Πρίαπος had repeated
into his poor eardrums
day after day that week.

It was clear to Πρίαπος at least
that the second cousin was a topic
they must actually legislate against.
No, not just pontificate about,

because these second cousins—
they wouldn't just rescind of their own accord,
second cousins were instead indicative
of a structural rot. Πρίαπος thought
that he Jo Yu-Ri and Araqi
should all move to communicate
with their New York state
representatives to see
if they could begin drafting a bill
opposing the concept of the second cousin
in this country.

Was that doable, did they think?
Araqi took a bite of an egg roll
that was somehow still scorching hot
five minutes after Jo Yu-Ri
put the plastic plate
down on the table.

The fact it felt a hundred fucking degrees
out in Midtown
probably didn't help.

Canto 1.13
(.753)

Jo Yu-Ri, wiping her petite fingers
on a thrice folded napkin,
smearing select remnants
of truck cooked egg roll grease
onto the pure white paper,
shook her head side to side
and showed Araqi
the page of the book she'd just opened up,
Ashbery's
Self-Portrait in a Convex Mirror,
and muttered look at all this scribbling!—
in reference to the inane notes
the previous owner
of the paperback had strewn
all over the first page in pencil.
Araqi asked her what condition
she'd bought the book in exactly?
Was she aware of that level
of scribbling prior to buying it?
No, she replied,
but to be fair nearly every other page of the book
was entirely clean,
until of course this final poem,
the self-titled entry of the collection.
Obviously some nitwit
who probably had to write, like,
a term paper about it,
Araqi suggested,

some kind of dissertation,
and Jo Yu-Ri agreed,
head bowed in defeat.

Araqi alleged it remained readable even if,
sure, the incessant pencil scribblings
were a little distracting,
certainly off-putting,
he could totally relate to that!

The fact of the matter
was it was increasingly difficult
to pay discounted prices
for used books these days,
without some incessant and/or inane
scribbling dominating the margins
of select pages,
without delays
in shipping or unexpectedly bent covers
or subpar paperback bindings,
although Jo Yu-Ri did note
of all the fine poems the collection consisted of
she found the title poem to be the least essential—
so if one particular poem had to be ruined
by said scribbling she was at least
glad it was that one.

Books, Araqi asserted,
were actually becoming slowly
impossible to acquire,
as production volumes dropped due to
the increasing illiteracy all around them.
It was basically a case of when
before a functional embargo

would take hold
in terms of acquiring decent books
at affordable prices.
They were rapidly reverting back
to the Middle Ages or something,
with rare libraries gated away
from aficionados jizzing themselves
over simple access to printed paper.
Jo Yu-Ri thought the emergence
of the PDF black market
ran counter to Araqi's hyperbolic claims
but of course she preferred to peruse
physical copies as well
so she felt
the overall pull of his lament,
but Jo Yu-Ri then abruptly continued on to note
in a more vigorous fashion
her agreement with Araqi
regarding Πρίαπος—
did he know that just the other day,
while watering her bok choy plants
with his massive phallus,
he told a story about
rendezvousing with an exotic dancer?
Πρίαπος said he'd met the stripper
just a couple weeks previous
and that she'd asked to meet with him,
which he said to Jo Yu-Ri
he assumed meant she intended to bilk him
out of some cash at her club
in Astoria, but apparently—

to her surprise—
Πρίαπος wasn't above that,
so he actually showed up to the club,
Jo Yu-Ri told Araqi,
but then, the dancer,
half in the bag according to Πρίαπος,
told him she actually meant to meet
outside the club, so as her shift ended
he took the dancer down the street
to some hookah spot,
smoked shisha then,
according to Πρίαπος, quote-unquote
"railed her in her SUV on a side street
after she moved her kid's carseat
to the side". Jo Yu-Ri
was a slightly flabbergasted
at the anecdote,
which Πρίαπος continued,
noting how the chick had some issues
with "suicidal ideation",
but to Jo Yu-Ri,
she relayed to Araqi,
it was a little concerning, no?
Just because she'd hired the guy
because his phallus was supposed to be
beneficial for plant growth,
and while clearly that was ideal
for bok choy cultivation
in Midtown Manhattan,
she wasn't so certain
she'd get the maximum value

of his phallus
if he was—plowing sluts in SUVs
on side streets
next to shisha
establishments,
Araqi finished?

Canto 1.14
(.744)

No, Araqi noted,
it was certainly uncouth
that Πρίαπος was, you know,
potentially having sex with strippers
outside shisha spots
in Queens, but still,
with that said,
he had come to question Jo Yu-Ri's
arithmetic just slightly,
mostly because
while he understood
the phallus of Πρίαπος
was being employed for bok choy
cultivation and engaging
in illicit activities,
and that that particular addition
seemed to portend poor outcomes.
But three plus four,
Araqi said, didn't equal seven—
not exactly.
Because truly it equaled
seven plus the Form seven,
because sans the Form seven
it would be basically impossible
for them to even conceive of seven,
but, Araqi noted,
Form seven by its very nature
didn't engage in the same

unitary mixing
that the mathematical seven did.
What Araqi was saying,
he reiterated to Jo Yu-Ri,
was that it was possible Πρίαπος,
being a divine being (of sorts!),
was probably not tethered
to the same rubrics of arithmetic
as others?—
that Πρίαπος was very possibly
closer to the Form seven
than the mathematical seven,
in which case, while sure,
his sojourns
with certain Astoria strippers
was in poor taste,
it might not actually have
a palpable effect
on Jo Yu-Ri's
bok choy?

Canto 1.15
(.794)

Jo Yu-Ri flashed back
briefly to a bulbous penis
that was sprayed in graffiti
onto the foundation of a home
on Bridgham
that she passed
while walking to a Family Dollar
the other day.

It was like ever since
she employed this
Πρίαπος she'd been surrounded
on all sides by unrepentant penis,
which probably,
she reflected,
served her right for going into business
with a Hellenic entity
(especially a so-called deity).

At the same time
growing fresh bok choy in Midtown
gave her a competitive advantage
no one else had in Koreatown,
so was it all possibly worth it?
As Araqi received the tab
(after drinking his second shitty
pseudo Italian pilsner),
at four twenty pm
(as opposed to Jo Yu-Ri's receipt
being received

at three twelve pm)
he wrote out the tip and,
when laying the paper
down on the table
next to Jo Yu-Ri's
the two realized both tabs
came to exactly
twenty-nine eighty-four a piece,
with each tab exactly consisting
of a twenty three buck subtotal
with a dollar eighty four tax assessment
and five even tip,
which was a bit of a coincidence,
almost like a chance event
that had some sort of cosmic significance?
The two stared at the two tabs
in silence as a chubby white guy
hammering away
on his xylophone slowly faded
to black.

$$\begin{aligned}(2 + 3 - 0) &= 5 \\ (1 + 8 - 4) &= 5 \\ (5 + 0 - 0) &= 5\end{aligned}$$

3:12 pm

subtotal: \$23.00
sales tax: \$1.84
tip: \$5.00
total: \$29.84

4:20 pm

subtotal: \$23.00
sales tax: \$1.84
tip: \$5.00
total: \$29.84

$$\begin{aligned}(2 + 3 - 0) &= 5 \\ (1 + 8 - 4) &= 5 \\ (5 + 0 - 0) &= 5\end{aligned}$$

(2) Abstract (unmetered)

According to the online archive of The New York Times, on February 9 1984, a series of Reagan-era American warships spent nine hours bombarding Syrian and Druze gun batteries in Lebanon. The Druze population of Lebanon and Syria is of course the ancient peoples who arose in the aftermath of the disappearance of the infamous Fatimid Caliph al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah (985-1021). The Druze, for their part, place a great significance on the number five, believing that prophets of each era come in groups of five, which they date back to the days of Antiquity, proclaiming the five great prophets of that era to be: Pythagoras, Plato, Aristotle, Parmenides, and Empedocles. Pythagoras, the eldest of the five, was a strict vegetarian born on an island called Samos in West Asia around 570 BC. He's since been renowned for, among other accomplishments, his musical tunings, the theory of the transmigration of souls, and a unique perspective on numbers, as well as the fact that there's not a single detail of his life that remains uncontradicted. Allegedly Pythagoras left Samos at the age of 40. Perhaps the greatest distillation of what we believe to be Pythagorean teaching can be found in the dialogue Timaeus by Plato, who founded his Academy in Athens at the age of 40 himself, around the year 387 BC, nearly two centuries after the birth of Pythagoras. Parmenides, the second eldest of the five, was born about 50 years after Pythagoras in Elea, in Southern Italy, where Pythagoras, by some accounts, committed suicide in Calabria—when Parmenides would

have still been an adolescent. Only fragments remain of Parmenides' primary poem on the indivisible Oneness of Being, where a great focus is placed on the concept One, but his ideas are present in more extended form in the dialogue *Parmenides* by Plato, as well as an extended, partially extant commentary on *Parmenides* by Proclus. Empedocles, another vegetarian (and the younger contemporary of Parmenides), was born in Sicily not long after the purported suicide of Pythagoras in Calabria. The last Greek philosopher to record his ideas in verse, he would be succeeded, informally, by Plato and Aristotle. Yet the former, the only native born Athenian of the five, wasn't born until a half decade after Empedocles' death, in the late 420s BC. While Aristotle wouldn't be born until Plato was in his mid-forties. Yet he'd remain at Plato's Academy until he was 37. Yet even Aristotle, the youngest of the five by far, remains an interpersonal mystery to us today. Nothing is known about his life for certain except for the fact he was born in modern day Thessaloniki and that he had a passing interest in botany.

Canto 2.1
(.761)

Hakim Allah actually desperately
needed a waifu in Cairo,
like "so bad",
but he also felt a certain longing
for summer,
for the sun
and the heat and the accompanying irresistible urge
to indulge in a nice cold wine,
being born after all
in the peak summer month of August
in Nine Eighty Five and all.
Some would suggest
there was possibly even
a mystical element to it,
the thirteenth day
of the eighth month,
perhaps an arithmetic calculation
or something of the sort,
the violent vacillations
he experienced philosophically?
Weren't those in themselves a residue
of an indivisible Oneness,
violently vacillating between
strict philosophical schools
that vehemently disagreed
with one another?
Wasn't vacillating between
philosophical poles,

violently,
in a sense, a real dissembling
of the pernicious dualities
and multiplicities
we encounter every damn day?

A middle-aged man was adorned in dapper cloth
sitting on the patio
smoking a thin cigarette
and Hakim, who didn't smoke regularly,
suddenly felt an intense urge
to indulge in just one cigarette,
reflecting back to past moments,
on equivalent patios
where he'd maybe puffed a cigarette or two,
where events were inevitably felt,
felt in the way that feelings
must inevitably extend,
muddied and disgusting
to recollection and thoroughly incomprehensible
in material ways.

Ultimately, it was only when you were
smoking cigarettes that you actually felt things,
and feeling things was usually
a kind of composite phenomena.

Hakim pulled out a single dinar
and asked the guy for the great privilege
of bumming a single cigarette,
smoking it next to the man
who was obviously a high ranking court officer
of the most respectable order,
to which the man bluntly replied

sorry last one,

but there's a "camel shop across the street that sells them".

In no way, shape, or form
was this man smoking the last remaining
unit from his pack of cigarettes—
it would have been fairly clear
to any person with even
half of a functioning brain
that this man had many more cigarettes remaining
in his pack, that while the precise amount
of cigarettes the man had
remaining was uncertain
it was also abundantly clear
that that amount certainly equaled
more than one.

It was utterly absurd to assume
this man was smoking his last cigarette
on the patio.

With this in mind, purely out of spite,
Hakim, after waiting a few moments
in deep contemplation,
crossed the street and stood in place
at the camel station,
where three people were already
impatiently waiting
in front of a hand-written
sign that read Bathroom Break Be Back in Ten Minutes.
There was no option but for Hakim to buy
an entire pack of cigarettes purely out of spite,
a spiteful lust to just smoke one cigarette.

A heavy set pasty middle aged lady
wearing a black napsack
with thinning light hair on the top of her head
was first in line,
and would remain longer
than the roly poly fair-skinned man
with the macho accent,
or the run of the mill day laborer—
yet, fueled by this mixture of nonsensical lust
and irrationally insatiable spite,
Hakim would wait
nearly an entire half hour
for the attendant to return to purchase
this pack of overpriced cigarettes
to smoke a small percentage of
on the patio.

He outlasted not only the heavy set pasty female
and her initial companions
but even subsequent others
who approached the window then quickly left
exasperated at the ridiculous wait,
at the absurd claim
on this cardboard sign.

Yet once this escapade
was completed Hakim returned to the patio to,
to his surprise,
find the same man still smoking a cigarette,
which Hakim quickly calculated,
must have been a subsequent cigarette
or, even worse, a subsequent
to a subsequent cigarette,

and the same heavy set woman
with the black napsack and thin light hair—
now also smoking a cigarette,
despite the fact she left the camel station
before being able to buy a pack,
which Hakim quickly calculated,
must have also been supplied by
the man in the high class cloth.

The man just moments ago
was allegedly smoking his quote-unquote
last cigarette on the patio.

The man in the high class cloth
must have gifted the heavy set
pasty female her cigarette,
because Hakim was just with her,
at the camel station,
and she had no cigarettes,
the only reason she was even
at the station was to obtain
additional cigarettes.

So it was basically corroborated
that the man adorned in the royal attire,
at the very least, at the bare minimum,
had two additional cigarettes,
if not three additional cigarettes,
in his pack when he ruthlessly told Hakim
he was smoking his quote-unquote
last one, which of course was unsurprising,
yet, like all implied lies,
it stung Hakim more vociferously
when it was finally confirmed

beyond a reasonable doubt.

All obvious lies are more benign
when still existing in an unproven state,
despite being obvious,
because a blatant lie, once proven,
despite the fact its essence
was already assumed fictitious,
despite already having attained
a certain reality as a lie,
stings with a certain vigor
when finally confirmed

as a blatant distortion of the truth.

All truth is ultimately distorted to some degree,
and we know this implicitly,
yet without fail we're monumentally
dejected upon confirming
certain distortions of the truth.

We believe the obvious lie to be fictitious,
having been obvious,
that it will mean nothing once
confirmed as a falsity,
as nothing has essentially been altered,
what we already treated
as a probable lie
simply becomes an actual lie,
yet when the obvious lie shifts
from assumed to proven,
it irrationally concatenates
and becomes an even more egregious lie.
Hakim had been shamelessly betrayed
by a man who owed him less than nothing

in the world, yet wasn't it perhaps the case
that by the sole act of smoking cigarettes,
to some extent,
the man entered into a social contract
of benevolently acquiescing a request
for a single cigarette
at shitty dive bars.

To smoke a cigarette at a dive bar
is to voluntarily enter into a commune
of like-minded citizens bumming cigarettes
off each other on occasion,
and, with that in mind,
wasn't falsely claiming tobacco poverty
in such a setting
a "faux pas of the highest order"?

Hakim came around to the idea it was
as he smoked two brand new cigarettes
on the patio from his brand new overpriced pack,
after somewhat sarcastically offering the man
in the royal attire an additional cigarette
after his so-called
last one was done,
as he drank from the white wine
the bartender was nice enough
to keep on ice for him
while he waited at the camel station
for upwards of a half an hour,
purely out of spite.

Canto 2.12

(.813)

At the age of thirty five,
which is, we know,
only truly divisible by
the numbers seven and five,
it's almost inevitable to arrive
at the realization that the sky
itself is little more than a tin roof,
Hakim considered as he sat on the patio
eyeing the douche bag
in the royal attire walk away,
that beyond the sky
our senses relay to us
only mirages and lurid
falsifications,
purely out of habit,
with no ill intent whatsoever.
It's never been with ill intent
that our senses have utterly let us down
in nearly every regard,
it's simply the intrinsic nature of things
that cause our senses
to relay lurid falsities.
Sans memory
there can't be time.
At the tender age of thirty five
all of this without fail
becomes clear to you,
that everything is aesthetics

in a certain sense,
that the sky itself
is just a tin roof,
and Hakim went back into the bar
to ask the aged bartender,
who it turned out was only
a couple years older than him,
for just one more wine,
where a younger man and his wife
complained about being banned
from some local establishment.

The young man calculated
how much money he spent
at this establishment,
how much money they were forsaking
by so unfairly banning him,
never taking
a second to analyze
whether the amount of money
he was spending at one bar
was even advisable to disclose in public,
with complete strangers.

There was a criminal element
to this banishment
in the eyes of this young man,
as this was a situation
where he was completely sans fault,
where this establishment had acted
erroneously, to the extent the error
was actually criminal.

He'd never be able to go back to that bar again.

But would they survive economically
sans his patronage?

When Hakim went down the road,
leaving the riveting conversation
of the young man behind him,
to his dismay

he didn't find a single waifu
marauding around the city,
the city was completely
void of any and all waifus.

No, just some middle-aged dudes
discussing the current state
of the Fatimid military.

How to transcend the tin roof
was always a matter of great dispute,
and a recurring voice would whisper
to Hakim in his sleep

that very night that there was nothing
beautiful in the streets

that afternoon

for a specific reason,

because the digestion of beauty

at certain times

can make a person exceptionally dyspeptic,
this was protection.

Hakim agreed,

still tasting the six falafels he scarfed down
on his way home even after brushing
his teeth multiple times,

violently vacillating in his own way

even as he re-entered into a calm,

deep sleep where he'd
have a recurrent dream
of killing himself to cleanse himself.
Hakim would kill himself
in his dream,
yet afterward he'd subsist in a superior form,
post successfully killing himself,
void of the memories that haunted him,
depriving him of a peaceful slumber.
He questioned these voices
he frequently heard in his head,
their origin,
the ones constantly calling him until,
finally able to assert control
of his environment, he screamed
Allah is One repeatedly,
until the containment of his dream
was cleansed by his yelling.
With Hakim in a state of great
distress and only half-awake,
The Prophet Muhammed appeared briefly,
as a mirror image of himself,
and uttered nothing he could recollect.

(3) Abstract
(unmetered)

In American folklore it's often posited that "second place" is actually "the first loser." While scholars of various stripes have conflicting opinions on the accuracy of such claims, the reality is, at least according to the general populace of the world's greatest country, the saying is functionally viewed as true. The second cousin, strictly defined, is the child of the first cousin in relation to the child of another first cousin, first cousins of course being the respective children of siblings. The number 2 is, in theory, the beginning of all multiplicity, the primal source of a multitude. Without the number 2 there would be no linear single-digit path to 3 and 4 or even 5. In fact all evenness itself is defined, in theory, by an ability to be divided by this number 2. Even binary code, while only consisting of 0s and 1s is still comprised of 2 numbers (0 and 1). And all duality is derivative of the number 2. The number is at times associated with Ceres or Demeter, a goddess of agriculture and fertility, an alleged sister of Zeus. In certain forms of Neo-Pythagoreanism and/or Neo-Platonism, a certain indefinite dyad is an originator of the entire universe, emanating from an ineffable One, whereas certain cosmologies, such as Gnosticism and Manichaeism, are notable for their dualist structures, placing a duality as a first principle, which are in sharp contrast to the more monist constructions found in Akbarism and other orders.

Canto 3.1
(.747)

Enzo told Daria
how he was considering
that it was perhaps
with a tyrannical exactness
that he proceeded about his life,
right up
through his weekly high fades,
that he considered a latent geometrical tyranny
to be possibly ruthlessly
guiding his life
as he took quick note
of a quite sizeable posterior
in light blue jeans
that was walking right past him
as he approached the large brick building
that contained
the Department for Economic Development
on a sunny Friday afternoon
at four pm on the dot.
Daria knew Enzo walked there
to try and slip the clerk
a quick so-called "business registration form",
but before she could confirm
what she already knew for a fact
Enzo went on to note
that it turned out the city clerks' offices closed
half an hour early for their
so-called summer hours,

which as it so happened
was right at four pm.
Enzo muttered what the fuck
before continuing on to note
that he was wearing his new tan
Walmart mesh basketball shorts
with his white vans
as the voluptuous woman walked past
him—by contrast—
wearing wire rimmed glasses
on the tip of her thin nose,
surrounded on three sides
by curly black locks.
According to Enzo,
sometimes it was just preferable
to sit on a roof
with your shirt off
and think about fucking nothing for a little bit—
even if it was five fifteen
on a Friday afternoon?
There was, after all,
repetition and number,
he said to Daria,
but did all numbers "actually repeat"?
Daria noted she'd been noticing an insane amount
of five fifty fives
and two twenty twos,
plus eleven elevens,
and even one elevens of late
but to date
she'd refrained

from any attempt to google an explanation.
But wasn't it the case,
Enzo interjected,
since they'd gotten onto the topic
of sequences of integers anyway,
wasn't it the case
that the "second cousin as a conceptual artifice
was collectively accelerating
the downfall of their country",
I mean,
Enzo said,
second cousins
are in aggregate all basically cunts,
right? In Enzo's mind
it was the clearly the case
that the second cousin
was basically objectionable,
a pitiful
clinging to a so-called bloodline
that was, even when more potent,
still somewhat ambiguous
if not nonsensical.
What was blood anyway?
Daria, for her part,
didn't have a particularly strong
opinion on the concept
of the second cousin
one way or the other,
but she admitted that she didn't
have as big of a family as Enzo,
which perhaps played a part

in her quizzical nonchalance?
No, Enzo
went on,
the second cousin was something indicative
of a structural rot,
in fact it was something
that probably needed actual legislation
to be properly combatted,
because these second cousins—
they wouldn't just rescind of their own accord.
No, Enzo and Daria both,
they needed to start
"petitioning local representatives"
to pass legislation
to abolish this concept of the second cousin.

Canto 3.¹²
(.731)

It was abundantly clear to Enzo
that there was a recurring
splitting into two
that was perhaps the most nefarious act
of all,
that the first of this or that
inevitably would become extended
to the so-called second
of the same substrate—but why?
It was this counting—
this lurid linear extension
that perhaps offended
Enzo the most,
to which Daria, thinking about her bok choy
with an unerring sense of dread,
was only partially paying attention to.
They'd fundamentally forgotten
something about number,
Enzo said,
they'd become addicted to dividing and adding,
extending and subtracting,
instead of focusing on concepts
more steeped in purity.
Enzo felt as though
they were meant to recall something essential
about number, but now,
somehow,
that was impossible for them,

that they'd forgotten for good
an essential aspect of number,
which made every situation
they encountered immeasurably more bleak.

The second cousin itself
was nothing beyond a symptom
of a much greater sickness,
the common cold of counting numbers,
of becoming unitary
until they reached infinity.

Nothing was more infinite
than the unitary,
yet the unitary becoming infinite
was utterly absurd!

Everything was split into two,
or split into three,
all around them were doppelgangers
and trinities of what was what.

Multiplicity couldn't exist this way!

Enzo continued as Daria simultaneously
considered bringing up a few concerns she had
with an employee she'd contracted
specifically in a botanical manner,
but who, given his unorthodox methods,
had started to concern her
given some of his more licentious habits.
Of course botany and personal matters
were probably, in most cases,
considered completely separate issues,
but due to the specific nature
of this particular job

it had begun to bother Daria
just slightly. Enzo, for his part,
had an entire pack of cigarettes in his drawer—
he said to Daria—
because he'd bought a whole pack the other day,
"just purely out of spite".
Did she want to go out onto the deck
and whack a puff or two from one?
Was she drunk enough
yet? To smoke a quick cig?
Because she clearly wasn't listening
to any of the fucking shit
he was saying about integers or second cousins—
about the nonsensical division
of everything all around them!
No Daria was, she was listening
(kind of ...),
it was just that she was just a tad
preoccupied, even before coming by
she'd been walking through a small
courtyard in the city,
taking note of the big trees
growing next to the large brick condo buildings,
contemplating connecting with nature,
but also with inanimate objects as well?
It was one thing to connect with nature
and trees and plants,
that was almost cliche,
but what about connecting with inanimate objects
"made of plastic
by wage slaves in East Asia"?

She'd recently attended divine liturgy
for the first time in ages,
she told Enzo,
and while occasionally
staring up at the series of icons
people would have indiscriminately killed
people for worshipping
just a few short centuries ago,
she could have sworn a set of voices
were speaking to her,
solely in her mind,
comforting her but also informing her
that there would be an upcoming time
that they'd snap their fingers,
and she'd finally return to them,
as if that was where she actually
belonged, in this plane she could hardly comprehend,
yet communicated to her with no problem.
She exited her body just momentarily,
filled with pure relief,
then the beings
reiterated a time would arrive
when they would snap their fingers and she'd return,
finally,
to them.
Perhaps she'd have discounted
the encounter
if she hadn't, on a whim,
she told Enzo,
decided to go up to take communion with her dad—
and as her turn finally arrived to imbibe

the blood of Christ Himself,
she noticed sitting calmly to the left
of the priest was a Wind Tunnel brand
floor fan.

The exact same floor fan she'd,
after taking entirely too many mushrooms
one particular evening eons ago,
engaged in an extended conversation with
regarding the true nature of things,
during which a certain clarity descended upon her,
finally understanding, with the utmost purity,
her true origin and, in turn,
the primal source of all things.

(4) Abstract
(unmetered)

“In another dream of wider significance I saw Jonas Lie, with a gilt bronze clock curiously ornamented. Some days later, when I went to walk on the Boulevard St. Michel, a watch-maker’s shop window attracted my attention. ‘Jonas Lie’s clock!’ I exclaimed aloud. It was indeed the same. It was crowned by a celestial globe on which two female figures leaned; the works were supported by four pillars, and on the globe a date-indicator pointed to the 13th of August. In a future chapter I will explain what the fateful 13th of August brought with it. This and other occurrences took place during my stay in Hotel Orfila between 6th February and 19th July, 1896. Concurrently with them a larger adventure pursued its often interrupted course till, with my exit from the hotel, a new section of my life began ... August 13th.—The day announced on the Boulevard St. Michel has arrived. I wait for something to happen, but in vain; none the less. I am certain that somewhere something is happening, the result of which I shall hear in a short time. August 14th.—On the street I pick up a leaf out of an old office calendar; in large type there is printed on it ‘August 13th’ (the same date which was on the clock). Underneath it in smaller type is a sentence, ‘Do nothing secretly which thou canst not do also openly.’”

- August Strindberg, The Inferno

Canto 4.1
(.782)

Ultimately, whether the cults of Aphrodite engaged in sacred prostitution or not is something scholars of history are still bitterly torn about, but there exist perhaps legitimate reasons to agree with either camp. On the one hand, if the Greeks engaged in, what certain participants of the Symposium at least believed to be, an abutting sacred form of pederasty, then is it really that farfetched to suggest dudes in Corinth were banging whores in an Aphrodite temple, but just in an intensely ritualistic way? Isn't it possible Aphrodite was, in some sense, a pre-waifu? The true origin of the waifu as we know it? Later that night, at Itaewon Pochu in Koreatown, Araqi was surreptitiously saving hentai jpegs onto his camera roll as he sat at the small window table overlooking West Thirty Second, splitting an eel appetizer with Jo Yu-Ri, who after a couple shots of Soju, was suddenly more forthcoming

than she'd been previously.
Unaware of
yet also unconcerned with Araqi
saving hentai jpegs
into his phone's camera roll,
Jo Yu-Ri found herself
more comfortable with, you know,
sharing her feelings after about
half a dozen shots of Soju.
Was she herself possibly engaged in an ...
"iteration of sacred prostitution"?

No!—employing some Greek demigod
to rub his cock on your bok
choy plants wasn't —well,
she didn't know what it was exactly,
she muttered to Araqi.
Maybe avant-garde botany?
But in any case
definitely not prostitution!
Araqi noted that: wasn't it possible
that some thing or some one
had some sort of, you know, "hold"
on Πρίαπος?

That maybe the dude just needed help,
some assistance, that all this shit
she was so concerned about,
vis-a-vis his recent whore mongering
was the result of certain something
having a vice grip hold on him?
Well, clearly he was a little off-kilter!
she said, that much they could both

agree on!

But the essence of that condition,
the condition of being hypnotized
in an abutting mystical manner—
was she the most appropriate one to say,
or was it possible she didn't actually care,
that this was an exclusively
capitalist endeavor,
that her role in the whole
matter was solely
rationalist, that as long as
her bok choy imparted a competitive leg up
in the heat of Koreatown
she didn't care one way or the other?

And, by the way,
the "bok choy at Itaewon was atrocious",
she noted,
so at least that was good!
The fact of the matter was
Jo Yu-Ri could definitely
question how she quote-unquote
arrived here, so to speak,
a budding, barely semi-successful,
restauranteur in Midtown,
a Johnson and Whales dropout
and Food Network junkie,
helplessly
perusing Craig's List ads,
desperate for a leg up
in the most viciously competitive restaurant metropolis
perhaps on the planet,

when she stumbled upon Πρίαπος's plight,
deciding to take it on
as a botanical advantage.

People would always note in awe
how her blue eyes displayed
a certain reddish gold tint
about them, possibly
some faint Spanish blood
on her Filipino mother's side?

It seemed her Korean-American identity
was always slightly undermined
by this Catholicism of her adolescence—
Catholicism has a tendency
of making everyone
a fourth generation Italian-American,
and Jo Yu-Ri felt this tugging at times as well,
but then again,
it wasn't quite like the guy
necessarily owed her anything,
because there was nothing
in their contract (which was non-existent)
that stipulated how he should spend his free time.

Yet, Araqi interjected,
is there not an implicit agreement
in any business relationship to, you know,
like, he said, when George Costanza
became a hand model in Seinfeld—
he wasn't traveling around
laying bricks and dipping his toes
into amateur boxing in his free time!
Yes, the Costanza analogy

was an apt one here,
yet again there was the question
of the essence
of Πρίαπος himself,
how he interacted, or was interacted with,
in the corporeal sphere,
which became an increasingly latent issue
as the two requested a second bottle of Soju.
It was possible, Jo Yu-Ri considered,
that "his cock wasn't existent"
in the way she may have initially thought.

Canto 5.1
(.760)

Of course Hakim entered the establishment
looking solely for Amina,
as at the time he was
completely captivated by her beauty,
unwilling to part with this particular image
of her form that relentlessly ricocheted
within the confines of his mind,
captivated, not like he'd been once before,
by the "comparative witchcraft
of clever conversation".

No, instead Hakim found himself
hypnotized by the blunt pure form
of her beauty, with no edification
or extrapolation, with no capitulation
to reason—or even to feeling
for that matter!

It was simply the case
that there was no interlocutor,
not even any remote contemplation
of this very form that so clearly
had wafted Hakim through the double doors
that evening,
trying to find what could perhaps be deemed
a waifu.

Now of course there's a complex hierarchy
of refraction to matters like these,
of which Hakim, having a decent
amount of philosophical education,

wasn't unaware of per se,
however, whether or not it was
at the top of his mind at the time
is a separate matter entirely
(it wasn't!).

There are long range correlations—
did a female look like someone familiar,
from years ago,
like perhaps exactly the same?

In fact,
it was possible Hakim actually
mistook this particular waifu
for another person entirely at first,
back from his secondary school days.

He wasn't even certain
it was her
when he first
stumbled upon her form.

He encountered her form but recalled
a co-ed he was acquainted with
from some years ago,
assuming incorrectly Amina was in fact
an old friend.

She informed Hakim softly
her name was Amina,
as if people were possibly listening in
to each syllable uttered from her exquisitely
proportioned lips, as if specific
court jesters were waiting in the wing
to transcribe their conversation
to latent

gossip columnists.

Scholars,

for their part, would ultimately retroactively conflate two possible Aminas as well, mimicking unintentionally their own source of study.

The fact that Amina was, technically speaking, you know, an orphan in a harem didn't faze Hakim in the least, because all of the prophets previously noted historically were, if not pure whore-mongers, then at least sympathetic to the plight of the prostitute, the prostitute simply existing as an extension of the destitute and downtrodden as a whole.

Hakim saw no reason to diverge from his predecessors in this regard.

There's a certain idea that the deepest relationships are the ones based on so-called illuminating conversation, predicated upon getting to quote-unquote know each other, yet you could counter that there's actually nothing to know of us really at all, that we're purely refractions of a source infinitely simpler than we seem to be, that convolutions are by their very nature

fictional and steeped in hypocrisy.

Having a great conversation
is the acute fallacy of humanity,
believing you've discovered
some eternal bond with another person
is perhaps an affront to Allah Himself.

Hakim and Amina didn't discuss themselves
at first, and when they did they struggled
to recall who they even were,
which was appropriate.

Hakim's madness, his indiscriminate killing
of others was based in this idea.

There was an immediacy to their coming into contact
with one another.

Hakim, again,
didn't contemplate Amina's beauty,
simply because it was an impossible act.
Memory was something they both
struggled to interact with.

Amina's beauty was a motor skill.
Her outline was a recollection
someone would never
become conscious of,
a lurid memory a person completely forgot about
but still stayed hugging their body
like a shark jaw.

It was the immediacy of Amina's beauty
that slowly began to erode
Hakim's sanity.

Possession sans contemplation
can be confusing for some,

Hakim not excluded,
because we often consider possession
akin to growing old
and decaying with someone,
repeating vows into an open air that,
if rearranged just slightly,
would become heavy as bricks.

At the time he passed through the double doors
to place an eye on her,
Hakim incorrectly assumed Amina's beauty
to be of a decaying nature,
basically that he could possess her
in a contemplative sense.

Hakim made a poor attempt
to seem like he wasn't looking
for Amina as he walked through the double doors,
her beauty already within him
but in a way that eschewed contemplation entirely.

Hakim lusted for decay,
to possess beauty in a contemplative sense,
to recite vows in air pockets of brick,
and Amina danced around his ambitions,
to be honest, fairly effortlessly.

Had Hakim been able to properly contemplate
this very real immediacy of Amina,
then perhaps his sanity
wouldn't have slowly eroded
in the manner it ultimately did.

When he executed those closest to him on a whim,
in increasingly violent and drastic ways,
slicing off heads and slitting throats

by the hundreds, it was only because
Hakim fundamentally
misinterpreted the immediacy of Amina's beauty.
Had he been able to perceive her beauty
in its actual sense as opposed to
ruthlessly attempting to tether it to his own
contemplation,
then he probably wouldn't have gone batshit crazy!
Court officers would be beheaded
because Amina's beauty
was a motor skill to Hakim,
when he incorrectly believed it to be
a roman à clef.
Yet isn't an eroded sanity necessary?
Could we possibly suggest that?
When Hamza ibn Ali
proclaimed Hakim to be
divine incarnate, was it possibly because
Hakim had sacrificed his own sanity
to make Amina's beauty,
which was of a purely waifu variety, decay?
Hakim would disappear years later,
in fact not long after two distorted
Aminas appeared to him in dream,
one dark, the other of a light variety,
yet still even then he remained unable
to disentangle what it was he saw.
Yet in any case,
all that's perhaps a better topic
for a later date,
because when Hakim walked through those

double doors his sanity had already
started to decay,
his mental faculties were already
in a state of disarray.
As Hakim focused his energies
on this false image of decaying with Amina
his sanity itself became dilapidated.
Hamza ibn Ali called him Hakim Allah.
It wasn't necessarily the phrases
Amina repeated that reached Hakim,
but more so the mode in which she said them.
She'd whispered pure nonsense to Hakim
that was nothing if not totally logical
only a few years before his friend
Hamza would deem him Hakim Allah.
Hakim would spend his nights and weekends
locked in his three hundred square foot living space,
an ascetic decision of his own accord,
and meditate extensively on the beauty of Amina,
its true nature, recreating
her geometry in his mind,
speaking with Amina in his imagination,
creating
an interpersonal brand of beauty based
entirely on contemplation,
one where they would decay
together into old age,
a human shape that fades
with time, existing solely temporally,
never emanating
anywhere except into the memories

and photographs which distort and falsify
everything worthy of our awe.
This was how Hakim's sanity eroded.
His asceticism played at least a part
in his own decay,
but mostly because he employed asceticism to create
images in his mind,
to delve into his memories as images
as if they contained an essence
more immediate than Amina's beauty.
They didn't!
It's the proliferation of the imagined image
that ultimately drives us all basically insane
all the time without fail,
because of the distance
we place between ourselves and the image,
by necessity of course!
Being deprived of the immediate beauty of Amina,
Hakim chose to ascetically attempt to recreate
it via his own imagined images,
existing almost exclusively within
the confines of his own contemplative states,
but whereas his (seemingly shallow) interactions
with Amina required nothing,
they merged into each other
sans conscious thought,
his imagined images were fleeting,
always decayed immediately post-construction.
At five thirty five pm one afternoon
the thought occurred to Hakim
that he'd been forty for his entire life,

despite the fact he'd disappear forever at just thirty five.
He was still obsessed with distance.

No, it was precisely the notion of distance
that drove his sanity off the fucking cliff.

Hakim's greatest creation was perhaps Dar al-Ilm,
or it could have possibly been his own interaction
with his sanity,

because perhaps by dealing with Amina's beauty
incorrectly Hakim ultimately
arrived at the true notion of beauty,
rather than moderately deluding
himself and decaying with a palatable fib,
he stamped full force into delusion.

He lost track of his sanity completely
because of it, in a sense
accurately assessing the false notion
of Amina's beauty as an item
you could decay beside.

The sacred prostitute is incapable of decay,
there's in fact absolutely nothing more absurd
than growing old with a so-called sacred prostitute.
How could you?!

In Ten Twenty One, Hakim would dream
of two distorted Aminas and then he too would
disappear,
not as a result of a palace intrigue,
or a surreptitious murder, or age and decay,
because even if those events seemed to occur,
we should stress that they're no less veil-like
than the veils Hakim witnessed around Amina's beauty.
No, to be clear,

it's fairly evident Hakim himself
became a waifu in his thirty fifth year,
which was entirely appropriate.

Disappear is probably the incorrect word to describe it!
because Hakim gave away
his sanity in a very real way
the second he walked through those double doors
to greet Amina in his own establishment,
the establishment where he saw himself enclosed,
like in a large box like container,
one Spring afternoon,
the same place he contemplated
the idea that Allah is the very mirror
in which you see yourself,
that you're the mirror
in which He witnesses His Names.

We seek to claim
beauty in a subject-object relationship
because certain beings have made themselves seem to be
that way,
not to trick us necessarily
but just to innocently cause us to go
appropriately insane,
and via that appropriate insanity
finally arriving at the proper nature of beauty.
Amina in her current state
enjoyed the fact that Hakim had half of his robe off
in the middle of the venue,
his face bleeding,
tossing dinars into the air screaming
at men twice his size that he had money!

Didn't they know this?
He'd fucking kill them all,
then he'd eliminate their families,
then he'd assassinate the acquaintances
of their second cousins!

But sacred prostitutes are of course
inveterately drawn to this exact type of insanity,
a sort of Dionysian losing of the self.

Years later Hakim would dream
of killing himself repeatedly
as a method of cleansing himself,
a related process. It's probably
interacting with the atrocities
of beauty where the greatest lessons are learned,
but certainly not in an interpersonal
and quote-unquote deep conversation driven way.
No, it's via a divine immediacy
that everything becomes idiotic
and your rational self is finally recognized
among everyone as an unwelcome interlocutor,
unable to wrap his pea-brained head
around why you're not currently
wearing a shirt in a public place.

Canto 5.¹²
(.775)

Walking through the
(in retrospect somewhat ominous)
double doors Hakim took note
of the same tin roof
that comprised the sky
on dive bar patios
as Amina made it clear
she had business to take care of,
she was after all on shift,
but that it was also important
that Hakim wait for her,
please! Don't leave!
Just wait a minute!
But fundamentally
there was nothing for the two to
discuss beyond Amina
staring silently into Hakim's eyes
for extended intervals of time.
When she finally moseyed over
toward him as he stood
nervously, still near the
double doors,
he told her he wanted to take her
quote-unquote
out of this place,
maybe even,
he didn't know,
take her out to dinner?

and she laughed in a way
that spoke to the
seeming impossibility of the idea,
and, in turn,
Hakim considered the false duality
of the physical
and the Platonic,
considering that, actually,
the proper division of kind
when it came to love
wasn't physical
and spiritual
but instead
the delayed
and the immediate.

There was no dialectic present here,
no long conversations
on the phone, no getting to know
one another's so-called secrets
and indulging in the thrilling idiocy
of what's hidden,
of the amusement park
of tiny little secrets.

There inevitably would come
a time when Amina actually asked
Hakim to tell a little more
about himself,
that it seemed like,
now that she thought about it,
she barely even knew him!
to which Hakim considered

his own trauma,
which of course
wasn't exactly real,
he contemplated his youth
with a rare momentary fervor
and witnessed that
all these memories
became mass-produced
action figures completely melted
into a strip of pavement
in the unforgivingly blistering
Cairo sun,
and as he turned to his left,
solely to escape Amina's
ever intensifying gaze,
he couldn't help but note
a Sandra Bullock poster
for a movie called
Miss Secret Agent
hung up adjacent.
Repeating the title again to himself
Hakim slowly arrived at the
disquieting conclusion
that there perhaps existed an entire
Sandra Bullock economy
all around him,
that entire swathes
of the film industry
were indiscriminately
dedicated to the ruthless
production of additional

Sandra Bullock content,
exclusively constructed
for a ravenous
Sandra Bullock fan base.
People, not at all in obscure numbers,
absolutely adored
Sandra Bullock, apparently!
But how could this be?—
that these shit stains
just couldn't get enough of
Sandra Bullock, could they?—
to the extent an entire industry
had developed to quench the thirst
for this Sandra Bullock content.
Oh no! Miss Congeniality
wasn't nearly enough Sandra Bullock
for these lurid masses of
Sandra Bullock shit stains!
Hope Floats was barely scratching the surface
of what was clearly
a Mariana trench-like itch
for the unadulterated production
of Sandra Bullock films.
Speed and Demolition Man
and The Proposal—no!
these insatiable zealots
demanded Miss Secret Agent
as well! Miss Congeniality
the Second: Armed and Fabulous,
not even that acutely cocksucking film
could suffice for these cocksucking Crusaders

of everything Sandra Bullock.
To Hakim's amazement,
Miss Secret Agent was still
somehow necessary!
Bird Box, Ocean's Eight—
this endless list of insipid films,
could there ever be enough Bullock?
Hakim thought, avoiding Amina's gaze,
realizing his entire childhood
was a blob of plastic
melted into a Cairo pavement.
There existed an entire sub-population
that subsisted seemingly solely
on Sandra Bullock films?
Hakim asked Amina
if she'd seen that movie posted over there,
Miss Secret Agent? With Sandra Bullock?
Was that, like, a sequel
to Miss Congeniality
by any chance?
Amina noted excitedly
that she'd actually seen the sequel
to Miss Congeniality,
that it was called Armed and Fabulous,
so she cast doubt upon whether the
particular film could be its proper sequel,
but then suggested that it was possibly part
of a trilogy? This Sandra Bullock industry
had been allowed to proliferate,
seemingly incessantly,
and now Hakim realized,

once and for all,
that he and Amina basically lived
derivative lives
in what was functionally
a Sandra Bullock driven economy.

Canto 5.13
(.758)

All around him,
his whole life,
he'd been unrepentantly
surrounded by Sandra Bullock's filmography,
but only in this moment
did this unfailingly depressing fact
become apparent to him.
In fact, Amina continued,
glancing at the poster again,
Miss Secret Agent was actually
just another name for Miss Congeniality,
the first film,
not Armed and Fabulous,
had Hakim seen it?
It was actually pretty decent!
Bullock plays a quote-unquote
tough and tomboyish FBI agent
in the Action slash Comedy,
it was a film that contained
action yet also comedic relief,
as Bullock was,
despite being
traditionally attractive,
a tough but also tomboyish
detective, which challenged
traditional gender norms.
One aspect Amina enjoyed
about the film was the balance of action

with spurts of comedic relief!

She loved spurts of
comic relief!

This would contrast with Bullock's
later work in a film
like Bird Box,
where she'd take a much more
serious turn in her acting career.

Hakim admitted to Amina that, actually,
he believed Sandra Bullock, well,
that she sucked. No, not that she
was the worst per se,
no there were obviously more
atrocious actresses
than Sandra Bullock.

But how many exactly?
Because Sandra Bullock,
according to Hakim,
was a particularly
nauseating personality.

He just found her,
he didn't know,
a bit of an annoying imbecile?

While, no, he hadn't seen
many of her feature films
start to finish
he didn't feel like
he needed to to be able to
arrive at a fairly confident conclusion
that she was basically vomit inducing.
She certainly wasn't

a pillar of creative brilliance!
The world, in Hakim's mind at least,
didn't require any further
Sandra Bullock films!
This idea, Hakim said,
that Sandra Bullock
should have basically
an entire industry
built around her,
for the sole purpose of producing
more and more
Sandra Bullock films,
it seems completely absurd to me!
Sandra Bullock?
If there's a single data point
we can reference to suggest
that our society is in dire need
of reform I think it's the putrid fact
that a movie was produced
and released under the title
Miss Congeniality Two:
Armed and Fabulous!
The fact that,
not only was that film
actually produced,
but this entire Sandra Bullock
industry continues to operate
and proliferate, even to this day?—
how can you not be just
a little offended by that, Amina?
It's all just a tad grotesque

you have to admit!
Well I disagree! Amina retorted,
I like her movies, Hakim!
I think she's amusing,
but also brazen in a way
I find endearing.
Endearing, Hakim repeated
equally in disgust and disbelief,
endearing? No, I watched Bird Box,
and I'll simply note
that my left nut
after a half an hour run
is more endearing
than that movie, Amina!
And Speed with Keanu Reeves?
C'mon! Oh, and don't even start
with Hope Floats! –
the fact there
exists an entire sub-population
of Egyptians dedicated to, what?—
the collected Sandra Bullock filmography?—
is just absolutely
mind boggling to me!—
it's actually an affront to good taste Amina,
it's actually the best Christmas gift
of all time to utter absurdity,
it's something we need to employ teams
of our finest scholars to study
to produce rigorous case studies
detailing extended hypotheses
as to how this state of affairs

was allowed to occur!

Diagrams

The Madness of a Cloud

Mode: >.667

11,010:15,461 .712

Canto I

Total Echoes: 1,859

Total Syllables: 2,546

Approximate Self-Similarity: .730

[C][l]oud was [s][i]t[i]ng at [S][e]v[e]nth H[ea]v[e]n
d[r]in[k]ing a Fernet on the [r]o[ck]s e[n]g[a]g[i]ng i[n]
[l]ight [c]onver[s][a]t[i]on with a [c]o[ck][s]u[ck]er h[e]d
ne[v]er [e][v]en met [a][b]out [a] [Q]ueen's [B][l]ood
[p][l][ay]-in g[a]me that he'd - this [p]arti[c]ular
[c]o[ck][s]u[ck]er - [r]e[q]uested to [b]e [p]ut on the [T][V]
at the [b]ar. Well, a[c]tual[l]y [C][l]oud [c]o[r]re[c]ted, for
the [r]e[c]ord, that he'd a[c]tua[l]y been [r]eading a [f]ew
[p][a]ges of [T]im[a]eus [p][r]ior to all this, [m][a]king a
[f]ew [d]is[p]a[r]ate notes, [f]in[d]ing him[s]el[f] [p]uzzled
at the [s]en[s]o[r]ly in[f]or[m]ation that [c]on[t]inued [t]o
[b]e [r]e[l][ay]ed in[t]o his [b][r][ai]n. [C][l]oud
[b][a]si[c]a[l]ly a[l]leged he was [f][l]u[m]mixed a[b]out
the [s]en[s]o[r]ly in[f]orm[a]tion that [b]e[c][a]me, in [s]ome
[w]ay, [r]e[l][ay]ed to [w]hat he guessed [w]as his
[b][r][ai]n? - how any of that was [c]o[r]ro[b]o[r]ated, [b]ut
[m]ore [s]o [C][l]oud [c]on[t]em[p][l][a]ted the [s][t]ati[c]
n[a]ture of [s]aid i[m]ages - that's [w]hat he [w]as
[s][p]e[c]ifi[c]a[l]ly [c]on[t]em[p][l]ating [w]hen [a] guy
[w]ith [a] r[ou]nd-a[s]s [f]a[c]e [l]eaned [o]n[t]o the [b]ar,
[s]ee[k]ing to [c][l]ose his [t]ab, obviou[s][l]y ex[c]ited [t]o
[t]ell the [b]ar[t]ender that he may n[ee]d to show [h]er

[h]is I[D], just [b]e[c]ause he [t]oo[k] his wife's [l]a[s]t name and [h]adn't [h]ad a [ch]an[c]e to [ch]ange his [l]i[c]en[s]e yet? The pa[t][r]on with the [r]ound-a[s]s [f]a[c]e [n]oted how [n]i[c]e the bar[t]ender was ([T]i[f]a!), [b]ut [w]hat [w]as her [n]ame again? He [c]ould [d]e[f]i[n]i[te][l][y] [d]isp[l]ay his I[D] if sh[e] r[ea][l][y] [n][ee]ded, just be[c]ause, again, his [l]ast [n]ame [w]as [d]i[f]ferent [n]ow - ta[k]ing his [w]i[f]e's [n]ame and all! Of [c]ourse, [C][l]oud [n][o]ted, [th]at it was [c]lear [th]at [n][o] one gave [a] [f]u[c]k [a]bout the [p][r]inted name on [a] [c][r]edit [c][ar]d in that b[ar], and Ti[f]a, [f]or her [p][ar]t, [d]i[d]n't exa[c]t[l][y] [s][ee]m [l]i[k]e she was [r]am[p]ing [u][p] to [s][u]ck this [d]ude o[f]f j[u]st be[c]au[se] he was a [r]a[d]i[c]al [f]eminist. [F]or [C][l]oud's [p]art he was still, you know, a[tt]em[p]ting [t]o get [b][e]hind the [b][l]unt [s]en[s]ations [b][e]ing [s]muggled [r]e[l]ent[l]e[s]s[ly] into his [s]o-[c]alled [c]onsciou[s] [e]xi[s]ten[c]e. [E]ve[r]ything was [a]n [i]mage to [s]ome e[x]tent, [r]ight Ae[r]ith? Touch it[s]el[f] was a [f]u[c]king [s]en[s]o[r]y [i]m[a]ge. [I]t was a [q]uaint [S]p[r]ing evening where [C][l]oud [f]elt m[or]e [or] [l][es]s [d][es]tined to [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]i[ze], having [s]tarted [d][r]in[k]ing w[i]ne in [p][r]e[p]a[r]ation [f]or a [F][r][i][d]ay [n][i]ght [d]inner, on[l]y to have Ti[f]a [b]ail [l]ast mi[n]ute, [b]e[c]ause sh[e] [n][ee]ded to [p][i][c]k u[p] a [b]ar sh[i]f[t] - [l][ea]ving him [c]om[p][l][e]te[l][y] fr[ee] to [c]ontinue this wine [d][r]in[k][i]ng [i]n a [r][i]tual[i][s]ti[c] [w]ay that [w]ould be [c]on[d]u[c]ive to [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]i[c]al i[d]eas. Yes, [C][l]oud [c]on[t]inued [t]o Ae[r]ith, it was [b]asi[c]a[l][y] on[l][y] vi[a] d[r]in[k]ing [a][l]one, [b]ut in [a] [r]itua[l]i[s]ti[c] [f][a]shion, th[a]t

h[e]’d ach[ie]ved any [s]ort of [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph][i][c]al [i]n[q]uiry. You [c]oul[d]n’t just [s]it at a [d]e[s]k and be[c]ome [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]i[c]al, at [l]ea[s]t [n]ot for [C][l]oud! May[b][e] [s]ome [p][eo][p]le [c]ould! [B]ut, [n]o, [n]ot [C][l]oud. He’d i[m]agine [th]at [th]ere were [p]ro[b]a[b][l]y a [l]itany of [p]o[s]si[b]le ways of [b]e[c]o[m]ing [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]i[c]al - [l]i[k]e, [f]or in[s]tan[c]e, [f]or the round-[f]a[c]ed al[b]ino ch[a][p], [p]erh[a][p]s [t]e[l]ing [T]i[f]a that he’d [t]aken his wi[f]e’s [l][a]st n[a]me, m[ay][b]e that could [b][e] [s][ee]n as po[s]si[b][l][y] ritua[l][i][s]t[i][c] [i]n a w[ay], a g[a]tew[ay] to [s]ome [s]ort of be[c]oming [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]i[c]al. This was a[c]tuall[y] [s]cien[c]e, [C][l]oud [t]old [h]er [h]e [th]ought at [th]e bar, [s]uc[c]e[s]sfully avoidi[ng] [m]a[k]i[ng] any eye [c]on[t]a[c]t with the round-fa[c]ed [m]an. Was it [n]e[c]le[s]sa[r]ily [s][t]r[ange] at all that [o]n[c]e the G[r]ee[k]s [w]ent extin[c]t [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]y went m[or]e [or] [l]ess [c]omp[l][e]te[l][y] and utter[l][y] downhill and [n]ever [l]oo[k]ed b[a][c]k in the [l]ea[s]t, [th][a]t [th]e [l][a][s]t group to [r][ea][l]y [r][ea]ch much of any [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]i[c]al [s]u[c]ce[s]s made a [s]in[c]ere e[ff]ort to [c]onjoin getting [f][u][c]ked [u][p] with [c]on[t]em[p][l]ating in[t]e[l]ligible [ph]e[n]o[m]e[n]a? - [th]at [th][e]se G[r][ee][k]s a[tt]em[p]ted [t]o [m]a[r]ry i[n][e]b[r][i]ation and [r]igo[r]ous dia[l]e[c]tic? [Th]at all [th]ought since - to [p]a[r]a[ph][r]ase [N]orthhead - had been a mi[n]or [f]oot[n]ote to [P]lato or [w]hatever? [Th]e [th]ing [w]as, a[c]cording to [C][l]oud, you just [c]oul[d]n’t w[i][l][y] n[i][l][y] [d]elve into metaph[y]s[i]cs [c]omp[l][e]te[l][y] [s]o[b]er! [B]ut that wasn’t to [s]ay a [pler]son should [n]e[c]es[s]arily [b]e[c]ome [s]ome

dege[n]e[r]ate al[c]oho[l]i[c] either, [b]e[c]ause a [d]ege[n]e[r]ate [d][r]unk would in [n]o w[ay] [m][a]ke a g[r][ea]t [m]eta-phys[i][c][i]st either - that was [b]a[s]i[c]a[l]ly impo[s]si[b]le, [b]e[c]ause, [l]i[k]e [C][l]oud [s]aid, the [s][o][l][o] m[o]de of in[e][b][r][i]ation should [b][e] done [r]itua[l]i[s]ti[c]a[l]ly, in [s]p[ur]ts, at [c][er]tain times. You [c]ouldn't just [b]e [l]i[k]e h[i]tt[i]ng the [b]ottle [a]s soon [a]s you wo[k]e [f]rom a [s]lum[b]er! - a[f]ter [s]aid in[e][b][r][i]ation [s]essions you'd [r]e[q]uire [s]o[b][r][i]ety to [p]arse through [w]hatever it [w]as that [c]ame to you via [s]aid [c]ontem[p]lation, [n]o? In f[a][c]t, the [a][c]tual [s]cience was [n]othing [b]eyond this [p]ar[s]ing th[r]ough of in[e][b][r][i]ation [s]essions of [r]igo[r]ous [c]ontem[p]l[a]tion! That was it - what [l][ai]d [b]eh[i]nd [l]ogi[c] and metaph[y]s[i][c]s, in [C][l]oud's m[i]nd at [l]east! [B]ut in[e][b][r][i]ation [c]ould [b]e anything [r]eally - [C][l]oud [c]ould en[t]er a s[t]ate of in[e]b[r][i]ation in [a] [c]ar [a][l]one on [a] Tuesd[ay] [A]M, without [c]onsuming a damn thing. [A]e[r]ith [m][or]e [or] less ag[r]eed, [a]dding th[a]t on the one hand a [ph]i[l]oso[ph]ical [m][i]nd should [b]e a[b]le [t]o ana[l][y]ze, in[t]er[p][r]et, ex[t][r]a[p]o[l]ate, all of that [s]cien[t][i][f][i]c [s][t]u[f]f - but, on [th]e o[th]er, i[f] you [f]ail to [p][l]a[c]e yourself [i]n a [plosi]t[i]on to [r]e[c]eive [a][n]ything to [a][n]a[l]yze, in[t]er[p][r]et, or ex[t][r]a[p]o[l]ate then you were [b]a[s]i[c]a[l]ly [s][c][r]ewed! [C][l]oud m[or]e [or] [l]ess ag[r]eed [b]ut [a]dded th[a]t - [s][a]ns this ty[p]e of "in[s][p][i]ration," [s]o to [s][p][ea][k] - they'd [b][e] [s]tu[c]k [s][i]tt[i]ng at [a] ta[b]le just [n]ood[l]ing [a]r[oun]d [n][l]on[s]en[s]i[c]a[l]ly, v[a][c]i[l]ating [b][a][c]k [a]nd forth [b]e[t]ween [t]wo

[t]ypes of [n]othing[n]ess, and then just pr[o][b]a[b][l]y k[n][o][c]king [o]ff s[o]me[o]ne else's [w]ork [b]y [a][c]ident. [B]ut [n]one of this [w]as [n]ew! It [w]asn't [l]i[k]e [C][l]oud [w]as [b][r][ea][k]ing [n]ews i[n] a[n]y [w][ay]. [A]t this point [A]e[r]ith [a]sked - you k[n][o]w, was thi[s] [a][b]i[n][o] douche [b]ag, he was an e[l]ement of this [a][n]a[l]y[s]is? [N]o, [n]ot real[l]y - a[c]cording to [C][l]oud - maybe the g[u]y was [t][r][y]ing a [t]ad [t]oo hard? - to [p][r]es[e]nt him[s][e][l]f as a [s][p]e[c][i][f][i]c ar[c]he[t]y[p]e [t]o the gene[r]al [p]ubli[c], as a g[u]y who [d]e[c]i[d]ed to [s][p][i]t [i]n the fa[c]e of his [o]wn [c]h[r][o]mo[s][o]me [c]ount, [w]hich [w]as [s]omething [C][l]oud [pler[s]ona[l]y en[d]or[s]ed! Gran[t]ed [C][l]oud [p]ro[b]a[b][l]y [w]oul[d]n't [d]o it [b]y [t][a][k]ing his [w]ife's [l]ast [n][a]me, [b]e[c]ause [C][l]oud [pler[s]o[n]al[l]y was obviou[s][l][y] more [p]rone [t]o a [t][y][p]e of [i][s]o[l]ated and over[l][y] [d]ramatic [s]elf-ann[i]hi[l]ation than a [s]ub[s]ervient and [d][i][s][i]ngen[u]ous[l]y [m][u]ted [f]e[m]i[n]ist a[n]nihi[l]ation, b[u]t he w[a]sn't i[p][s][o] [f]act[o] op[p]osed to either! Ae[r]ith ag[r]eed [on]e h[un]d[r]ed [pler[c]ent! But [C][l]oud [s]till would g[o] a [l]ittle [f]urther, n[o]ting [th]at i[n] [th]e i[n]telligible [s][ph]ere, as [s][o]me[o]ne [l]i[k]e, [s]ay, Pr[o][c][l]us would n[o]te, that [s][o]-[c]alled [f]orms were [s]omehow able to [p]arti[c]i[p]ate in [o]ne an[o]ther w[i]thout m[i]xing, [w]hereas [w][i]th[i]n the [s]en[s]ible realm they [p]art[i][c][i][p]ated [i]n th[i]ngs and [s]ub[s]e[q]uent[l][y] got [d]irt[y]. But [C][l]oud [th]ought [th]at it [w]as [w]orth going [o]ne [s]tep [f]urther - [s]ince they were [d]i[s][c]u[s]sing a[n]nihilation [a]nd [s]tu[f]f [a][n]lyway,

[th]at [th]e [p]er[c][ei]ved m[i]x[i]ng be[t]w[ee]n [f]orms that [t]ook [p]lace in the [s]en[s]ible a[r][e]na was it[s]el[f] j[u]st [a] [p][r]oje[c]tion of [m]ixture but not a[c]tual [m]ixture. The in[t]el[l]igi[b]le sphere, [b]eing [p]ure[l]y e[m]an[a]ted, [p]ar[t]i[c]i[p]a]ted w[i]th[i]n [i]t[s]elf without [m][i]x[i]ng [i]t[s]el[f], while i[n] the [s]e[n][s]i[b]le [s][ph]ere [i]t [d][i][d]n't [s]eem like that was [p]o[s]si[b]le, that [b]y [p]arti[c]i[p]ating w[i]th[i]n [s]en[s]i[b]le [th][i]ngs [th]ey [b]e[c]ame e[s]ential[l][y] m[i]xed w[i]th them, a[s]suming they were [c]ategori[c]a[l][y] [s]en[s]ible. E[s]ential[l][y] [n][a]ture was t[ai]nted, which of [c]our[s]e [C][l]oud [a]nd [A]erith k[n]ew all [t]oo [w]ell! [W]ay [t]oo [w]ell! He[n][c]e thei[r] sha[r]ed a[c]quie[s]ce[n][c]e toward [o][c]c[a]sio[n]al [a][n]nihil[a]tion! [B]ut even this [s]en[s]i[b]le f[i]lth, [s]o to [s][plea[k], [C]loud [th]ought, [th]i[s] [pler]c]eived m[i]x[i]ng u[p] [i]n the [p]arti[c]i[p]ation of [s]en[s]i[b]le th[i]ngs, wasn't it [a][s]o [a] [p]rojec[ti]on? - [a]n [e]man[a][ti]on, just as the [p]ar[t]i[c]i[p]a]tion of the in[t]elligible [s]phere was al[s]o [a]n [e][m]a[n]ation of the [p][r]i[m]a[r]y u[n]ity of all things? Which, yeah, [b][r]ought [C][l]oud [b][a][c]k to th[a]t al[b]i[n]o [r]ound-[f]aced [f]u[c]k at the [b]ar, [t]a[k]ing his wi[f]e's [l]ast [n]ame - [b][c]ause ul[t]i[m]ate[l][y] the al[b]ino's [v]antage point wasn't [r]e[m]ar[k]a[b][l][y] di[v]ergent f[r]om [C][l]oud's or Ae[r]ith's, [C][l]oud thought. Thi[s] al[b]i[n]o was [p][r]o[m]oting a [c]ertain t[y]p[e] of an[n][i]hilation of their [c]ultu[r]al-[s]en[s]i[b]le [r]ealm, [th]in[k]ing [th]at [th]e [p]at[r]iar[c]hal lineage of their [s]o[c]iety was [b]a[s]i[c]ally [s]omething obje[c]tional[b]le, [s]omething e[s]ential[l]y t[ai]nted, that should [b]e

a[n]nihil[!]a]ted in the [s]ervi[c]e of [s]omething [m]ore pure. O[k]ay, well, [C][l]oud [th]ought [th]at [m][a]de a [m]odi[c]um of [s]ense! [M][a]lybe t[a][k]ing his wi[f]e's [l]a[s]t n[a]me was in a [s]ense a g[r][ea]ter [f]orm of [p]lu[r]ity than [l]o[c]king a woma[n] i[n] a [k]itche[n] and [e]xpe[c]ting a blowjob [e][v]ery other [e][v]ening, [C][l]oud thought. Ju[s]t as [P][r]o[c][l]us and [S]o[c][r]a[t]es [s]en[s]ed [th]at [th]e in[t]el[l]igible [s][ph]ere [p]arti[c][p]ated w[i]th [i]t[s]el[f] yet not in a [w]ay [w]here it m[i]xed w[i]th [i]t[s]elf, [th]at [th]i[s] was [d]i[s]tinct [f]rom our [f]urther [d]e[s]cen[d]ed, [s]en[s]i[b]le [s][ph]ere where things [p]arti[c][p]ated [w]ith [o]ne another [b]ut got [m]ixed u[p] in the [p]ro[c]e[s]s - well, [m]ay[b]e this al[b]i[n][o] [m]an was [n][o]ting [th]at [th]e [p]a[t]riar[c]h[y] was a [p]ar[t][i]c[i][p]a[t]o[r][y] m[i]x[i]ng that [l]eft un[s]eem[ly] [c]um [s]t[ai]ns - [f]or [l]a[c]k of a better [ph]r[a]se! - on hu[m]an ex[p]e[r]ience. [P]at[r]iar[c]hy, in the al[b]i[n]o [m]an's [m][i]nd, should [b]e a[n]n[i]hilated [b]e[c]ause of this [s]en[s][i][b]le m[i]x[i]ng u[p], this [p]u[t]rid [t][ai]nting of [w]hat [w]ould [b]e [b]etter o[f]f [p]ure. And [t][a][k]ing your [n][i]ce wi[f]e's [n]ame was a [p][r]o[p]er [m]ode of an[n]ihilation in [r]es[p]onse. Ae[r]ith [r]e[m]ar[k]ed that she knew [C][l]oud would inevita[b]l[ly] [b][r]ing the dis[c]ou[r]se [b]a[c]k to this [p]oo[r] ch[a][p] [c][l]osing his t[a]b, [b]ut, just to [b]e [c][l]ear, [w]hat [C][l]oud [w]as saying [w]as [th]at [th][i]s m[i]xing [th]at o[c]curred in the [s]en[s]ible [r]ealm was it[s]elf ju[s]t a [s]e[p]a[r]ate [p][r]ojection - ju[s]t a l[e][s]ser mode of [p]roj[e]cting! So [w]hile the [m]a[t]erial [w]orld [m]ay have di[s]gu[s]ted them, [p]erha[p]s [m]oving the [t]wo

[t]oward [s]ome [s]ort of [a]ll-en[c]om[p]a[s]sing [c]on[c]e[p]tual [a]nnihilation, [a]nd [a]s [m]uch as the [p]a[t][r]iarchy [m]ight have seemed [p]u[t][r]id to the al[b]ino hus[b]and at the [b]ar who [l]oo[k]ed to an[n]ih[i]ate him[s]el[f] [b]y ta[k]ing his [n][i][c]e w[i][f]e's [l]a[s]t [n]ame, it [c]ould be wise to [c]on[s]ider [th]at [th]ese [d]i[s]gu[s]ting a[g]g[r]e[g]ates were them[s]elves [s]im[p]ly [d]e[r][i]vat[i]ve [p]roje[c]tions, [th]at [th]ey weren't a[c]tual [m]ixtures, [th]at [th]ey were just [d]erivative e[m]anations as o[p]posed [t]o [t]at[t]oos of what [th]ey [th]ought [th]ey [d]e[s][p]ised. Aerith [w]as a[w]are. She wasn't [d]i[s]tressed a[b]out it, [b]ut she k[n]ew this poor al[b]i[n]o g[u]y would in [t][i]me [t]a[k]e the [b]r[u]nt [o]f it from [C]loud. [C]loud [q]uestioned whether he [d]i[d]n't [d]eserve it? [P][l]us [l][i]ke they'd al[r]eady im[p][l][i]ed - they [m]u[s]t to [p][r]o[c]eed from the i[m]mane[n]t [t]o the [t]ran[s]cende[n]t, no?

Canto II

Total Echoes: 2,174

Total Syllables: 3,037

Approximate Self-Similarity: .716

[C][l]oud [f]ound it a [t]ad [b]e[f][u]dd[l]ing, j[u][s]t [b]e[c][au]se [T]ifa [s]aid sh[e]d h[a]d [a]n [o]dd [d][r][e]am [a][b]out him the [p][r][e]v[i]ous night, and h[e]d [r]e[p][l]ied [b][l]unt[l][y] that he [d]i[d]n't usual[l][y] have [d]reams a[b]out [p][e]o[p]le h[e] knew, somehow [c]om[p][l][e]te[l][y] [p]urging the [f][a][c]t [f]rom his m[i]nd th[a]t, just that n[i]ght, [h]e'd [h]ad a [v]i[v]id dream in[v]ol[v]ing one of his [f]i[r]st gi[r][f]riends and

he[r] [c]u[r]rent (to the [b]e[s]t of [C][l]oud's know[l]edge) [s][p]ouse. [H]ow [c]ould th[a]t [h][a]ve [p][o[s]si[b][l]y [s][l]i[p]ped his [m]e[m]o[r][y], given the [v]i[v]a[c]it[y] of the [d][r]eam it[s]elf? [B]ar[r]ett [d]i[d]n't have a [c][l]ue [e]ither, [r]eal[l]y. [H]is ex and [h]er [h]usband were [l][i]v[i]ng w[i]th [C][l]oud and h[i]s [f][i]c[tional wi[f]e in a [m]o[d]est [c]on[d]o they'd been l[e]asing in Up[p]er [M]idgar, yet he [t]old [T][i][f]a he “[n]ever [d]reamt” about [p]eo[p]le he k[n]ew, yet [p]erha[p]s the [m]o[s]t be[f]uddling a[s][p]e[c]t of it [w]as that [w]hen he'd said th[a]t to [h]er [h]e [a][c]tua[l][y] [b]e[l][i]ved it! [C][l]oud's ex-girlfriend and h[i]s [f][i]c[tional [w]i[f]e had [b]e[c]ome s[o]me[w]h[a]t [f][r]iend[l][y] i[n] the [d][r][e]am, i[n] the [c]on[d]o, and the wh[o]le or[d]e[al, in [C][l]oud's [d][r]eam, st[r]u[c]k him as total[l][y] [f]ine [i]n[i]tial[l][y]. H[i]s [f][i]c[tional [w]i[f]e [w]as ob[s][c]u[r]ed, a [p]u[r]e [m]irage, [w]hile his ex [w]as [a]n [i][m]age of [h]ow [h]e'd k[n]own [h]er in the [p]ast, [n]ot [h]ow she was [n]ow ([n]ot that [h]e k[n]ew [h]ow she was [n]ow!), [b]ut eventua[l]ly [C][l]oud [b]egan [t]o [c]ome [t]o the [r]ea[l]ization [th]at [th]i[s] was his ex-[r]oman[t]i[c] in[t]ere[s]t, and that his [c]u[r]rent wi[f]e and ex-girl[f][r]iend [b]e[c]oming [f][r]iends was [a]n [a][b]solutely [c]ata[c][y]s[m][i][c] deve[l]op[m]ent for him [s]ocial[l]y, [th]at it [w]as [th]e [p]ro[b]a[b]l[y] [w]or[s]t [th]ing [th]at [c]ould [p]o[s]si[b][l]y [h]a[p]pen to his [m]arriage. [H]e [w]ondered [w]h[a]t the [h][u]sband of [h]is ex [w]as thin[k]ing - [C]loud [w]as [w]ondering how it [w]as ex[a]ctly th[a]t he got r[o]ped into this wh[o]le [th]in[g] as he was [e]xitin[g] [t]his a[p]art[m]ent into an U[p]per [M]idgar that, of [c]ourse, wasn't [e]xa[c]tly

U[p]per [M]idg[a]r at [a]ll! Yet on[l]y hours [l]ater when [T]ifa [t]old [C][l]oud sh[e]d had a [d]r[e]am w[i]th h[i]m [i]n [i]t that [n]ight he [c][l]aimed to [n]ever [d]r[e]am a[b]out [p]eo[p]le he k[n]ew. Odd! [B]ar[r]ett [n][o]ted [th]at he just [d]id, [th]ough, [r]ight? [Th]at his [s]tatement [t]o [T]i[f][a] was [f][a][s]e, [n][o]? Um, yeah, th[a]t's ex[a]c[t]ly what [C][l]oud ju[s]t [s]aid! [C][l]oud [r]e[i]te[r]ated that it was “[l][i]te[r]al[l]y [th]at night” [th]at [h]e'd [h]ad [th]e [d][r]eam, [f]urther em[ph]asizing the ab[s]ur[d][i]ty of h[i]s [s]t[a]te[m]ent [t]o [T]ifa. [M][a]lybe, [C][l]oud thought, it was [c][l][o][s]er to a [c][o]in[c]i[d]en[c]e th[a]n [a]n a[c]ute [m][s][r]e[m]em[b]erin[g] o[r] fo[r]gettin[g]? Was that [p]os[s]i[b]le? [M]e[m]o[r]y was ell[i][p][t][i][c]al [s]ome[t]imes. [B]ut i[n] a[n]y [c]a[s]e, he [t]old [B]a[r]rett [h]e'd [h]ad another d[r][e]am [r][e][c]lent[l]y - if [B]a[r]rett was [b]y any chan[c]e [i]nte[r]e[s]ted [i]n [l][i][s]tening to more [b]ullshit a[b]out his [d][r]eam [s]tates? - where [C]loud had [d]i[s][c]overed a g[l]owing, f[l]uo[r][e][s]cent i[n][s][e][c]t i[n] one of the [d][r]awers on a [s][c][r]eened-in patio that [d]i[d]n't ex[i][s]t [i]n [s]o-[c]alled “[r]eal [l]i[f]e,” and [C][l]oud to[s]sed the [f]u[c]king thing [o]ut[s]ide [o]nto the gras[s], [k][i]nd of [d]i[s]gu[s]ted [b][y] it to [b]e hone[s]t, on[l]y to [d]i[s][c]over that [s][a]me in[s][e][c]t ju[s]t a [f]ew [m]o[m]ents [l][a]ter - but [n]ow a[p]pea[r]ing in a huma[n]oid [f]orm, [s]tanding out[s]ide the [s][c][r]eened-in [p]atio, ho[p]ing to b[e] [l]et in. Now, in [th]e dr[ea]m [th]ere was a [l]ittle [g][e]t-to[g][e]ther on [th][i][s] [p]ati[o], [s][o] [C][l]oud [w]as a [l]ittle wa[r]ly of [l]etting this [b][e]ing - who was female, [t]o [b][e] [c][l]ear

- in[t]o the [p]arty, [b]ut [c]u[r]ious[l][y] [e]ve[r]lyone [e]lse at the [p]o[w]-wo[w] [s][e]emed total[l][y] in[c]a[p]a[b]le of [p]er[c][ei]ving her, [e]ven a[f]ter [C][l][ou]d al[l][ow]ed her in? Yes, [C][l][ou]d al[l][ow]ed her in and the [f]orm of [c]ommuni[c]ation be[t]ween him[s]el[f] a[n]d the e[n][t][i]t[y] was [s][i]m[p]l[y] a [s]eries of vague [f]eelings, [p]erha[p]s, he [th]ought, [th]i[s] was [s]ome [k][i]nd of [r]em[i]nder that you [c]ouldn't just, you know, [c][r]eate [th]ings - [th]at [r]e[f][r][e]shing [s]ynthe[s]es are the b[e][s]t [w]e [c]ould do? [W]ith [th]at [s]aid, [th]ey [s]tarted [c]op[ul]ating on the [p]atio. [B][a][r]rett wan[t]ed [t]o [c][l][a][r]i[f][y] [th]at it was [th]e [b]utter[f][l][y] [w]oman that [C][l]oud [w]as [f]u[c]king? Or [w]hatever she [w]as? [W]ell, [C][l]oud n[o]ted, [o]nly [w]hen she [b]e[c]ame a human [b]eing, of [s]ome [s]ort, [th]at [th]at [w]as [w]hen the [c]opu[l]ation o[c]urred, obviou[s][l][y]! [B]ut, with that [s]aid, it was a[c]tual[l][y] ([k]ind of?) int[r]iguing [t]o [B]a[r]rett, [t]o [b]e honest? [B]ut, mo[r]e impo[r]tant[l][y], [C][l]oud [r]eal[l][y] wan[t]ed [t]o know how [S][e]v[e]nth H[ea]v[e]n was [l]a[s]t night, [b]e[c]ause [B]a[r]rett [s]top[p]ed [b]y there, [d]i[d]n't [h]e? [H]ow was it? Well. [L]et's [s]e[e]. [B]arrett [d]e[f]inite[l][y] [f]elt the [p]urit[y] of the [b]ooze ex[p]and w[i]th[i]n h[i]s che[s]t u[p]on his [f]ir[s]t [s]i[p], and while the [b]ar[t]ender ([o]bvious[l][y] [n][o]t [T]i[f]a, [b]ut he [d]i[d]n't [c]atch her [n]ame) was s[l]ight[l][y] more a[f]fable than [w]hen he [w]ent there [w]ith [C][l]oud, but she [d]i[d]n't [a][c]tual[l][y] [a]sk [w]hat [f]ruit he [w]anted [i]n the dr[i]n[k]. [S]itting a[l][o]ne at [S][e]v[e]nth H[ea]v[e]n Bar[r]ett [t]oo[k] n[o]te of him[s]elf [t]o[s]sing the [s]ingle orange [s][l]i[c]e onto h[i]s th[i]n, [n]ow i[m]m[e]d[i]ate[l][y] [m]oist [n][a][p][k]in

and [m][a]nual[l][y] extr[a][c]ting the [s]ingle [s]eed th[a]t h[a]d been ex[p]elled [f][r]om the o[r]ange [i]nto the [l][i][q]uor [f]rom the g[l]a[s]s, a[n]d i[n] doing [s]o, he n[o]ted [th]at all [th]at he'd a[cc]ounted for [a]t the [b]ar - the [a][f]fa[b][i][l][i][y], the [f]ruit, the s[e]ed - that extr[a][c]ting those id[e]as [o]ut [o]f the air was [b][a][s][i][c]ally the [s][a]me as the [c]oo[r]dinate-t[r]a[c]king [r]epo[r]ted [b]y [r]emote viewers. He gl[a]nced [b][a][c]k [a]t the [b]ar and too[k] [b]rief note of the [b]artender ch[u]gging [a] shot [o]f [b]ooze with a [c][u]stomer and was vio[l]ent[l]y sma[c]ked in the [f]ace with an a[c]ute [m]e[m]o[r]y of [r][i][p]p[i]ng [s][i]m[i]lar shots with a [s][p]e[c]i[f]i[c] [b]artender [f]rom his [p]ast, [w]hich [w]as [b]a[s]i[c]ally ju[s]t a[n]other [s]et of [c]oordinat[es], [b]ut these [p]lat[t]i[c]lu[l]ar [c]oordinates [r]e[t]urned [t]o [h]im, [h]e [d]i[d]n't [p][l]u[c]k them [o]ut [o]f the air. He [d]i[d]n't [p][l]u[c]k these ri[p]ping shots with a bartender [c]oordinates [f]rom a [r]a[p]id [r]ush of in[f]ormation - no, [s]aid [c]oordinates [r]eturned to him [a]s he [s][a]t in [s]o[l]i[t]ude [a]t the bar [t]otal[l]y in[v]o[l]un[t]ari[l][y], [v]io[l]ent[l][y] sm[a][c]king B[a]rret in the [f]u[c]king [f]a[c]e and [s]omewhat [r]ude[l][y] [c]o[l]la[p][s]ing time [i]t[s]el[f] [i]n the [p][r]o[c]e[s]s, [r]ight as [B]ar[r]ett [s][a]t [a]t th[a]t [t]iny [t]a[b]le a[l]one, [i]nn[o][c]ent[l]y [s][i]pping h[i]s dr[i]n[k] [i]n [S][e]v[e]nth H[e]av[e]n. [B]arrett the[n] w[e]nt on [t]o [t]ell [C]loud how, [b]efore the [b]ar, he'd s[ee]n a [b]unch of [p][eo][p]le with [M]a[k][o] [p][o]isoning that [h]e [h]adn't seen in [m]onths, and [C]loud [n]oted that's how they k[n]ew S[p][r]ing was ap[p][r]oaching, [r]ight?! Yet, on that

[n]ote, it was [k]ind of [f]unny be[c]ause [C][l]oud was a[c]tual[l]y thin[k]ing to himsel[f] [th]e o[th]er [d][ay] - [w]hat [w]as the exa[c]t [d]e[f][i]n[i]tion of sobriety any[w][ay] - li[k]e how [c]ould they a[c]tually [d]i[s]t[i]ngu[i]sh [s]o[b][r]iety f[r]om intox[i]cation? [B]a[r]rett [p]er[k]ed [u][p] [a] [b]it. [C][l]oud made it [c][l]ear that, [n]o, he wasn't [n]e[c]e[s]sari[l]y [l]i[k]e [t]al[k]ing about s[m][o][k]ing [c]ra[c]k, or exp[o]sing your[s]elf to high in[t]en[s]ity [m][a][k]o shards for [d]e[c]ades on end, [b]ut [m][a]y[b]e ju[s]t [d]rin[k]ing [w]h[i]te [w][i]ne or [s]omething? [B]e[c]ause [C][l]oud [w]as [c]r[o][s]s[i]ng the [W][a]sh[i]ngton [S]t[r]eet [b][r]idge [c]on[t]em[p][l]ating a [p]ar[t]i[c]u[l]ar [v]is[i]on of [i]nd[i][v][i]sible One[n]ess [th]e o[th]er [n]ight, [a]s [B][a]rrett k[n]ew too well th[a]t [C]loud was [a]pt [t]o do [f]rom [t]ime [t]o [t]ime, and [b]e[l]ieve it [n]ot he was a[c]tua[l]ly [d]i[s]covering [a] [d]e[c]ent [a][m]ount of e[n]joy[m]ent i[n] the [m]a[t]e[r]ial [w]orld at the [t]ime! - [d][r]in[k]ing a [m]ini [w]ater [b]ottle f[i]lled w[i]th [M]ez[c]al, [b]ut [a]lso [a]t[t]emp[t]ing to [g]auge whether [h]e'd [h]ave the [t]ime [t]o [g]rab just one [m]o[r]e [b]eer [b]e[f]o[r]e [T][i][f]a was su[p]osed to b[e] at his a[p]art[m]ent. [C][l]oud was [c]ontemp[l][a]ting the n[a]ture of a[n] i[n]d[i]v[i]sible [O]neness[s], [b]ut he [w]as al[s][o] [c]omforted [b]y the mate[r]ial [r]ealm while [c]o[l]d[l]y [c]al[c]u[l]ating his odds of [b]eing a[b]le to ch[u]g an[o]ther [b]eer while still ma[k]ing it [b]a[c]k to his [a][p]artment [b]e[f]ore Ti[f]a was sup[p]osed to [a]rrive. [A]nd [a]s [C][l]oud was [c]ontem[p][l][a]ting this n[a]ture of a[n] i[n]d[i]v[i]s[i]ble [O]neness, [c]r[o]s[s][i]ng a [W][a]sh[i]ngton [S]t[r]eet b[r]idge, [d][r]in[k]ing

[M]ez[c]al from a [m]ini water [b]ottle [C]loud [r]e[m]ar[k]ed to [B]a[r]rett [h]ow [h]e'd [s]tarted to [q]ue[s]tion this very [d]eff[i]n[i]tion of [s]o[b][r]iety. [B]ut it was here [B]a[r]rett [b]egan to [q]uestion - [w]ell - [w]hat did [C][l]oud [a][c]tua[l]ly mean by th[a]t? [W]ell, [w]hat [C]loud [w]as [t][r]ying [t]o get [a]t, Ba[r]rett, was th[a]t [s]o[b]riety it[s]elf was [s]up[posed] to [b]e a [b]a[s]eline of [s]orts, no? Of [c]our[s]e it was! Yet how [c]ould [th]ey [m]easure [th]i[s] [b]a[s]e[l]ine exa[c]t[l]y? - was there [a] [m]easure[m]ent at [a]ll? - was so[b]r[i]ety to [b]e def[i]ned [b]y a l[a][c]k of p[a]ssion, or a vague [s]en[s]e of th[e] “[e]ven-[k][e]eled”? [B]ut the pro[b][l]em was, in [C][l]oud's [m]ind at [l]ea[s]t, [th]at [th]ere was [n]o u[n]iver[s]al e[m]otional [b]a[s]eline [w][i]th [w]h[i]ch to def[i]ne [s]o[b]r[i]ety. [S]ome [p]leo[p]le - he [m]eant, even [C][l]oud [h]imself [c]ould be t[o]tal[l][y] un[h]inged e[m][o]tional[l][y] on o[c]asion while [q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te “[c]omp[l][e]te[l][y] [s][o][b]er”! [F]urther[m]ore, even i[f] they - [B]arrett and [C][l]oud - [c]ould de[f]ine [s]ome [b]a[s]e[l]ine e[m]otional [s]tatus [a]s [a]xio[m][a]ti[c], [th]en [th]ey would [s]till have to [c]ombat [ph]ilo[s]o[ph]i[c]al[l][y] with e[x]ternal [s]ub[s]tan[c]es that weren't [c]on[s]i[d]ered int[o][x]i[c]ants that would [o]bviou[s][l][y] sh[i]ft th[i][s] e[m]otional ba[s]e[l]ine. What did [C][l]oud [m]ean? Well, [l]i[k]e, [a] [l]a[c]k of f[oo]d [c]ould [a]lter m[oo]d. The [s]ame [c]ould be [s]aid of [c]a[f]feine! [C]o[n]suming dirt would pro[b]a[b]ly shi[f]t s[o]me[o]ne's emotional [s]tate. Hi[s]to[r]i[c]al[l][y], a[c]co[r]ding to [C][l]oud, [p]eo[p]le ate fu[c]king [p][l]ants with [s]mall [d]o[s]es of p[s]ly[c]he[d][e][l][i][c]s em[b][e][d]d[e]d w[i]th[i]n them and [p][r]o[b]a[b]ly

thought ve[r]y little about “in[t][o]xi[c]ation” [p][r][o][p]er! [P]eo[p]le u[s]ed to fu[c]king [s]ani[t]ize [w]ater [w]ith al[c]ohol! [S][m]o[k]ing [t]o[b]a[c]co al[t]ered [m]ood. [B]a[s]i[c]ally, [B]arrett, “a[n]ything we i[n]ge[s]t alters our [l]a[t]ent [s]t[al]te of exi[s]ten[c]e and theref[o]r]e ch[a]nges u[s] in [s]ome [f]o[r]m or [a]nother, wh[i]ch [i]n [m]o[s]t [a]ll [c]a[s]es pro[b]a[b]ly [f][i][t]ers [i]n[t]o our [m]ood.” [C]loud [n]oted, [f]or him [p]er[s]o[n]al[ly], a shi[f]t in his [d]iet [c]ould [d]o won[d]ers for h[i]s [i]ntel[l]e[c]tual [d]i[s][p]osition - [s]o then [w]hat [w]as [s]o[b]riety? It [s]eemed im[p]o[s]si[b]le to even [th]in[k] a[b]out [s]o[b][r]iety as [a] [th]ing at [a]ll! Well, [B]a[r]rett h[a]dn’t ex[a]c[t]ly [c]on[s]idered it li[k]e that and [w]asn’t sure if he [w]ould. [B]ut [C][l]oud [th]ought [th]at m[al]y[b]e th[ey]’d t[a][k]en a [f]al[s]e [b][a][s]e[l]ine of [s]o[b]riety [c]on[c]eptual[l][y], no? A[f]ter all, [w]hat [t]e[c]h[n]i[c]al[l][y] [w]as an ex[t]er[n]al [s]ub[s]tan[c]e? [C]ould they [d]ig even [f]urther and [c]on[s][i][d]er the [d]e[f][i][n][i]tion of an ex[t]er[n]al [s]ub[s]tan[c]e? A [c]onver[s]ation [c]ould [c]ertainly [a]lter [a] [p]er[s]on’s [t]em[p]erame[n]t ex[p]one[n]tial[l][y] as well! - but did that [t]e[c]h[n]i[c]al[l][y] [c]ount as [a]n [e]xoge[n]ous [s]ub[s]tan[c]e? Did [w]ords [n]ot [c]arry [w]eight? A vo[c]i[f]e[r]ous thought or [e]ven a [f]l[e]eting [m]e[m]o[r][y] - e[s][p]ecial[l][y] in [C][l]oud’s [c]a[s]e! - [c]ould [o][f]ten t[o][s]s a [p]er[s]on [c]om[p][l][e]te[l]y o[f]f-[k]ilter, yet they [s]till [f]or [s]ome in[c]om[p][r]ehen[s]i[b]le [r]eason [c][l]ung to an [i]dea of an obj[e][c]tive [s]o[b]r[i]ety, and [th]en [th]ey [s]ub[s]e[qu]e[n]tly [t]argeted [s]e[l]e[c]t [s]ub[s]tan[c]es as in[t]oxi[c]ating, while deeming [s]o-[c]alled “other”

[s]ub[s]tan[c]es - which [a][s]o [a][t]ered [t]emperaments - as [t]otally fine! [W]ell, [th]is [w]as [w]hat [C][l]oud [w]as [th]in[k]ing at [l]east, as he [w][a][k]ed over the [W][a]shington [S]treet [b]ridge - that if [p]eo[p]le [d][i][d]n't [v]iew [c]on[s]uming [f]resh [v]ege[t]a[b]les as [s][o]mething [f][u]nda[m]en[t]ally [m]ind al[t]ering, then it was [p]o[s]si[b]le, in [C]loud's [m]ind, [th]at [th]ey ju[s]t ex[p]e[r]ien[c]ed the [w]orld in va[s]tly dif[f]e[r]ent [w]ays. [A]nd [B][a]r[r]ett [f]or his [p]art [f]ound this to [b][e] int[r]iguing yet un[c]onvin[c]ing. [B]ut [C][l]oud in[s][i][s]ted [th]at [th]ere [s][i]mp[li]y was no [t]rue [a]nd [e]x[t]ended [s]tabi[l]it[y] of our men[t]al [s]tates - even if [th]ey were hy[p]o[th]eti[c]al[l][y] de[p][r]ived of ex[t]ernal [t]in[k]e[r]ing, be[c]ause even thought it[s]el[f] was [f]undamen[t]al[l][y] e[x][t]ernal [t]o [s]ome e[x][t]ent, was it not? [A]nd [p]eo[p]le on [a]verage were [c]onstant[l][y] a[c]costed by [s][p]e[c]li[f]i[c] th[ou]ghts, were they [n][o]t? Thought [a]lmost [n]ever [c]ea[s]ed [a][c]co[s]ting th[e]se [p][e]o[p]le, [w]hich [w]ere all [p]eo[p]le? And even if [th]ey [c]on[f]ined [th]emselves to [c]ommonly ag[r]eed u[p]on mate[r]ial [s]ub[s]tan[c]es, [th]en [th]ere was [s]till no [c]on[s]i[s]tent way to [c]al[c]u[l]ate the [d]egr[ee] of al[t]e[r][a]tion [t]o a men[t]al [s][a]te a[c][r]o[s]s [p]eo[p]le of [d]i[f]fe[r]ent walk[s] of [l]i[f]e, [p]e[r]iod. Bar[r]ett [m]ight not ex[p]e[r]ien[c]e the [s]ame [m]ental sh[i]f[t] a[f]ter the [c]on[s]um[p]tion of a [f][r]esh [s]t[i][c]k of [c]ell[e]r[y] that [C][l]oud would, [e]ven if [the [c]e[l]e[r][y] it[s]el[f] [r]emained en[t]irely [s][t]atic. [W][a][k]ing a[c]ro[s]s the [W][a]shington [S]treet [b]ridge, [C]loud [d]ran[k] [f]rom a [t]iny [w]ater [b]ottle [f][i]lled w[i]th [M]ez[c]al and [d]i[d]n't [f]eel in[t]oxi[c][a]ted i[n] a[n]y

w[ay], sh[a][p]e, or [f]orm - any [m]ore than [h]ad [h]e been [d]rin[k]ing [a] [c]u[p] [o]f [c]off[ee], or [ea]ting a [d]el[i]c[i]ous [s]n[a]ck, or re[c][e]ving a [s][p]le[c]i[f]i[c] thought. [I]n h[i]s m[i]nd at the t[i]me there was no [t]rue [d][i]v[i]sion [b]e[t]ween in[t]oxi[c]ation and so[b][r]iety, and this was [C][l]oud's final [c]on[c][l]usion - [r]egard[l][e]ss of wh[e]ther or not Bar[r]ett ag[r]e[e]d - [a]s he [s]omewhat [a]nxious[l][y] [s]ent [T]if[a] [a] [t]ext m[e][s]age [l][e]tting her know he was “[t]a[k]ing a wal[k],” just in [c]a[s]e she [a]rrived at his [a]partment be[f]ore he [f][i]n[i]shed [s][l]ugging down one [l]a[s]t [b]eer [a]t the [b]ar th[a]t he [w]as [w]alking to.

Canto III

Total Echoes: 1,403

Total Syllables: 1,994

Approximate Self-Similarity: .704

“[W]ell, no,” [w]ere the two [w]ords C[l]oud began [w]ith as he ex[p][l]ained [th]at his [p]oint was [th]at [th]ere was a [s][i]gn[i]f[i][c]ant d[i][s]t[i]n[c]tion be[t]w[ee]n the [t]wo, m[ea]ning [d][i]nner and [d]r[i]nks! - that if you [m]a[k]e it out [l]i[k]e it's just [d]rin[k][s] and then [l]a[s]t [m]i[n]ute it [b]e[c]omes [d]i[n]ner? - then yeah [C][l]oud's gonna [b]e a [l]ittle [f]u[c]king [p]i[s]sed o[f]f! E[s][p]eciall[y] i[f] h[e] [d]i[d]n't k[n][o]w the [f]u[c]king [p]eo[p]le, you k[n][o]w [A]e[r]ith? How did that ma[k]e [a]ny [s]en[s]e? He [f]ound it [a] [b]it [a][b][s]urd, [f][r]an[k]ly. Sure, he'd go [t][i]e one or [t]wo on with a [t]otal [s]tr[a]nger, that was f[i]ne, but to [s]it [d]own [a]nd [a][c]tually e[n]g[al]ge in a [d][i]nner? - that was a[n] e[n]tirely [d][i][s]t[i]n[c]t [l]evel

of [s]ocia[l]izing, and it [w]as [o]ne that, [f]ran[k][l][y], [C][l]oud [d]i[d]n't parti[c]u[l]ar[l][y] [c]are [f]or. [A]nd he wasn't ashamed to [a]dm[i]t [i]t! - th[a]t, [f]r[a]n[k][l][y], he [f]elt th[i][s] [Ph][i][l][i][s]tine n[o]tio[n] of ju[s]t g[o]li[n]g out to [d]inner with an[y] and ever[y] a[c]quaintan[c]e, that [i]f you [d]i[d]n't a[c]quie[s]ce to [th]at [s]tan[d]ard [th]en you [w]ould b[e] [d]e[e]med, [w]hat? - ant[i]-s[o]cial? [W]ell [c]o[l]or [C][l]oud ant[i]-s[o]cial then! [B]ut Aerith n[o]ted that while, sure, to [b]e [f]air, it was a di[f]ferent [l]evel of s[o]cia[l]ization, if he tru[l][y] [d]i[d]n't k[n][o]w the [p]leo[p]le, but, you k[n][o]w, if it was he[r] [p]e[r][s]onal[l][y]? [S]u[p]posing it was Aerith, then she'd h[o][p]e that it woul[d]n't [b]e that [b]ig of a [d]eal [t]o [C][l][ou]d? [T]o just go [ou]t to [d][i]nnner? Was she k[i][d]ding him?! Oh, of [c]ourse not, Ae[r]ith! With her? You fu[c]king [k]id[d]ing? [C]loud [w]as al[w]ays [d]own to g[r]ab a [n]osh with s[o]me[o]ne li[k]e her, [n][o], it was just [th]at [th]e hypo[th]eti[c]al [n][o]tion of [ea]ting [s]u[p]per with a [c]om[p][l][e]te [s]tranger ("a mo[r]e o[r] [l]e[s]s [c]om[p][l]ete [s]tranger") - [w]hat [w]ere they di[s][c]u[s]sing? [C]loud and the hy[p]otheti[c]al stranger? [D]id [h]e [h]ave to [c]ome [p]re[p]ared with a [p]ortf[o][l]i[o] of tal[k]ing [p]oints? - [C][l]oud [c]oul[d]n't [i]magine [th]at [th]ey'd b[e] [s]u[p]er [i]ntr[i]gued with an[y]thing [h]e [h]ad to [s]ay, or [th]at [th]ey'd [e]nd u[p] on the [p]r[e][c]i[p]i[c]e of [a]ny r[e]l[e]lation that he'd [c]on[c]lude to b[e] [p]arti[c]u[l]ar[l][y] en[l]ighten[i]ng [e]ither. [C][l]oud was [s]im[p][l]y going by [e]m[p]i[r]i[c]al [e]viden[c]e [r]ea[l]ly. That [w]as all. He [w]asn't, [l][i][k]e, tr[y]ing to be a dick or [a]nything! Ju[s]t that, [e]m[p]iri[c]a[l][l][y]

[s][p][e]a[k]ing, it [s][e]emed un[l]i[k]e[l][y] they'd have [a] lot to [c]onver[s]e [a][b]out, [C]loud and [th]i[s] hy[p]o[th]eti[c]al [s]tranger. [B]ut [A]erith [a]dded that, to [b]e fair, [w]asn't [C]loud the [o]ne who [w]as al[w][ay]s r[ai]ling again[s]t [s]o-[c]alled [s]en[s]ory data? Yet, in thi[s] [c][a][s]e, he was [a]ll [b]ent [ou]t of sh[a][p]e [a][b]out this im[p]rom[p]tu [d]inner [b]e[c]ause, in his own words, [b]e[c]ause of [e]m[p]i[r]i[c]al [d]ata? Of [p]a[s]t [e]xp[er]ien[c]e, [w]hich [w]as [s]en[s]o[r]ly [d]ata? [M]e[m]o[r]ies, [r]ight? [W]hich, [w]ouldn't [C]loud ag[r]ee, was [s]ome of the mo[s]t un[r]eli[a][b]le [d][a]ta [a]v[ai]la[b]le no? Of [c]our[s]e he [d]id! Aer[i]th, ev[e]n [f]u[ck]ing [q]uantum [ph][y]s[i][c]s was [s]till [f]un[d]amentally [s]en[s]e-[f]orward, in the [s]en[s]e [th]at [th]ey were beg[i]nn[i]ng w[i]th [s]en[s]e [pler]e[p]tion - this [w]as [w]hat [c]ontem[p]o[r]a[r]ly [s]o-[c]alled [s]cien[c]e had [a]chieved [o]f [c]our[s]e! [P]la[c]ing [s]en[s]e [pler]e[p]tion [a]s [a]n a[p]lex [p]re[d]ator un[t]il [f]inally, with the [d]i[s][c]ove[r]ly of [q]uan[t]um [ph][y]s[i][c]s, [i]t'd [r]e[d]u[c]ed the obse[r]vable wo[r]ld to a [d]egr[e]e that [e]ven [l]inear [s]en[s]e-[pler]e[p]tion no [l]onger [m]ade any fu[ck]ing [s]en[s]e in the u[p]er [w]orlds! [Th]at [w]as [w]hat [th]ey'd done. [A]nd [q]uite [s][m]ugly [a]t [t]imes [t]oo! But [w]asn't that [w]hat [C]loud [w]as [d]oing w[i]th th[i]s im[p]en[d][i]ng [d][i]nner? Ae[r]ith [q]ue[r]ied him on thi[s] [p]oint. Well, [C]loud [s]u[p]posed [th]at, [th]in[k]ing [a]bout it [a]gain, yeah, he was [k]ind of a[c]ting li[k]e a [q]uantum [ph][y]s[i]c[i]st a b[i]t, [w]asn't he? [W]ell, Aerith [w]as just saying - to [th]e [e]xtent [th]at his argu[m]ent was [f]unda[m][e]ntally [e]mpirical. But it was

[k]ind of [i]n[t]uitive [i]n a [s]en[s]e [t]oo, his argument, [i][n] [C]loud's opi[n]ion. H[e] agr[e]ed with A[e]rith to the [e]xtent that, ye[s], he was [b]a[s]ing his [d]i[s]gu[s]t [p]artially on [e]m[p]irical [e]vi[d]en[ce], [b]ut he'd [a][s]o [a]ll[e]ge that he f[e]lt a[n] i[n][t]uitive [d]i[s]gu[s]t with these [t]y[p]es of [s]ocial g[a]therings [a]s well, and then [h]e, [t]o [h]er [p]oint, [t]o [b]e [b][l]unt, [d][i]d [t]end [t]o [d][i]p i[n][t]o the world of em[p]iri[c]ism to va[l]i[d]ate [s]aid i[n][t]uitive [d]i[s]gu[s]t. Although, [t]e[c]hni[c]al[1][y], they should [p]ro[b]a[bl][y] [b][e] a [l]ittle [c]autious to ev[e]n [e]m[p][l]oy the word [e]m[p]iri[c]ism here, be[c]ause he [d][i][d]n't th[i]n[k] em[p]iri[c]ism [n]e[c]e[s]sa[r]il[y] [n][e]eded to b[e] [r]e[s]t[r]i[c]ted to [s]en[s]e-[p]er[c]e[p]tion [n]e[c]e[s]sa[r]il[y], you k[n]ow? Ae[r]ith [s]u[p]posed the[r]e, ye[s], was [p][r]o[b]a[b]ly [a]n [e]m[p]i[r]i[c]ism of the intel[l]igi[b]le [r][e]alm as w[e]ll? Hone[s]t[l][y], to C[l]oud - it was [c]ertain[l][y] [p]o[s]si[b]le that h[e] may[b][e] wasn't [e]ven in the [b]e[s]t mind [s]tate to even [a][s]e[s]s it [o]ne [w]ay or [a]nother. [A]erith too[k] [a]dvantage of this [c]apitu[l][a]tion to [s]ay sh[e]'d [r][e][c]ent[l][y] had [a] d[r][e]am [a]b[ou]t [C][l]oud - would [h]e mind [h]earing [h]er out? - [w]here he [w]as emailing her a [q]ues[ti]on [a]bout whether [a] [s][p]e[c]i[f]i[c] a[c][t]ion was [d]e[f]ined as 'in[s][d]er tra[d]in[g]', while she was [p]roce[s]sin[g] [s]ome non-[d]e[s][c]ri[p]t 'or[d]ers' for [s]omething in a bath t[u]b, which [c]on[s]i[s]ted [o]f, for [s]ome [r]eason, w[a]shing [l]arge ch[o][c]o[l]ate [c]oo[k]ies [d]own the [d][r]ain, [w]atching [th]em as [th]ey [s][l]ow[l]y [d][i]s[i]nteg[r]ated un[d]er the hot [w]ater. Then, after

[th]at, [r]ea[l]izing [th]at [th]e [c]oo[k]ies [r]e[l][a]ted to [C][l]oud's [q]ue[s]tion about in[s]i[d]er [t][r][a]ding, she [c]on[t]emp[l][a]ted if [sh]e [sh]ould have [f][l]ushed them all [d]own the [d][r][ai]n be[f]ore an[s]we[r]ing the [q]ue[s]tion? [D]id she [d]o w[r]ong [b]y [C]loud [b]y washing these [c]oo[k]ies [p][r]eemptive[l][y] [d]own the [d][r]ain? If [C][l]oud [t][r]u[l][y] wan[t]ed the 'order [p][r]o[c]e[ss]ed,' [s]o to [s][p]lea[k]. In a [s][e]n[s]e Aerith [f][e]lt an a[f]f[i]n[i]t[y] [f]or the [c]oo[k][ie]s, [d]i[d]n't sh[e], [C]loud in[f]erred. [C][l]oud [p]ostu[l]ated [th]at she [f]elt [l]i[k]e [th]ey were [a][c]tual [b]eings [a]s she [c][r]um[b]led [th]em [d]own [th]e un[f]org[i]v[i]ng [d][r]ain [w]ith the [s][c]orching hot [w]ater? In [r]et[r]o[s]pe[c]t, [A]erith [a]d[m]itted [th]at [th]at [m][ay] have been the [c][a][s]e. [C][l]oud [n][o]ted [th]at [th]ere was a [c]ertain [l]evel of g[n][o][s]is ach[ie]ved through [c]ontem[p][l]ating your dr[ea]ms - yet was there any to [b][e] g[l][ea]ned from [p]artici[p][a]ting in [d]ou[b]le [d][a]te [d]inners? [A]erith [a]dmitted she'd [b]een [c][l]inging onto the fa[c]t of the [c]oo[k]ies [b]eing washed [d]own the [d]rain, and she knew [C][l]oud had a [p]lar[t]icu[l]ar [t]a[l]ent when [i]t [c]ame to [i]n[t]er[p][r]eting [d][r]eams. W[e]ll th[e]n [l][e]t's [s][e] here, [C][l]oud [c]on[t]em[p][l]ated, the [d]i[s]solu[t]ion of a [s]w[e]et [f]ood in an [a][p]par[a]tu[s] [u]sual[l]y [u]sed t[o] [c][l]ean your[s]el[f]? [B][u]t with a [t]rans[a][c]tional, a[b][u]tting [c][a][p]ital[i]s[t] un[d]er[t]one. [A]nd [A]erith was [d]oing it, [p]erh[a][p]s unint[e]ntional[l]y, for [s]omeone [e]lse ([C][l][ou]d), with[ou]t their k[n]ow[l]edge, and [n]ot on[l]y [w]ith[ou]t their k[n]ow[l]edge but [w]hile [i]g[n]oring their [i]n[q]uir[y] -

a[c]tual[l][y], [C]loud guessed it [w]as h[i]s [i]n[q]uir[y] te[c]h[n]i[c]all[y], about [w]hether it [w]as [l]egal, as a[p]parent[l][y] this was [s]omehow [p]otential[l][y] ‘in[s]ider trading’? So sh[e] was [r][e][p]ur[p]o[s]ing [a]n [a][p]pa[r][a]ltus for [c][l]eansing the bo[d]y to [d]e[s]troy [l]arge, [l]ife-[l]i[k]e [p]ie[c]es [o]f [u]nhealthy [f]ood [f]or [C][l]oud, [w]ith[ou]t his [c]on[s]ent, [C][l]oud mean[w]hile [w]on[d]ering i[f] [d]e[s]troying thi[s] jun[k] [f]ood in a b[a]th tub was [a][c]tua[l][y] i[l][e]gal? Of [c]our[s]e in any [d]ream they al[s]o should [c]on[s][d]er [w]hether [w]h[a]t [w][a]s [r]e[p][r]esented [w]as [a] [r]e[p][r]esen[t]ation [o]f [a]nother [r]e[p][r]esen[t]ation, [m]ea[n]ing [m]ayb[e] [n]ot [a]n [a][n]a[l]ogly] [a]t all? But i[f] they [p][r]o[c]e[d]ed as i[f] [w]hat [w]as [r]e[p][r]esented in Ae[r]ith’s [d][r][e]am a[p]p[e]ared as [i]t was [i]n[t]en[d]ed [t]o a[p]pear, [th]en [th]at would b[e] a [d][e][c]ent [s]tart. [S]o, in a [s]en[s]e, Aerith [th]ought, [th]at sh[e] was [c][l][e]aning [p]arti[c]u[l]ar attributes of [C][l][ou]d with[o]ut his [p]erm[i]ss[i]on, [w]hile [C][l]oud [w]as th[i]n[k][i]ng - [p]erha[p]s [s]u[s][p]e[c]ting - that [c][l]eansing him[s]elf [i]n th[i]s w[ay] m[ay] h[a]ve [a][c]tual[l]y been a [t]y[p]e of insider [t]rading, it [c]ould have been a ve[r][y] [s]er[i]ou[s] [c][r]ime. [C]loud [n][o]ted that - Ae[r]ith, [c][l]eaning your[s]elf was b[a][s]i[c]a[l]ly [a] [c][r]ime [a]gain[s]t [th]e [s]t[a]te [th]ese d[ay]s. [N][o] [s]urprise [th]ere! Al[th]ough [C]loud [l][i][k]ed a [n][i]ce [c]oo[k]ie [e]very [n]ow and th[e]n, he [d]i[d]n’t [n]e[c]e[s]sarily [f]ind a[n]ything th[a]t [b][a]d a[b]out [ea]ting a [f]ew [c]oo[k]ies on [c]asion, but [C]loud also [f]ound it intr[i]guing that Aerith [p]ersonally [i]denti[f]i[ed] with [th]e [c]oo[k]ies as [th]ey [b][r]o[k]e

a[p]art and tum[b]led [d]own the [d][r]ain, that she [s]aw a [c]ertain goodnes[s], a [s]pe[c]i[f]i[c] [b]eing w[i]th[i]n them, and [s]u[b][s]e[q]uently [f]elt a [s][a]dne[s]s [a]t the [f][a]ct they h[a]d to [b]e washed [d]own the [d]rain of this [b][a]th tub. Even what's fundamental[l][y] [b]ad for you isn't [n]e[c]e[s]sari[l][y] [b]ad, Aerith [n]oted. [B]ut ye[s], it was [s]ad to [s]ee them [f][a]ll [a]part in [a] [b]ath t[u]b [f][au][c]et, h[u]h? “[E]ven the [r]unning shoes you n[ee]d to [t]o[s]s in[t]o the [t][r]ash are e[t]ernal,” Cloud [s]aid.

Canto IV

Total Echoes: 1,332

Total Syllables: 1,960

Approximate Self-Similarity: .680

Cloud was [f]or sure [f][i]ne [w]ith [w]h[a]tever Ti[f]a [w][a]nted to [s][a]y to him (“I al[w][a]lys [w][a]nt you to [s]peak your m[i]nd!”), [b]ut he just [w][a]sn’t going to [b]ack off his [w]ell-[d]eveloped (in his m[i]nd) [i][d]ea [th]at [th]e [i]n[s][t]itution [i]t[s]elf (as a [c]on[c]ept) was ba[s]i[c]ally [r]e[s]t[r][i]c[t]ive, [th]at [th]ey shouldn’t ne[c]e[s]s[ar]ily [c][ar]e what’s th[e][r]e in the [c]ontainer (“[C]atego[r][y] theo[r][y]!”), but al[s][o] that e[r][o][s] [w]as a g[a]te[w][a]y. Ti[f]a ju[s]t wasn’t [c]ertain th[a]t e[n]gaging i[n] [th][a]t in the bar, [a][f]ter hours - she [d][i][d]n’t kn[o]w, was th[a]t [a][c]tual[l]y ap[p][r][o][p][r]iate, [C][l]oud? [E]v[e]n [i]f sh[e] wan[t]ed [t]o [d]o [i]t! [I]n the [b]ar?! Of [c]our[s]e, [C][l]oud total[l]y un[d]er[s]tood, [b]ut, again - ju[s]t to [r]eite[r][a]te - e[r]os was a g[a]tew[aly]. [I]t [d][i][d]n’t have to [b]e a[b]out, you know, purely that. [W]hat? - [w]as [T]i[f]a

[n]ow gon[n][a] [a][l]low her[s]el[f] to [b][e]
[t]ly[r]an[n]ical[l][y] [r]e[s]t[r]ained [b]ly the
[i]n[s]t[i]tutio[n]al [n]orms of Shin[r]a, et al? [W]as that
[n][ow] h[ow] she [w]as go[n]na [l]ive her [l]ife? - by the
[c]ontem[p]luous [r]ules of [Sh]in[r]a? [Sh]e [c]ould [p]op
that [p]ussy [w]ide o[p]en [w]henever she [w]an[t]ed [t]o! -
if sh[e] r[e]all[y] [w]an[t]ed [t]o, ev[e]n [i]f [i]t was ju[s]t
[s]u[p]er [q]u[i][c]k[l][y]! ([W]hat exa[c]t[l][y] [w]as the
tem[p]e[r]ature in the [r]oom?) There wasn't an[y]th[i]ng
[i]nhe[r]entl[y] [o]ut [o]f [b][ou]nds [a][b][ou]t an[y] of that,
[a]ssuming the [c]orr[e]c[t] [c]ont[e]xt, [b]e[c]ause - [w]ell,
no, [C]loud [w]asn't [s]aying he [w]as in [s]u[pp]ort of
[i]nd[i][s][c]r[i]m[i]nate [p]rom[i][s][c]uit[y] - [n]o, [n]ot at
all! It [n][ee]ded to b[e] [r][i]go[r]ou[s] - [p]erhaps [e]ven
[r][i]tual[i][s]t[i]c, and h[e] wasn't [e]ven [s]ugge[s]ting
[T][i]fa should i[p][s][o] [f]a[c]t[o] ju[s]t
[q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te [p]o[p] that [p]u[s]sy [o][p]en to
[s][p]ite the m[o][r]al n[o][r]ms of Shinra - it was a[c]tually
the o[p]posite! No, [C]loud was [s]im[p]ly a[s]serting [sh]e
[sh]ouldn't not ma[k]e [b]eautiful [l]ove in [S][e]v[e]nth
H[ea]v[e]n [s]im[p][l]y [b]e[c]ause of [s]ome [s]o[c]ietal
Shinra [c]ode - [sh]e [sh]ouldn't al[l]ow her[s]el[f], Ti[f]a,
to [b][e] [r]egu[l]ated [b]y a[n] i[n][s]titutional e[n]tity
whose [p][r]i[m]a[r]ly [p]ur[p]o[s]e was the
em[p]l[oy]m[en]t of the univer[s]al [r]e[s]t[r]i[c]tion. To
[C][l]oud it [w]asn't in any [w][ay], sh[a][p]e, or [f]o[r]m
Shi[n]ra's [p]la[c]e to e[n][f]o[r][c]e a[n]y u[n]iver[s]al
[r]e[s]t[r]i[c]tions what[s]oever. [F]u[c]k Shin[r]a
[s][p]e[c][i][f][i][c]ally and [f]u[c]k the [i]n[s]t[i]tution in a
more generi[c] [s]en[s]e. [U]gh, sh[u]t [u]p [C]loud! He
[w]as [k]idding, [w]asn't he? Oh yeah! - [C]loud

ad[m][i]tted [i]t was [c]ertain[l]y [p]o[s]sible he was [e]xaggerating [c]ertain [e][l]e[m]ents of his argu[m]e[n]t i[n]te[n]tional[l]y, i[n] terms of the [w]h[o]le - [w]ell, you k[n]o[w] - [n][o], he [w]asn't [s]ugge[s][t]ing [T]ifa should “[p]o[p] that [p]u[s]sy” in the [b]ar! No, that [w]as a[b][s]urd! Unle[s]s she [w]an[t]ed [t]o! [B]e[c]ause if she wan[t]ed [t]o [T]i[f]a should know that [C]loud [t]oo[k] no o[ff]en[s]e, li[k]e, at all! [Th]ey both [l][au][gh]ed [a]t them[s]elves, but [d]i[d]n't he, [C][l]oud, in the [a]bstr[a][c]t [k]ind of h[a]ve a [p]oint? No, ju[s]t [l]i[s]ten for a [s]e[c]ond, [C][l]oud [s]aid, [p][ea]se T[i][f]a - h[e] knew she [f]elt [a]n [a]nxiety, [f]rom [t][i]me [t]o [t][i]me, and a[c]ording to [C][l]oud it was a[c]tuall[y] en[t]ire[l][y] po[s]sible [th]at it was [th]e anxiet[y] of the younger [S]o[c]rat[e]s. Namel[y], it was [th]is anx[i]et[y] [th]at T[i][f]a, sh[e] [f]elt [l][i]ke she m[i]ght have [f]a[l]le[n] i[n]to a pit of “b[o]ttomle[s]s n[o]n[s]en[s]e” - this [i]dea [th]at [th]ere [c]ould be an a[c]tual [c]on[c]eptual [i]dea beh[i]nd all phe[n]ome[n]a th[a]t h[a]d e[v]e[r] o[c]cu[r]red, th[a]t e[v]e[r]ly [a][c]tion she too[k] had some [c]apital-[I] [I]de[a] [b]eh[i]nd or [a][b]ove it, that eve[r][y] [s]ingle [s]en[s]o[r][y] [p]er[c]e[p]tion, eve[r][y] [s]ingle [m]o[m]ent [o]f their l[i]ves [e][m]erged fr[o]m [s][o]me [c]on[c]eptual [I]dea [b]eh[i]nd it, that [i]deas them[s]elves [b]e[c]ame [s]u[b]-a[t]omi[c] [p]arti[c]les which [b]ecome mul[t]i[p]l[i]ed i[n]to a[n] i[n]f[i][n][i]te (“[s]eeming!””) [n]on[s]en[s]e. It was [a]n [e]xt[r]eme vertigo to [e]x[p]e[r]ien[c]e that with[ou]t a d[ou]bt! - and [C][l]oud was all [t]oo [f]amiliar with that [t]y[p]e of [m]adnes[s] him[s]e[f]! In [f]a[c]t, his [e]ntire [e]x[p][e]rien[c]e in the [e]ther, [s]o to [s]p[ea]k, was

funda[m]ental[y] in ag[r][ee][m]ent w[i]th th[i]s anxiet[y] of young [S]o[c][r]at[e]s. B[u]t wh[a]t [C]loud would [s]ay in [r]e[s]ponse, [t]o [T]i[f]a, [t]o him[s]el[f], to [S]o[c][r]ates - [w]hat [C]loud [w]ould [s]ay in [r]e[p]ly is exactly what [P]armen[i]d[e]s [s]aid to this young [S]o[c][r]at[e]s him[s]elf, [th]at [th]i[s] anxiet[y] was a[n] a[n]xiet[y] of youth (“[C][l]oud, we’re b[a][s]i[c]a[l]l[y] the exa[c]t [s][a]me [a]ge . . .”), [o]ne that [w]ould be ext[i]ngu[i]shed [w]hen sh[e]’d “learned not to despise any of [th][e]se [th]ings.” In [sh][or]t, Ti[f]a [sh]ouldn’t a[l]low [Sh]in[r]a [m][or]es - or, [f][r]an[k][l]y, i[n][s]titutional [m]ores [f]rom anywhere el[s]e for th[a]t [m][a]tter! - to i[n]ter[f]ere with her own p[r]o[c]e[ss]es. That [w]as all [C][l]oud [w]as [s]aying [r][e]al[l][y]. I[f] [T][i][f]a [w]an[t]ed [t][o] d[o] th[a]t [a]t [S][e]v[e]nth H[e]av[e]n, [th][e]n, sure, [th]at [w]as [f]ine! [W]ell, T[i][f][a] [a][p]r[e]ciated the [k]ind [w]ords, [e]ven [i][f] [i]t was an [a]w[k]ward subject for [C]loud of all [p][e]o[p]le to [b][e] [b]roaching, given the [f][a][c]t th[a]t it was [k]ind of [b][l]atant[l]y obvious [th]at it was [C][l]oud [th]at T[i]fa would [p]ro[b]a[b][l][y] do that with in the [b]ar. [W]hy [w]ould they [k]id [o]ne [a]nother [a][b]out that! [B]ut for [C]loud’s [p]art - no he [d]i[d]n’t [c]are [o]ne [w]ay or the other - he ju[s]t [th]ought [th]at [w]hen [s]ome[o]ne [s][p]ent a [d]e[c]ent [ch]unk of time in [th][e] [e][th]er [th]at it [ch]anged [th]eir [p]er[s][p]e[c]tive on that [k]ind of shit - what [c]on[c]lusion, after [a]ll, should they d[r][aw] f[r]om the [c]ontem[p][l]ation of [s]en[s]i[b]le o[b]je[c]ts? If she [w]an[t]ed [t]o [b]end [o]ver in her [o]wn [b]ar, it [w]asn’t [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]i[c]al[l]y [ou]t of [b][l]ou[nds] to him in the [l]ea[s]t. [L]i[k]e he [s]aid, to [s]ome [e]xtent

[e]ros [w]as a g[a]te[w][a]y - they shouldn't view it [s]im[p][l][y] organi[c]al[l][y] or [p]ure[l][y] [s]en[s][i][b][l][y] [e]ven [i]f [i]t was to some [e][x]tent [e][x]istent in[e][x]t[r]ica[b][l][y] w[i]th[i]n those [r]ealms, at [l]ea[s]t from their [pler][s][p][e]ctives in their [b]odies or [w]hat[e]ver. A g[a]te[w][a]y to [w]hat though, [T]i[f]a [w]on[d]ered. [T]o a [d]i[f]ferent [t]ype of knowledge [C]loud [c]on[f]irmed. Wasn't he agai[n][s]t [s]e[n]sual empi[r]i[c]ism, Ti[f]a [q]ue[r]ied - [b]ut [C][l]oud [q]ui[c]k[ly] [c]ountered that it was [b][y] am[p]li[fi]y[ing] the [s]en[s]o[r]y ex[p]e[r]ien[c]e, by [s][p]eeding it u[p] [th]at [th]e [s]en[s]o[r]y ex[p]e[r]ien[c]e it[s]el[f] was t[r]an[s]cended - that was the whole [g][a]tew[aly] [p]art. A[g]ain, [C][l]oud wasn't arguing for any of th[i]s [i]nd[i]s[c]r[i]m[i]nate[ly]! - he was in[s]tead m[a][k]ing the [c][a][s]e [th]at [th]ese ampl[i]f[i][c]ations [c]ouldn't b[e] [c]omp[l][e]te[l][y] [c]ut o[f]f! - [th]at i[f] "o[th]er [b][i]tter and [b][i]lious humors wan[d]er a[b]out in the [b]o[d]y and find no [e]xit or esca[p]e, [b]ut are [p]ent u[p] w[i]th[i]n and [m]ingle their own va[p]ors with the [m][o]tions of the [s][ou]l, and are [b]len[d]ed with [th]em, [th]ey [p]ro[d]uce all [s]orts of [d]iseases." That ju[s]t li[k]e [p]arti[c]les of matter [c]ould be s[p]ed u[p] to [c][r]e[a]te anti-[g][r]avit[a]tional w[a]ves, the [s]en[s]o[r]y or[g]ans [c]ould [b]e [s]imi[l]ar[ly] [s][p]ed in order [t]o [t][r]an[s]cend them[s]elves, [b]a[s]i[c]a[l][y]. [C][l]oud made a d[e][c]ent [p]oint, [b]ut [h]ad [h]e [h]eard [b]a[c]k from [B]iggs and [W]edge - [w]ere they g[o]ing to ma[k]e it to [th]e little [th]ing Tifa was h[o][s]ting that [S]unday? She ju[s]t [n]eeded to, you k[n]ow, gle[t] a d[e][f]inite h[e]ad [c]ount so she [c]ould k[n]ow how much [f]ood

sh[e]’d [n][e]ed. [C]loud [h]adn’t [h]eard ba[c]k, and [f][r]an[k][l][y] h[e] was [f]inding it a l[i]ttle [r][i]d[i][c]u[l]ou[s] [a]t th[a]t point - be[c]ause at the ver[y] [l][ea][s]t, to [C][l]oud, they [c]ould at [l]ea[s]t R[S][V][P] one way or [th]e o[th]er. Sure, of [c]our[s]e, eros was a g[a]tew[a]y - there [c]ouldn’t be a totally univer[s]al [r][e][s]tri[c]tion op[p]r[e][s][s]ing [e]very [s]ingle mem[b]er of a [s]o[c]iety, [b]ut at the [s]ame time if a [p]er[s]on [c]ouldn’t RS[V][P] to [a]n [e]vent they ba[s]i[c]all[y] should [s]tart [ea]ting mud out of t[r]oughs with [p]lugs, in C[l]oud’s view at [l][ea]st! [P][eo][p]le who [r]efused to RS[V][P] [t]o events in a [t]imely [m]anner [r]eally had no [p][l][a][c]e in [p]o[l]ite [s]o[c]iety! - or, for th[a]t [m][a]tter, in any [s]o[c]iety! That was [C][l]oud’s [p]er[s][p]le[c]tive at [l][ea][s]t! And T[i][f]a ag[r][ee]d! [F][r]an[k][l][y], sh[e] was getting a [l]ittle [f][r]u[s]t[r]ated with the whole [p][r]o[c]e[s]s. She was, in her m[i]nd, doing a n[i][c]e [th]ing - [th]rowing an Avalanche [q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te [S][u]nday [F][u]nd[al]y, but sh[e] ju[s]t [n][e]eded to k[n]ow a head [c]ount [A][S][A][P]. It [w]as alrea[d]y [W]ednes[d]ay [n]ight! [C][l]oud [n]oted [th]at [th]ey’d sent out the invi[t]ations, [l]i[k]e, [t]wo weeks [b][a][c]k, and they [h][a]dn’t even [h]eard [b][a][c]k from [h][a]lf of the po[t]ential a[tt]end[e]es, which [a][c]tuall[y] [m]oved [C]loud to [th]ink [th]at [m]ayb[e] T[i]fa should ju[s]t [c][a]n[c]el the whole d[a]mn thing! [B]ut, no, [T]ifa was right - it was [t]oo [l]ate to [c][a]n[c]el, [b]e[c]ause then she’d [l]oo[k] [l]i[k]e the [a][s]hole. [C][l]oud [th]ought [th]at [m]ay[b]e that was [p][r]efe[r]a[b]le! [M]ay[b]e that’s what [n]ee[d]ed to ha[pp]en! There [n][e]e[d]ed to [b][e] some [r]ules to this shit, [r]ight?

Canto V

Total Echoes: 1,768

Total Syllables: 2,478

Approximate Self-Similarity: .713

[C][l]oud [a][s][k]ed [B][a][r]ett [p]oint [b][l][a]n[k] [r]ight
in [S][e]v[e]nth H[ea]v[e]n: [W]hat [w]as [c][a][p]ita[l]ism
[r]ea[l]y? - [b]e[c]ause that's [w]hat he [w]as [a][c]tual[l][y]
[ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]i[c]al[l][y] o[p]p[o]sed to [v]is-a-[v]is Shinra,
[n][o]? The [m]a[s]s [p]roduc[t]ion of [m]a[k][o] e[n]ergy -
was that [n]ot [f]unda[m]ental[l]y ju[s]t [f]ree [m]ar[k]et
[c]a[p]ita[l][i]sm at [i]ts [f]ine[s]t? - and there[f]ore wasn't
[c]a[p]ita[l]ism ju[s]t [f]unda[m]ental[l][y] a
[s]ingu[l]a[r]it[y] of [s]orts, ju[s]t a [c]om[p][l]ete
evi[s]ce[r]ation of [m]e[m]o[r][y], to [th]e ex[t]ent [th]at
[m]e[m]o[r]y is [th]e [c]on[t]ext in [w]hich [w]e
[c]on[s]tru[c]t our[s]elves, our [s]o[c]ieties? [C][l]oud
a[s]serted th[a]t [c][a][p]ita[l][i]sm [d][i][d]n't g[i]ve a fu[c]k
about th[a]t [a]t all! - sim[p][l]y [b]e[c]ause [c]a[p]ita[l]ism
[c]oul[d]n't, [b]e[c]ause if [c]a[p]ita[l]ism [d][i][d]n't
[r]uth[l]e[s]s[l]y [p]ur[s]ue [m]axi[m]um [p][r]ofits, then
[s]ome[o]ne el[s]e [w]ould. [C][l]oud eventua[l][y] [a][s]ked
B[a]r[r]ett if [c]a[p]ita[l]ism [a][c]tual[l][y] [c]on[s]i[s]ted
of [m]e[m]o[r][y] [a]t all? [B]ut [B]ar[r]ett [d][i][d]n't
[f]u[c]king know. The [f]u[c]k [d]id h[e] [e]ven [c]are - he
was a[tt]empting [t]o ma[k]e an a[c]tive [d]ifference [i]n
th[i]ngs. No, [i]t [d][i][d]n't at all, [d][i]d [i]t?
[C]a[p]ita[l]ism was the [s]ingu[l]ar fo[c]u[s] [s]ans
[m]e[m]ory [p]ar ex[c]e[l]len[c]e - it [s]ought a[n]
i[n][c]rea[s]e at whatever the [c]o[s]t, [r]egardl[e][s] of the

[c]ont[e]xt - d[r]iven by [th]e hy[p]o[th]eti[c]al o[th]er, [th]e hy[p]o[th]eti[c]al o[th]er [m]oving [c]a[p]ita[l]ism to [c]om[p][l][e]te[l][y] ignore [m]e[m]or[y] ho[l]isti[c]a[l][y]. The on[l]y [c]ontext [i]n wh[i]ch [c]a[p]ita[l]ism would [e]ven [r]e[m]otel[y] [c]onsider [m]e[m]o[r]ly was [i]n [i]ts [f]uture [f]ore[c]asts, but even those ty[p]es of [r]e[p]orts were [f]unda[m]entally [m]lyo[p][i][c] [i]n [c]ha[r]a[c]ter, weren't they? [P]lu[s] “[p]a[s]t [p]er[f]or[m]an[c]e [i]sn't [i]nd[i]cative of [f]uture results!” And even a [f]ive year [f]ore[c]ast would [b][a][s]i[c]ally ju[s]t [c]over the [a]ttention [s]pa[n] of [a] [b][e]ta [f]ish in [th]e gra[n]d [s]cheme of [th]ings. No, [C][l]oud [s]aid, [c]a[p]ita[l]ism [c][l]ear[l]y o[p]erated [s][a]ns [m]e[m]o[r][y], [a]s a [s]ingu[l]arit[y] - and there[f]ore was [f]undamental[l]y an [a]gent of de[s]t[a]bi[l]ization [f]rom a [p]o[l]iti[c]al [s]tand[p]oint - h[e] was ag[r]e[ing] with [B]a[r]rett! [B]a[r]rett wasn't [s][e]e[k]ing agr[e]ement whe[n] [C][l]oud the[n] a[s]ked if there wasn't al[s]o [s]omethin[g] a[b]uttin[g] divine to that [t]y[p]e of [s]ingu[l]arity - [t]o [C][l]oud it was all[m][o][s]t [l]i[k]e the r[a]di[a]tion [p]oisoning of [p]ure [m]a[k]o it[s]elf and shit, [n][o]? [C]a[p]ita[l]ism as a [s]ingu[l]a[r]ity [c]ontained a [d]ivine e[I]lement, [i]n [i]ts [r]a[d]i[c]al [r]e[j]ection of [m]e[m]o[r][y] [c]apita[l]ism was [c]ertainl[y] [d]ivine-adja[c]ent. It was [l]i[k]e [c]a[p]ita[l]ism [a]s [a]n un[f][e]ttered [s][e]eking of in[c]r[e]a[s]e of [e]x[p]ansion [w]as [i]n [i]t[s]el[f] [s]omething [w]orthy of [p][r]aise in the [a]b[s]t[r][a]c[t], but for an [a][c]tual [s]en[s]ible [s]o[c]iety the em[p][l]oy[m]ent of unre[p]entant [c]a[p]ita[l]ism was the [m]o[s]t [d]e[s]tabi[l]izing and [s]elf-[d]e[s]tru[c]tive [p]o[l]iti[c]al [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]y you

[c]ould ever [s]ub[s][c]ribe to! [C]a[p]ita[l]ism was m[a]gni[f]i[c]e[n]t i[n] the [a]bstr[a][c]t, [b]ut i[f] you [a][c]tually [s]u[b][s][c]ribed to [th]e [th]eo[r]ly in [p][r][a][c]ti[c]e [th]en you would almo[s]t [d]ef[i]n[i]te[l][y], in [d]ue [t]ime, [t]otal[l][y] [d]e[s]t[r]oy your[s]elf and eve[r]ything a[r]ound you! Ultimate[l][y], Ba[r]rett [r]eite[r]ated that he [d]i[d]n't [r]eal[l][y] have a [t]on of [t][i]me to [d]i[s][c]u[s]s these [t][y]pes of [d]e[t]ails - [ph]ilo[s]o[ph]i[c]al [d]i[s][c]ussions woul[d]n't, a[f]ter [a][l]l, [f]un[d]a[m]entally [a][l]ter the [r]apid envi[r]on[m]ental [d]e[s]t[r]u[c]tion that was ongoing at the hands of Shinra! [C]loud [d]i[d]n't [d]i[s]agree! Yet, at the [s]ame [t]ime, weren't [th]e [t]wo of [th]em at [S][e]v[e]ntth H[e]av[e]n [d][r]in[k]ing [f]u[c]king [b]eers? How many [d][r]a[f]t [b]eers h[a]d they [d][r][a]n[k] [a]t th[a]t [p]oint? They weren't gonna slow [d]own Shin[r]a's [d]e[r]a[d]ation of the [p]lanet via con[s]uming [d][r]aft [b][e]ers [e]ither! Shit, [b]r[o]. It was [l]i[k]e - [C][l]oud [a][c]tual[l]y w[o][k]e up th[a]t [m]or[n]ing thin[k]ing a[b]out [m]e[m]ory - [n]ot [c][a]pita[l]ism, [b]ut [m]e[m]ory at [l][e]a[s]t - [a][b]out [h]ow [h][e] [c]ould [b][e] him[s]el[f] [a][c]ro[s]s multi[p]le [p]lat[f]orms and shit, [b]ut how, with that in [m]ind, [m]e[m]ory [p]erha[p]s wasn't a[t]tached to [B][e]ing it[s]el[f] [e]ither. [C][l]oud [w]as al[w]ays [c]on[c]ur[r]ently multi[p]le ite[r][a]tions of [h]im[s][e]lf, and [h]e [t]o [s]ome [e]xtent [p]ar[t]oo[k] in [B]eing a[c]ross those ite[r][a]tions, [b]ut at the same time - [th]e [th]ought o[cc]urred to [C]loud that [m]e[m]o[r]y wasn't ne[c]e[s]sa[r]ily [a][t]t[a]ched [t]o [B][e]ing [a]t all [t]imes [ei]ther? [B][e]ing and [m]e[m]o[r]y - [w]hat [w]as their ex[a][c]t [r]ela[ti]on[sh]ip? [Th]at [th]e soul [c]ould

[f]un[d]a[m]ental[y] [b][e] eternal, [b]ut [i]f [i]ts [b][e]ing was [d]i[s]a[s]ociated [f]rom [m]e[m]or[y] as w[e] un[d]er[s]tood it then obviou[s][y] it would [k]ind of b[e] di[f]fi[c]ult to ve[r]i[f]y! As we [t]end [t]o [c]on[f]irm expe[r]iences via [m]e[m]o[r]y and shit. [B]arrett gul[p]ed [d]own his eighth [p]i[nt] of Midgar [L]i[ght] [b]ut that [d]i[d]n't [d]eter [C]loud [f]rom [p]i[r]od[d]ing [f]urther at the [p]oint - [n]ame[l][y], that [f]unda[m]en[t]al[l][y] [c]a[p]ita[l]ism [c]on[t]ained [n]o [m]e[m]or[y], and Being itself [p]erha[p]s on[l][y] [p]a[r]tial[l][y] [p]a[r][t]oo[k] in [m]e[m]or[y]? Was [c]a[p]ita[l]ism a form of [b][e]ing? [N]o, it [c]ouldn't [b][e]! - [n]ot unles[s] they too[k] a [s]t[a]ti[c] v[a]ntage [p]oint on a[n] i[n]f[i]n[i]te urge to i[n]c[rea]se and ex[p]and, which, to [s]ome exte[n]t, wasn't [th]at [th]e [d]rive of the i[n][f][i]n[i]te, [w]hich [w]as [f]un[d]ame[n]tally the transce[n][d]e[n]t, [w]hich [w]as - [n]o [B]eing [c]oul[d]n't [b]e [t]ran[s]cen[d]ent, [n]ot [t]otal[l]y, [r]ight? [C]loud [d]i[d]n't thin[k] [s]o. Ba[r]rett [h]ad [h]ad enou[gh] of thi[s] [f]u[c]king shit! - [a]nd he [s][l]a[m]med his [m]ug of [M]idgar [L]i[ght] on the [c]ounter and [m]oseyed out the [b]ar ([h]e'd [h]eard a[b]out some new “[Q]ueen's [B]lood” [th]ing [th]at was [b]eing introdu[c]ed to [S]e[c]tor [S]even that he wan[t]ed [t]o [t]ry anyway). [T]i[f]a [t]oo[k] the op[plor]tunity to as[k] [C]loud i[f] [h]e'd [h]ad a[n]ly e[n][c]ou[n]ters with - you kn[o]w? - th[o]se [r]uth[l]es[s] ap[p]a[r]itions that [s]e[e]med to b[e] [h]aunting [h]im in[t]er[m]ittently [s]in[c]e re[t]urning [t]o [M]idg[a]r? [W]ell, Cloud [w]as after [a]ll [a] re[m][a]de [m]an - in [m]ore [w][a]ys than [o]ne, but no? [W]hy? Who el[s]e a[r]ound the [s][l]ums had [s][e]en them r[e][c]ent[y]? It [w]as [w]eird to

[C][l]oud, a [l]ittle [c]urious, he n[o]ted [t]o [T]ifa, m[o][s]t[ly] be[c]ause it [s][e]emed [l][k]e [s]ometimes (a) h[e]'d s[e] them, yet [s]ometimes (b) [n]o, he wouldn't [n][e][c][e][s]aril[y] [s][e][e] them [b]ut in[t]uit them, [b]ut [th]en o[th]er [t][i]mes - l[i]ke the o[th]er day - (c) the a[p]pa[r]itions [w]ould be [e]ve[r]y[w]here for [e]ve[r]y[o]ne to [s][e]e, and h[e]'d whi[p] out his f[u][c]king B[u][s]ter [S]word with [T]i[f]a b[y] his [s][i]de. [T]i[f]a a[s]ked him to ext[r][a][p]olate on the [t][r]iad of a-b-c, if he [c]ould. Sh[e] [c][l]ear[l][y] wan[t]ed [t]o as[s]i[s]t [C][l]oud in reaching the b[o]ttom [o]f [a]ll [o]f thi[s], [s]o to [s]pea[k]. [W]ell, to [C][l]oud, it [w]as almost [l][i][k]e the E[l]eatics were [c]orre[c]t [a][l][a][l]ong - [th]at [th]is [t]ype of phe[n]ome[n]a - where some[t]imes (a) h[e]'d [s][ee] them and sh[e] wouldn't, [s]ometimes ([b]) he wouldn't [e]ven [s][e]e them [b]ut h[e]'d f[e]el them, and [th]en o[th]er times (c) [th]ey'd a[pp]ear to the [p]u[b][l]i[c] at [l]arge, well, phe[n]ome[n]a [l][i][k]e that [b]a[s]i[c]a[l]ly un[d]ermined the [e]nt[i]re [i][d]ea of [e]m[p]iri[c]ism v[i]a [s]en[s]e [p]er[c]e[p]tion, no? If [s]en[s]e [p]er[c]e[p]tion was [s]ome[th]ing [th]at [th]ey [c]ould [r]e[l]iably em[p][l]oy as a fir[s]t [p][r]in[c]i[p]le to g[a][th]er d[a]ta [a]nd [th]en a[r]rive at [c]on[c][l]usions [r]egarding the n[a]ture of the [c]or[p]o[r]real [w]orld - then shit [l][i][k]e [w]hat [C][l]oud ju[s]t [d]e[s]c[r]ibed [c]oul[d]n't [b]e [p]o[s]i[b][l]y, [r]ight? [C][l]oud a[s]ked how [c]ould it [p]los[s]i[b][l]y?! There had to [b][e] a [s]e[p]a[r]ate [f]ir[s]t [p][r]in[c]i[p]le they'd n[e]ed to [r]e[f]e[r]en[c]e. Al[s]o, he'd [s]witch to [F]er[n]et i[f] that was okay with Ti[f]a? [B]ut the p[r]o[b]lem with this [n][o]tion - [b][o]th h[e] and Ti[f]a ag[r][e]d (Ti[f]a [r]e[l]uctant[l][y] ag[r][e]d) - was

[th]at (a) [th]ere was no evi[d]en[c]e that he [s]aw [th]em when o[th]ers [d]i[d]n't, and (b) there was no e[v]i[d]en[c]e e[v]en to him[s][e]lf that he [f][e]lt th[e]m wh[e]n he [d]i[d]n't [s]ee them. [C]loud [c]ould [s]ee [th]em and h[e]d b[e] sure [th]at h[e] saw [th]em [e]ven i[f] T[i][f]a [d]i[d]n't - [h]e'd [h]ave an em[p]i[r]i[c]al [d]ata [p]oint that he just [c]oul[d]n't [p][r]ove! - [b]ut when [C][l]oud [s]im[p][l]y [f][e]lt him[s][e]l[f] to [b]e in [c]ommunion with [s]omething [f]o[r]mle[s]s and in[c]o[r][p]o[r]eal, then [e]ven h[e] [c]ouldn't [b][e] sure, [f]rom [a]n [e]m[p]i[r]i[c]al [s]tand[p]oint, [w]hat it [w]as he ex[p]e[r]ien[c]ed, [b]e[c]ause his [e]x[p]e[r]ien[c]e [l]a[c]ked a [f]orm [e]ntire[l]y - [h]e [d]i[d]n't [h]ave a [s]en[s]e-b[a][s]ed em[p]i[r]i[c]al d[a]ta [p]oint to even [p][r]ove to him[s]el[f] that he ex[p]e[r]ien[c]ed anything! Ti[f]a [p]oured the [F]ernet and [s]aid [s]omething ab[ou]t wanting to be[l]ieve C[l]oud. [A]t th[a]t [p]oint [C][l]oud [s]aid, hear[k]ening [b]a[c]k to the [p]oint that [p]r[e]v[i]ou[s][l]y [c]aused [B]ar[r]et to [s]t[o]m[p] [ou]t [o]f the [b]ar, [w]hat [w]as [m]e[m]o[r]y any[w]ay? - [i][f] not th[i][s] ty[p]e of [c]o[m]munion with a [f]orm[l]e[s]s and in[c]o[r][p]o[r]eal ex[p]e[r]ien[c]e [l]ike these [r]uth[l]e[s]s [a]p[p]a[r]itions? [A][f]ter all, he [r]e[m]em[b]ered a [b][oa]t[oa]d of sh[i]t that [d][i][d]n't ne[c]e[s]sa[r]il[y] have i[m]ages [a]tt[a]ched! [A] [l]ot of his [m]e[m]o[r]ies were in [f][a][c]t [f]orm[l]ess [f]ree[l]ings, but then - [l]i[k]e some of [C][l][ou]d's other en[c]ou[n]ters - [d]id in[d]eed [c]ontain i[m]ages, but they [f]eatured i[m]ages that on[l]y a[p]peared to [C][l]oud, just [l]i[k]e Ti[f]a's i[m]age-[m]e[m]ories [o]nly a[p]peared to her! S[o] [C]loud was of [th]e [a][c]ute [o][p]inion [th]at [m]e[m]ories [th]em[s]elves were to [s]ome extent [l]ike

[th]ese [r]uth[l]es[s] a[p]pa[r]itions he'd been ex[p]e[r]ien[c]ing? - yet Tifa [q]ui[c]k[l]y [c]o[r]re[c]ted him, a[p]tly [p]ointing [ou]t that [C][l][ou]d's [m]e[m]ories, to the be[s]t of her k[n]ow[l]edge, had [n]ever [s]warmed [a]round [S][e]v[e]nth H[e]av[e]n and [a]ttacked i[n]no[c]ent [c][i]v[i]lians? [H]e [h][a]d to gr[a]nt th[a]t [a]s [t]rue! - "but you know what I m[ea]n, [T][i]fa." Sh[e] did. C[l]oud's [m]e[m]o[r]ies were [s]i[m]i[l]ar [t]o those [r]uth[l]es[s] a[p]pa[r][i]t[i]ons [i]n [t]erms of (a) and (b), [b]ut not in [t]erms of (c). [C]loud [c]on[t]inued on to [s]ay, [s][i][p]p[i]ng a [f][r]lesh [F]ernet, [th]at [th]e [p]oint [m]o[r]e o[r] les[s] [r]e[m]ained, that [w]hile sure [m]e[m]o[r]ies [w]ere [d]i[s]tinct, these a[p]pa[r]itions - these un[i][d]enti[f][i]ed [f][y]ing a[p]pa[r]itions, they [f]un[d]a[m]ental[l][y] un[d]er[m]ined the uti[l]it[y] of our [s]en[s]e-[p]ler[c]e[p]tion, [w]hich [w]as [s]omething, to [C][l]oud's or[i]g[i]nal [p]oint, [th]at [th]e [E][l]eati[c]s real[l]y [e]m[ph]asized. Ti[f]a a[c]k[n]ow[l]edged [C][l]oud's point about [m]e[m]o[r]y - she [d]i[d]n't [n]e[c]e[s]sa[r]il[y] [d]i[s]ag[r][e]e w[i]th [i]t ju[s]t [b]e[c]ause [m]e[m]o[r]ies, to the [b]e[s]t of their k[n]ow[l]edge, [n]ever [ph][y]s[i][c]al[l]y mani[f][e][s]ted them[s][e]lves in [c]o[r][p]o[r]eal [f]orms, that it [s]tru[c]k [T]i[f]a as [b]a[s]i[c]al[l]y [t][r]ue that [m]e[m]o[r]y was a [s]i[m]i[l]ar [t]ly[p]e of ex[p]e[r]ien[c]e, [s]ome[th]ing [th]at [th]ey in[t]era[c]ted with [s]ome[t][i]mes v[i]a [a]n [i]mage that wasn't [s]en[s]ible to [a]nyone [e][s]e, and [s]omet[i]mes [v][i][a] [a] [v]ague feeling [th]at [th]ey [c]ouldn't even [c]or[r]obo[r]ate them[s]elves! - [e]ven [m]e[m]o[r]y to [s]ome e[x]tent [c]omp[l][e]te[l][y] un[d]erm[i]ned [th]e [i][d]ea [th]at our [s]en[s]o[r][y] f[a][c]ulties were

[r]elia[b]le instruments t[o] [u]se t[o] [c]ome to
[a][c]cu[r]ate [c]on[c][u]sions a[b]out [w]hat [w]e
[p]erc[e]ive to b[e] the [c]o[r][p]o[r]eal [w]orld.

Canto VI

Total Echoes: 1,247

Total Syllables: 1,707

Approximate Self-Similarity: .731

[C][l]oud k[n]ew that of [c]our[s]e Ae[r]ith was
[s]u[f]fe[r]ing [f][r]om this g[n]awing [i]n[k][l][i]ng that,
you k[n]ow, [C][l]oud m[ay] have [g]one and [g]iven
aw[ay] the [f][l]ower - or [p]erh[a][p]s th[a]t was a [t]ad
[t]oo st[r]ong a [ph][r][a]se - m[ay][b]e [p]assed [a][l]ong
was [a] [b]etter w[ay] to [p]ut it, that's what C[l]oud
[p]lost[u]lated at [l]east - [b]ut i[n] a[n]y [c]ase he k[n]ew
[th]at Ae[r]ith k[n]ew [th]at he [f]or[w]arded the
[f][l]o[w]er, [r]ight? But how did she [c]ome to [p]osse[s]s
that k[n]ow[l]edge exa[c]t[l]y? - [c]ould it have
[p]o[s]si[b][l]y [b]een via the under [c][i]ty [w]h[i][s][p]er
[n]et[w]or[k]? Or [d]id Ae[r]ith [c]ome to [r]ea[l]ize
[C][l]oud g[a]ve the shit aw[ay] via [s]ome [s]ort of
[d][i]vine [i]ntu[i]t[i]on? Ba[s]i[c]a[l]ly, [C][l]oud was
a[t]em[p]ting [t]o [a][s]cer[t]ain the [s][our][c]e [or][i]g[i]n
of [A]e[r]ith's know[l]edge - was it o[p]i[n]ion or
i[n]tu[i]t[i]on - [w]hereas Aerith [w]as ch[ie][f][l][y]
[c]on[c]erned with [th]e im[p][l]i[c]ations of [th]e
know[l]edge it[s]el[f]. She a[c]tua[l]ly made it [q]uite
[c][l]ear that [sh]e wasn't [s]ure if [C][l]oud's
[p][r]eva[r]i[c]ations were [r]ea[l]ly the [p]oint she was
a[t]em[p]ting [t]o ma[k]e when she b[r]ought the whole

[f][l]ower [r]e-gi[f]ting u[p] to [C][l]oud - [th]at [th]e issue [a]t h[a]nd wasn't, [p]erha[p]s, how she ob[t]ained thi[s] [p]ar[t]i[c]u[l]ar k[n]ow[l]edge, but in[s]t[ea]d wh[e]ther or [n]ot [C][l]oud g[a]ve the [f][l]ow[er] a[w]l[ay], [w]hich to [b]e [f]air she [w]asn't, [l]i[k]e, o[f]fended [b]y - Ae[r]ith was just a [l]ittle [c]u[r]ious? Who'd [C][l]oud “[f]or[w]ard” it [t]o any[w]ay? [T]i[f]a, [r]ight? Of [c]ourse it [w]as [T]i[f]a - [w]hich [w]as [t]otal[l][y] [f]ine! They [w]ere a[c]tua[l][y] [f]riends! [B]ut [C][l]oud, i[f] [p]los[s]ible, wan[t]ed [t]o [s]tay on this [p][r]ior [p]oint - this e[p]i[s]temo[l]ogi[c]al [p]oint - [b]e[c]ause he [th]ought [th]ere was a [p][r]etty im[p]ortant d[i]s[t][i]n[c]tion [t]o [b]e [f]ound there, [b]etween knowing [s]omething via o[p]inion - [b]e[c]ause, [f]or [i]n[s]t[a]n[c]e, [s]ome [S]e[c]tor [S][i]x d[i][p]sh[i]t was ya[p]ping his f[u][c]king g[u]ms in the [s]l[u]m - or [b]y [c]ontr[a]st [b]e[c]oming [f]a[m]iliar in a [m]ore [p]ure [f][a]shion. [Th]ere was [p]ure knowledge of [th]ings - and [th]en [th]ere was [b]ull[sh]it you h[ear]d th[ir]d hand from dou[ch]e[b]ags in the [S]e[c]tor [S]ix [S][l]ums. [C][l]oud [f]elt [l]i[k]e Ae[r]ith p[r]o[b]a[b]ly knew via [th]e [f]ormer me[th]od - [c]ould she [c]on[f]irm though? Instead Ae[r]ith ch[o]se to [p][o]sit the [r]adi[c]al n[o]tion that may[b]e it [c]ould have [b]een [b][o]th? Sure, [C]loud [th]ought [th]at was [p][o]ssi[b]le (he guessed . . .) - [b]ut he [d]i[d]n't [th]in[k] [s]o - it was [p]o[s]si[b]le yet not [p]ro[b]a[b]le - in [f]a[c]t, [C][l]oud [f]elt [l]i[k]e he k[n]ew that Aerith k[n]ew, [n]o, [n]ot via [s]ome [w]hi[s][p]er [n]et[w]ork, [n]o, [n]ot [b]y o[p]inion at all, [b]ut i[n][s]t[ea]d [b]y dir[e]ct i[n]tuition. And it just [s]o h[a]p[p]ened th[a]t it was [b]y his own [i]ntu[i]t[i]ve [c]a[p]a[b][i][l][i]ties th[a]t [C][l]oud k[n]ew

[th]at Ae[r]ith k[n]ew [th]at he g[a]ve [th]at [v]e[r]ly [f]u[c]king [f][l]ower [a]w[ay] [v]i[a] her own intu[i]t[i]on, [n]ot by a[n]ly [l]u[r]id [r]u[m]or [m]onger [f][r]o[l]i[c]king shame[l]e[s]s[l]y in the [s][l]ums. Were there any [r]u[m]or [m]ongers [f][r]o[l]i[c]king sh[a]me[l]e[s]s[l]y in the [s][l]ums though? [S][p][r]ea[d]ing [d]i[s]in[f]or[m]a[t]ion [a]b[ou]t [C][l]ou[d] [g]iving [a]w[ay] [f][l]owers to a [p][l]etho[r]a of wo[m]en [i]n [M][i]d[g]ar! [N]o, that [w]asn't the [w]ay [A]erith [h][a]d [a][c]ce[s]ed [h]er k[n]owledge - [n]ot at all. [A][n]yw[ay], [A]erith [th]ought [m]aybe [C]loud should [clon]sider [th]im[k]ing t[w]i[c]le be[f]ore [g]iving [a][w]ay [f]lo[w]ers [a][g]ain. That [w]as [a]ll. [N]ot that she was [p]ar[t]i[c]u[l]ar[l]y [p]le[r][t]u[r]bed. [N]ot in the [l][e]ast a[c]tua[l][y]! [B]ut may[b][e] [C][l]oud [c]ould just - hy[p]otheti[c]a[l][y] - if a [g]irl [l]i[k]e h[er] w[er]e to [g]i[ve] h[i]m a [b]eauti[f]ul ye[l]low [f][l]ower in the [m][i]ddle of [M][i]dgar, [m]ay[b]e [h]e should [h]old onto [th]e [th]ing! Or at the ver[y] [l]ea]st don't [g]o and [g]ive it to some other [f]u[c]king chi[ck]! Was it real[l][y] that d[i][f]f[i][c]ult to just [c]ontinual[l][y] [k]ee[p] a [s]ingle [f][l]ower on your [pler]sion? [N]ot that it was [A]erith's [b]usiness [a][n]y[w]ay, [b]e[c]ause [c][l]ear[l]y [i][f] [C][l]oud [w]an[t]ed [t]o g[i][f]t the [f][l]ower [t]o [T]ifa - sure that was [f]ine, it was totally his [o]ptio[n] if that's [h]ow [h]e w[a]n[t]e[d] [t]o go a[b][ou]t it, [b]ut [d][i][d]n't C[l][ou]d th[i]nk [i]t was just a [l][i]ttle rude? [N][o], in[s]tead he [th]ought [th]at [th]ere was a [n][o]ta[b]le [d]i[s]tinction [b]e[t]ween the [t]wo [t]ypes of k[n]owledge - [b]ut if Ae[r]ith [d]id [s]o [h]appen to [h]ear [i]t [i]n the [s]t[r]ee[t], then [w]ould sh[e] b[e] [w]illing [t]o [t]ell C[l]oud who was

f[l]a[p]ping their [l]i[p]s? [W]as any[o]ne out in the [s][l]ums [s][p]e[c]ifi[c]a[l]ly [l]oo[k]ing to [r]at his [s][p]i[k]ly a[s]s out? I[n] a[n]y [c]a[s]e, [r]egard[l]e[s]s of all that, [C][l]oud [t]ota[l]ly under[s][t]ood wh[er]e A[er]ith was [c]oming [f]rom, and [h]e gue[s]sed [h]e ju[s]t wasn't [r]eally th[i]n[k][i]ng at the [t]ime, when h[e] [r]e-g[i][f]t[e]d the [f][l]ower - [T]ifa [t]oo[k] n[o]te of the [f][l]ower, and he [d]i[d]n't wan[t] [t]o go in[t]o the wh[o]le fl[o]wer girl a[n]ecd[o]te, s[o] he figured it m[i]ght be [k]i[nd] of [n]i[ce] to, you k[n]ow, [p]ass a[l]ong the [l]ove? Ae[r]ith [r]e[p]eated the [ph]r[a]se [p]ass a[l]ong the [l]ove in [a] w[ay] that, [q]uite [a]m[a]zing[l]y, wasn't [c]om[p][l][e]te[l]y [f][i]lled to the br[i]m with [c]ons[t]ern[a]tion and [c]on[t]em[p]t. [T]o [C][l]oud there was something ine[f]fa[b][l]y [t][r]ue a[b]out [c]ontemp[l]a[ting] the [f]em[a]le [f]orm, [i]n [i]ts [b][l]unt [ph][y]s[i]c[al] [i]te[r][a]tion - there was no [l]u[r]id o[p]inion [p][r]esent w[i]th[i]n [i]t, although C[l]oud [d]i[d]n't e[x][p][l][i][c][i]t[l]y e[x][p]re[s]s thi[s] [i][d]ea to [A]e[r]ith [a]t the t[i]me, given her [r]eti[c]en[ce] to e[n]gage i[n] the op[i]n[i]on [v]er[s]us [i][n][t]u[i][t]ion di[c]hotomy he [s]tarted the [c]onver[s]ation with - yet he was [s]till [o]bviou[s][l]y [c][o]n[t]em[p][l]ating her [f][or]m [a]s this b[a][c]k [a]nd [f][or]th o[c]curred. Her [t][y][p][i][c]al [ph][i][l]o[s]o[ph][i][c]al d[i][s][p]los[i]t[i]on when it [c]ame to [l]ove triangles [w]as [w]aning just [s][l]ight[l]y - this [l]ittle [f][l]ower [i]n[c][i]dent [s]eemed to [a][l][m][o]st [r]ile her up e[m][o]tionally, [a]lthough it was [c][l]ear to [C][l]oud when she [r]e[p]eated the [ph][r]ase [p]ass a[l]ong the [l]ove that she wasn't ent[i]rely r[i]led u[p]. Not yet at [l]east. Aerith [f]ina[l]ly

[c]on[f]irmed [f]or [C][l]oud that, yes, it was v[i]a [p]ure [i]ntu[i]t[i]on she'd [s]urm[i]sed her f[l]ower no [l]onger [r]es[i]ded on his [p][er][s]on, and [s]ure [sh]e ag[r]eed [th]at [th]ere was a [c][e]rtain di[s]tin[c]tion be[t]ween the [t]wo [t]ypes of kn[ow][l]edge. [C][l][ou]d then [a][s]ked [A]erith [w]hat she [th][ou]ght [w]as [th]e [c][au]se of each [t]y[p]e - well, [o]bvious[l]y [o][p]inion [c]on[s][i]sted of [l][i]teral [w]h[i][s][p]er [n]et[w]orks, she [s]aid, from what [p]eo[p]le [s]aw [a]nd heard [a]nd [a]ll that. This [a][l][ow]ed [C][l]oud to note that wasn't eve[r]ything Shin[r]a [w]as [w]or[k]ing on - e[s][p]ecial[l][y] H[o]j[o] - was that [n]ot [b]a[s][i][c]al[l][y] a[n]other [w]hi[s][p]er [n]et[w]ork, that H[o]j[o], de[s][p]ite [b]eing a [s][o]-[c]alled [s]cientist, [w]as [s]im[p]ly [w]or[k]ing [o]ff [o]f [w]hat [h]e and [h]is a[s]so[c]iates heard and [s]aw? Ae[r]ith was [t]em[p][t]ed [t]o [s][ay] H[o]j[o]'s [o]p[e[r][a]tion was a [m]ore [s]yste[m][a]tic version of th[a]t, yes, [b]ut in[s]tead a[b]r[u][p]tly [c][u]t her[s]el[f] o[f]f, [b]e[c]ause when she [c]on[s]i[d]ered it [f]urther she [c]on[c][l]u[d]ed the un[d]er [c][i]t[y] [w]h[i][s][p]er net[w][or][k]s [w][er]e a[c]tual[l]y [q]uite [c]om[p][l]ex them[s]elves! [S]o in[s]tead she a[c]cused [C][l]oud of changing the [s]ubj[e]ct, th[e]n she noted th[a]t, [a][c]tua[l]ly, [sh]e wan[t]ed [t]o [sh]ift t[o]pi[c]s, but [n][o]t to the [s]o-[c]alled [w]hisper [n]et[w]or[k]s of H[o]j[o] versus the [w]ell-k[n]own [w]h[i][s]per [n]et[w]or[k]s of the [S]e[c]tor [S][i]x [S][i]ums, [n]o! [N]o, [C][l]oud under[s]tood. [E]ven [h]e [d]idn't [e]ven r[ea]lly want [t]o [t]al[k] ab[ou]t H[o]j[o]! Maybe he was obfus[c]ating. C[l]oud a[p]o[l]ogized, but Ae[r]ith [s]aid it wasn't [n]e[c]e[s]sa[r]y, there was [n]o [s]o[r]ry [n][ee]ded

[r][ea][l][y] - they [p]ro[b]a[b][l][y] shouldn't [b][ea]t a [d]ead [h]orse, [s]o to [s][p][ea]k. [B][u]t, [u]gh - what a [h]o[r]en[d]ous [t]urn of ph[r]ase. No, [C][l]oud ag[r][ee]d - it was a [t]e[r]ri[b]le [s][ay]ing, a [s][c]um[b]ag [s][ay]ing, [r][ea][l]y - H[o]j[o] p[r]o[b]a[b][l]y would [d]o it though, [b]eat a [d]ead horse? - a[n]d the[n] [f]u[c]king, [l]i[k]e, [i]nje[cl]t [i]t w[i]th [m]a[k][o] or [s]ome shit, [m]a[k]e it a [m]utant [s]teed! G[r][o][s]s! [F]u[c]king loser!

Canto VII

Total Echoes: 1,227

Total Syllables: 1,738

Approximate Self-Similarity: .706

[C][l]oud just [a]t th[a]t [m]o[m]ent had begun to [r]e[c]apitu[l]ate, [th]is [t]ime [t]o [th]e [t]wo of [th]em - [A]e[r]ith [a]nd [T]ifa - how it wasn't a[c]tually the [c]ase that h[e]'d s[ee]n the [b][e]ing, no, there wasn't i[n] [f][a][c]t a[n] [a][c]tual [ph][y]s[i][c]al [b]eing i[n] that se[n]se of the [ph]rase - it wasn't [l]i[k]e the me[n] i[n] the [b][l]a[c]k [c][l]oa[k]s they'd [b]e [f]o[l]owing in Re[b]irth (were ei[th]er of [th]em [f]amiliar with [th]at [p][l]ot[l]ine yet?). He'd just [b]egan to ex[p][l]ain [th]is to [th]e [b]oth of [th]em, and [C][l]oud [d]i[d]n't [f]eel a[n]y [d]i[f]fe[r]ent a[b]out it [n]e[c]e[[s]sa[r]i[l]y - the [f][a][c]t t[h]at he was [t]elling [th]e [b]oth of [th]em - [T]i[f]a was [b]e[h]ind the [b]ar [a]nd [A]erith just [h]appened to [b]e there. It was [f]ine. [W]ere they [f]amiliar [w]ith [R]e[b]irth yet? [P][r]o[b]a[b][l]y [n]ot, [r]ight? [B]ut [n][o], in thi[s] [c]a[s]e [C][l]oud had [b]een fu[c]king, you k[n][o]w, just [s]itting on this [c]ar[p]et in Wu[t][ai] at the [t][i]me - he [s]at on

the [c]ar[p]et [c]ros[s]-[l]egged - and then he [s]u[d]den[l][y] in[t]uited a [p]lure[l][y] [d]ivi[n]e b[e]ing [e]man[a]ting in the [t]riangle head [e]nca[p][s]u[l][a]ted in the [p]erfe[c]t[l][y] [s][q]uare [d]es[i]gn that [r]e[p][e]ated [e]nd[l]e[s]s[l]y th[r]oughout the [e]n[t][i]re [c]ar[p]et. This [t][r][i]angle head [w]as [w]hat [C][l]oud [c]ould on[l]y des[c]ribe [a]s [a] “[l][a]ughing [A][l]lah”. That’s how it [s]tru[c]k him. There wasn’t [r]ea[l]ly [a] [q]uestion [a]bout [i]t [i]n [C][l]oud’s mind and it was a[c]tua[l]ly beauti[f]ul. Yes, [a] “[l]au[gh]ing [A][l]lah” [w]as the on[l]y [w]ay he [c]ould [d]e[s][c][r]ibe the [d]ivine being, which [c]ertain[l]y [c]ommuni[c]ated with him [a]s he [s][a]t [c][r]os[s]-[l]egged in [W]utai in a [s]ome[w]hat [m]ly[s]ti[c]al [m]a[n]ner, al[b]eit not [q]uite ver[b]all[y], [b]ut the [b][e]ing [c]ertain[l][y] [c]o[m]mu[n]i[c]ated in a w[ay] that [c]aused [C][l]oud to [s][m]ile. [C][l]oud, s[m]ile?! The [t]wo wo[m]en [f]ound that [t]otal[l]y hi[l]arious! [T]i[f]a n[ea]r[l]y [f]u[c]ked u[p] the b[ee]r sh[e] was [p]ou[r]ing she was [s]o [s]ur[p][r]ised to h[ea]r [C][l]oud of [a]ll [p]eo[p]le [t][a][k]ing [a][b]out him[s]el[f] [s]mi[l]ing. [B]ut [n][e]ither [T]i[f]a n[or] [A]erith [f]ound this [a][n]e[c][d]ote of [C]loud’s to [b]e [d]i[s]i[n]genuous i[n] a[n]y way - i[n] [f]a[c]t they [b]oth [f]u[l]ly [s]uppo[r]ted [C][l]oud’s [c]on[f]essions and mo[r]e of[ten] than not [e]ven [f]ound them [l]egitimate[l][y] intr[i]guing ([b]ut there were, of [c]our[s]e, [s]ome ex[cle]ptions!), al[b]eit they gene[r]al[l]y [f]ound the ane[c]dotes i[n]t[r]iguing [i]n a [o]ne-on-[o]ne [s]etting, as [o][p]osed to thi[s] [F][F]M [a]rrangement. [B]ut that was c[l]ear[l]y [f]ine! It just [s][o] h[a][p]pened [A]e[r]i[th] was a[r]ound and she [p]o[p]ped in the [b][a]r. N[o] [b]ig deal at [a]ll!

Yet, [w]hile [c]ontem[p]lating [w]hether or [n]ot a[n]other [M]os[c]ow [M]ule was ad[v]isable or [n]ot, [C]loud ex[p][r]e[s]sed [q]uite [v]igo[r]ou[s]ly that he wan[t]ed [t]o [r]e[l][ay] a [s]ub[s]e[q]uent ane[c]d[o]te that he [v]iewed a[p]r[o][p][o]s of the [c]ar[p]et en[c]ounter, if that was o[k]ay? Of [c]ourse! Well, [s][p]ec[i]f[i][c]al[l]y it [w]as that [w]hen he [p]o[p]pled in[t]o his [l]o[c]al [c][o]-[o][p] g[r][o][c]e[r]ly [s][t]ore that [m]or[n]ing, [f]or just a [f]ew [m][i][n]or [i]tems, a [c]ou[p]le h[a]nd [f][r]uits [r]eally, [a]nd the new [c][a]shier [a]sked him - [r]ight as [h]e sh[i][f]ted [h][i]s [h]ead[ph]ones [u]p o[f]f [o]f his ears to [s][t]art the [f]ormalized [s]ales [t][r]ans[a][c]tion - [i][f] h[i]s b[r]other “or [s]omething” went there [s]ome[t]imes? - [t]o the g[r]o[c]e[r]ly [s]to[r]e? Did [C][l]oud have a [b][r]other [b]y a[n]ly chance? [B]e[c]ause she, the [n]ew [c]ashier, felt [l]i[k]e sh[e]’d s[el]en him [b]efo[r]e? Well, [C]loud [s]aid to the [c]ashier, thin[k]ing a[b]out it [f]or a [s]e[c]ond he [f]ound it [q]uite [p]o[s]si[b]le [th]at [th]is a[l]leged do[p]pelganger was a[c]tual[l]y [f]u[c]king just him! - [C][l]oud him[s]el[f]! - [th]at the [c][a]shier was in [th]at [p]arti[c]u[l]ar in[s]tan[c]e [c]on[f]using [C][l]oud for his a[c]tual [s]el[f], [th]at [th]is [c]ashier on[l]y bel[ie]ved sh[e]’d [s][ee]n [s][o]me[o]ne who [l]oo[k]ed just [l]i[k]e [C][l]oud [b]efore [b]e[c]ause sh[e]’d, in [f]a[c]t, s[ee]n [C][l]oud [b]e[f]ore. He [w]alked a[w]ay just [m]o[m]en[t]a[r]ily, he [t]old [T]ifa [a]nd [A]e[r]ith, just [t]o [t]o[s]s his [b][a][s][k]et [b][a][c]k in[t]o the [s]t[a][c]k of [b][a][s][k]ets [b]ehind the auto[m][a]ti[c] d[oor]s. Yeah, he’d [t]a[k]e one [m][or]e [M]ule, pl[e]ase [T]i[fa]? The new [c]ashier was [c]hu[c]k[l]ing when [C][l]oud a[r]ived b[a][c]k [a]t the [c]he[c]kout [c]ounter [r]eady to [p]ay for

his [sh]it - [sh]e was in the [p][r]ocess of ente[r]ing the item num[b]er for his [r]ed [q]uinoa, [c]hu[c]k[l]ing a[l]one - “it [c]ould’ve [b]een you” she [r]e[p]leated, chuc[k][l]ing, [b]ut then, [C][l]oud [r]e[l]ayed [t]o [T]ifa and Ae[r]ith, she a[c]tual[l]y [c]ame a[r][ou]nd to [C][l][ou]d’s [p]arti[c]u[l]ar hy[p]othesis. The new [c][a]shier, [a]fter thin[k]ing [a]bout it, [c]ame to [a]gree with [C][l]oud, th[a]t she [a][c]tua[l][y] p[r]o[b]a[b][l][y] had [s]een him in the g[r][o][c]e[r][y] [s]t[or]e [b]ef[or]e, and that she’d just [n]ow er[r][o][n]eously [f]igured [h]e [h]ad a [b]rother, when in [f][a][c]t this hypo[th]eti[c]al [b][r]o[th]er was [a][c]tual[l]y just [C][l]oud himsel[f]. [T]i[f]a [c]on[s]i[d]ered, [a][f]ter she’d inge[s][t]ed the [f]ull [a]ne[c][d]ote and [s]erved [C][l]oud his [r]e[f][r]eshed [M]o[s][c]ow [M]ule, that it was [s]omewhat [l]i[k]e[l]y [th]at [th]e [c]ashier wan[t]ed [t]o [q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te [s]u[c]k his [c]o[c]k, and [C][l]oud [d]i[d]n’t [n]e[c]e[s]sa[r]i[l][y] [d]i[s]ag[r][e]e with the [n]otion! - he [c]ertain[l][y] [c]on[s]idered it [p]o[s]si[b]le, [th]at [th]is [c]ashier [m]ay have [b]een a[m]ena[b]le to some[th]ing [l]i[k]e [th]at, but [th]at wasn’t [q]u[i]te the [p]oint! There [w]as a t[y][p]e of [w]isdom [l][a]tent in the exch[a]nge, [w]asn’t there? - regard[l]ess of [w]hether or not the [c]ashier [w]anted to per[f]orm [f]el[l]atio on [C][l]oud? Ae[r]ith, by [c]on[t][r]ast, [t]oo[k] a more [ph]ilo[s]o[ph]i[c]al [a]ngle to her [a]nal[y][s][i]s of the en[c]ounter, [b]e[c]ause sh[e] agr[e]ed with [C]loud [th][a]t [th]e [c][a]shier exh[i][b][i]ted a [c]ertain [s][p][i][r]itual in[s]ight, even [i][f] [i]t was in[a]dvertent. [A]erith, [f]or her [p]art, [d]i[d]n’t [p]ut much of a[n]y sto[c]k i[n][t]o the [c]ashier’s [i][n][t]entions, whether or [n]ot they were

[s]or[d]id, be[n]ign, or [s]im[p][l]y in[d]i[f]ferent. U[p]on [a][c]k[n]ow[l]edging this Ti[f]a [n]oted that she [r]e[c]log[n]ized [A]e[r]ith's [p]oint of [v]iew as [v][a]lid, th[a]t it was [p][r]o[b]a[b][l][y] the “[r]ight way [t]o [t]ake [i]t [i]n,” [e]ven i[f] sh[e], [T][i][f]a, wasn't [pler[s]onal[l][y] at the [p]oint of [p]arti[c]i[p]ating in [q]uite that [l]evel of obje[c]t[i]v[i]ty (i[f] [th]ey [c]ould, in [f][a][c]t, [c]all it [th][a]t). [C]loud m[en]tioned [th][a]t, [a]t [th]e [en]d of the [d]ay, [h]e [c]oul[d]n't [h]el[p] [i]t [i]f a [c]er[t]ai[n] [p]er[s]o]n ex[p]erien[c]ed an [ur]ge to [s]u[ck] his [c]o[ck] - that [w]hether or [n]ot [s][o]me[o]ne [wa]n[t]ed [t]o [s]u[c]k any[o]ne's k[n]ob [w]as [s]omething [u][t]imately [u]nk[n]owable, that [C][l]oud [c]ouldn't [s]im[p][l][y] [t]os[s] [p]o[t]ential [s][p]iritual en[c]ounters to the way[s]ide [p]ure[l][y] be[c]ause of a [p]ur[p]orted [s]ordid [s]ub[t]ext or in[t]ention. Both [w]omen ag[r]eed [w][i]th th[i]s, yet [plerh[a][p]s Ae[r][i]th just a [t][a]d more than [T]i[f]a? - not to [s]ay [T]i[f]a was [s]omehow [b]e[s]ide her[s]el[f] with jealou[s]ly i[n] a[n]y ma[t]erial way - no, th[is] d[is][t]inction [b]e[t]w[ee]n [T][i]fa [a]nd [A]e[r]ith was p[r]o[b]a[b]ly [r]ooted more [s]o in Ae[r]ith's [b]a[s]i[c]a[ll]y a[b][s][ur]d [a][b]i[l]it[y] to [r]e[m]ain [ph]ilo[s]o[ph]ically undet[er]red [a][b]out other [w]o[m]en [w]hile s[t][ee]ped i[n] a[n] obvious [l]ove [t]riangle. Did sh[e] [e]ven [l]i[k]e [C][l]oud, r[e]al[l][y]? [B]e[c]ause it was [r]ea[l]ly [q]uite [e]vident that [C][l]oud, [T]ifa, and Ae[r]ith were [c]o[l]le[c]tive[l]y [e][n][t]w[i]ned i[n] a sort of [l]ove [t][r]iangle, [b]ut Ae[r]ith, for her part, [m][ai]nt[ai]ned [q]uite the uni[q]ue [a][b]i[l]it[y] to [r]e[m][ai]n es[s]entia[l][y] [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]i[c]al [a][b]out it [a]ll - she [d]i[d]n't [s][ee]m to [a][ll]ow f[ee][l]ings of

jea[l]ou[s][y] to over[c]ome her in the [l][ea][s]t when [C][l]oud re[l]ayed ane[c]dotes a[b]out [c][a]shiers th[a]t, if [th]e [th]r[ee] [w]ere [b][e]ing h[on]est, [c][l][ea]r[l]y [w][an]ted to [w]hip the guy's [c]o[ck] out and [s]u[ck] [on] it for an ex[t]e[n][d]ed i[n][t]erval of [t]ime. [D]id she [e]ven r[ea]l[l][y] [l]i[k]e [C][l]oud? H[i]s [i]n[d][i]v[i]dual f[ee][l]ings on the situ[a]tion were a [l][i]ttle am[b][i]guous, even when he was [a]ll [a][l]one. [C][l]oud was of [c]our[s]e in[c][a]pa[b]le of as[s]es[s]ing his own [f][ee]lings [f]or [s]omewhat obv[i]ous r[ea]sons.

Koreatown Bok Choy

Mode: >.667

11,083:14,489 .765

1.1 A[r][a]q[i] t[o]ld J[o] Yu-[r][i], as they [s][a]t in the [s]m[all] h[all][w]ay [w]ide Ud[o]n Lab [o]n [W][e][s]t Thirty [S][e]cond, [r]ight [n][e]xt to the Marti[n][i]que, [h]ow [h][e] [h]ad no [r][e][c]oll[e][c]tion of [r][e]-[r][e]ading [R]ings of [S]aturn what[s][o]f[e]ver, in fa[c]t the onl[y] [r][e]a[s][o]n A[r]a[q]i [e]v[e]n [r][e]a]lized h[e]d [s]tarted [r][e]-[r][e]ading [R]ings of [S][a]turn [a]t [a]ll was [a] [s]ole b[l]ue pen [u]n[d]er[l][i]ne [s]t[r][i]ke [u]n[d][er] the w[or]d [R]umelia, [r][i]ght [o]n t[o][p] of [p]age [n][i]nety [n][i]ne that, [n]ow [r][e]-[r][e]ading it yet [a]gain, [A][r]aqi k[n][ew] all t[oo] [w]ell [h]e [w]ould [h]ave [n]ever made [w]hen he [i]n[i]t[i]ally [r]ead [R][i]ngs of [S]aturn, [b]e[c]ause [a]t th[a]t time A[r]a[q]i [b]are[l]y knew what [R]ume[l]ia [r]efe[r]enced, [b]ut u[p]on [a] [s]econd [r]eadings, [a][s]suming [s][ai]d [s][e]cond [r]eadings [t]ook [p]lace when [A][r]aqi [b]e[l][i]ved it [d]id, h[e] was [t]otal[l][y] [b]alls [d][ee]p in [R]ume[l]ia [l][or]e. F(or) all of th[e]se [r][e]asons A[r]aqi [b]e[l][i]ved h[e]d on[l][y] [b]eg[a]n his [s]econd [r]eadings of [R]ings of [S][a]turn when he [p]i[c]ked u[p] the [b]oo[k] again just [th]e [o][th]er [a]fternoon, [b][u]t in [a][c]tu[a][l]ity, a[c]cording to th[i]s [p]art[i][c]u[l]ar b[l]ue under[l][i]ne on the [n][i]nety-[n][i]nth [p]age of the [n]ovel, it [s][ee]med [l][i][k]e h[e]d [a][c]tual[l][y], in f[a][c]t, [r][e][c]ent[l][y] [s]tarted a third [r][e]ading, [n]ot a [s]econd. [B][u]t w[a]sn't [i]t a [b][i]t [b]efud[d]ing, a tad [d]i[s][c]on[c]er[t]i[ng] [p]erh[a][p]s th[a]t a [p][er][s][o]n

[c]ould h[a]ve [a]bsor[l]ute[l]y n[o] [r]e[c]o[l]e[c]tion of [r]eading a wh[o]le f[u][c]king h[u]ndred [p]ages [o]f [a] n[o]vel less than f[i]ve years [p]r[i]or, A[r]aqi thought, a [s][e]ntiment[e]nt he [e]xp[r][e][s]sed to Jo Yu-[r][i], and sh[e] ag[r][e]ed that [i]t d[i]d [s][e]em eg[r][e]gious, [b]ut al[s]o [pler]p[lexing] and may[b][e] [e]ven, [n]ot to [b][e] hy[p]er[b]ol[i]c, [b]ut a [b][i]t om[i]n[ou]s? [B]ut all [th]is, [th]e en[t]irety of the [p]air's [s][p]e[c][i]f[i]c [s][t]ream [o]f dial[o]gue w[a]s ab[r][u][p]tly inter[r][u][p]ted when J[o] Yu-[r][i] [n][o]ted A[r]aqi's v[i]s[i]bl[y] [c]on[c]ate[n][a]ting f[r]ust[r][a]tion as th[ey] were sudden[l]y, vio[l]ent[l]y up[s]tr[ea]med at the [b]ar [b]y [s]ome gr[e]a[s][y] fu[ck] in a [c]o[b]alt [b]lue [s]o[c]cer jersey - the [f][a]ct of the m[a]tter was the two [f]riends only [p][o][p]ped in the [s][p][o]t to beg[i]n w[i]th [t]o [t]a[k]e a [q]u[i][c]k l[i][s]t[e]n to a [p]arti[c]u[l]ar xy[l]oph[o]ne [j]azz t[r]i[o] A[r]aqi and [J][o] Yu-[R]i heard [p][l]aying [f]rom the [f]oyer as they [w]alked [p]ast on [W][e][s]t Thirty [S][e][c]ond, A[r]aqi [b][e]ing in[t][r][i]gued [b]y a [t][r][i][o] [l]ed b[y] x[y][l]oph[o]ne, [b][u]t [o]nce in line at the [b]ar they [b][o]th s[l][o]w[l]y real[l]ized how [l][o][q]uacious this [b]artender [w]as [w]ith each [c][u]stomer, A[r]aqi's ff[r][u][s]t[r][a]tion [c]on[c]aten[a]ting with [e]ach [s]e[c]ond h[e] [c]ontinued to w[ai]t for a [b]eer, and now, this [c]u[s]tomer in a [c]o[b]alt [b]lue [s]o[c]cer jersey, [p]o[p]ped [u][p] out [o]f [s][ee]mingly thin air to [u][p][s]tr[ea]m [th]em, [th]is [c][u][s]tomer, who'd, for [h]is [p]art, [h]ad a[p]pa[r]ent[l][y] been [r]e[p]leated[l][y] [s][c]ornered in his [q]u[e][s]t to get a [s][e][c]ond [b]eer him[s][e]lf, [b]y none o[th]er [th]an [th]is lo[q]u[a]c[i]ous [b]ar[t]ender, who

[k]ept [c]on[t]inuing on a[b]out che[c]king the [p]ipes in the [b][a]sem[e]nt, and now this [c]u[s]tomer in the [c][o][b]alt [b][l]ue [s]o[c]cer shirt au[d]acious[l]y [c]ut them [b][o]th in [l]ine to [r]uth[l]ess[l]y expe[d]ite his [s]ub[s][e]quent [b][e]ve[r]age. [A][r]a[q]i was [a][b]utting an [a]u[d][i][b]le [c]omp[l][ai]nt [b]ut [r]em[ai]ned [u]nwil[l]ing to [a][b]an[d]on his ju[s]t-[d]i[s][c]overed ex[c]itemen[t] for this xylo[ph][o]ne [j]azz as [J][o] Yu-r[i] n[o]ted [th]at [th]ere was a Vietnam[e]se [f]ood truck out[s][i]de, r[i]ght on the [c]orner of [S]ixth and [Th]irty [S]e[c]ond, [th]at she [c]ould [g][o] [g]et a [f]ew egg [r][o]lls if they [w]anted? A[r]a[q][i] [w]asn't [r][ea]ll[y] in the mood, but this [d][i][d]n't [d][e]ter Jo Yu-r[i] from amb[l]ing out[s]ide to [s][e]le "[w]h[a]t [w][a]s [u]p [w]ith their [d][u]m[p][l]ings", [r]ight as the bar[t][e]n[d]er finally [a][t][e]n[d]ed [t]o [A][r]a[q]i's [p][e]n[d]ing [r]e[q]uest for an [o]ver[p][r][i][c]led [q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te I[t]alian [s]t[y]le beer, wh[i]ch [d][i][d]n't [t]aste like Peroni [a]t all, [a]nd b[y] the [t][i]me the [t][wo] got [t][o] a s[ea]t the jazz [t]r[i]o [f][i][n][i]shed [i]ts [f]irst [s][e]t and [b]egan its [b][r]eak, lighting [c]iga[r][e]ttes and wal[k]ing [b]a[c]k to the [b]ar [f]or their [r]e[s]pe[c]tive, [A][r]a[q]i [a][s]sumed, [f][r][e]e [r][e][f]ills.

η/ω 713:927 .769

1.12 Of [c]our[s]e it was the [c][a][s]e that A[r]a[q]i, de[s]pite his [a]git[a]tion [a]t the f[a][c]t h[e] and [J]o Yu-[R][i] [e]n[t]ered this [e]s[t]ab[l]ishment w[i]th the [e]xpl[i][c][i]t [i]n[t]ent of [l][i][s]tening to th[i][s] xy[l]oph[o]ne [j]azz tri[o], [o]n[l]y to get s[t]iffed [b]y a

preva[r]i[c]ating [b]artender, [b]y a m[y][s][t][e][r]ious [sh][i]t [s][t]ain w[ea][r]ing a [c]o[b]alt [b]lue [s]o[c]cer [sh]irt, to [th]e ex[t]ent [th]at [b][y] [th]e [t][i]me [th]ey [w]ere seated [w]ith an over[p]riced [b]eer [a]nd a h[a]nd[f]ul of sub[p]ar Vietnamese egg [r][o]lls, the [f]ucking t[r][i][o] it[s]el[f] [s]to[p]ped [p]ounding xylo[ph]ones and [c]eased [p][l]aying jazz, but A[r][a][q]i h[a]d other more [p][r]e[s]sing and [d]ire to[p]i[c]s of [d]i[s][c]ussion, [d]e[s][p]ite the [s]u[d]den [s][i]lence in the [c]o[r]i[d]or w[i]de [r]e[s]tau[r]ant, [s][p]e[c][i]f[i][c]al[l][y] about Jo [Y]u-[R][i]'s new [s]o-[c]alled [e]mp[l]oy[e], [P][r]ia[p]us, [b]e[c][au]se the [f][u][c]king guy had [b]een tall[k]ing his ear o[f]f a[b]out S[o]ju for [l][i][k]e the wh[o]le [l]ast w[ee][k]. J[o] Yu-R[i] n[o]dd[e]d at the [c]o[m]m[e]nt without ev[en] [an] [in][k][i]ng of a h[i]nt of sh[o][c]k in her [g]aze, she wasn't [c]au[g]ht [o]ff [g]u[a]rd at [a]ll, [a]s A[r][a][q]i [c]on[t]inued [t]o [r]e[c]apitu[l]ate the guy's m[o]n[o][l][o]gues, ab[ou]t [h]ow this [c]ountry, [i]f th[i]s [n]ation h[a]d any ch[a]nce [a]t all what[s][o][e]ver, th[e]n it [n][ee][d]ed to imm[e][d][i]atel[y] a[d]opt [S][o]ju [a]s its [n][a]tional [d]rink, [th]at [th]ere was [n]o [o]ther [o][p]tion but to [a][d]o[p]t [a]ll ite[r][a]t[i]ons of Soju, of [K][o]r[je]an [R]ice W[i]ne as the [p][r]o[p]er [B]ud [L][i]ght [r]e[p][l][a]cem[e]nt, to [c]o-o[p]t this [K]o[r][e]an wine and [r][e][b][r][a]nd it [a]s e[s]sentially fu[c]king [A]me[r]i[c]an, [A][r]a[q]i [s]aid. [Th]at [th]e J[o]e [R][o]lgans of the in[t]er[n]et [s][ph]ere had [p][r]e[s][c]ribed the Do[n]ald [T][r]um[p]s of the [ph][y]s[i][c]al world as the [p]a[n][a][c][e][a] this [c]ountr[y] [n][ee]ded, via [r][e][a]ctiona[r][y] ch[a][nn]els [p]o[s]ted on a [p]lat[f]orm

that i[r]o[n]i[c]ally e[n][ou]gh [s]tarted as a [C]IA [f][r][o]nt, yet the [r]eality w[a]s the t[r]ue [c]o[r]r[e][c]t[i]ve [c]ould [n][e]v[e]r be [f]ound in a Do[n]ald T[r][u]mp, [n][o], [o]nl[y] in [K]o[r][e]an [r][i]ce w[i]ne, a[c]cording to [P][r]ia[p]us, [p][eo][p]le n[ee]ded to start dr[i]n[k][i]ng [i]t [i]n [b]ars and [r]e[s]tau[r]ants in [p][i]a[c]e of [c]ar[b]o[n]ated [l]ight [b]eers! A[r]a[q][i] and J[o] Yu-[R][i] [b][o]th [n][o]ted [th]at [th]ey [r][e]s[p]e[c]ted the [p]assion of [P][r]ia[p]us, [a]nd th[a]t he was [e][s][e]ntially [c]o[r]r[e][c]t [i]n h[i]s as[s][e][s]s[m][e]nt that nothing was [m]ore A[m]e[r]i[c]an than stealing the do[m][e][s]til[c] [c][u]lture of [o]thers [a]nd [r]eb[r][a]nding it [a]s our [o]wn - and S[o]ju was in [f][a][c]t, [a][f]ter all, an o[p]timal bar [d]rink, as it was [s][p]e[c][i][f][i][c]ally [d]es[i]gned to [p]rov[i]de more [o]f [a] [b][u]zz than [b]eer, [b]ut not qu[i]te the ill-[a]d[v][i]sed lift of the [a][v]erage [e]ighty p[r]oof g[r][ai]n [a]l[c]ohol. Yet, [a][c]cording to [A][r]a[q][i], [P][r][i]a[p]us was [d]ub[i]ous [th]at [th]e [c]ountry [c]ould a[c]tually [a][d]opt [S]oju, [p][r]ima[r]ily be[c]ause of [p][e]o[p]le, h[e] [s]aid, li[k]e the m[e]d[i]an [s]e[c]ond [c]ousin, [p][eo][p]le who would b[e] [r]eti[c]ent to dr[i]n[k] [s]omething [q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te [K]o[r][e]an on the [r]egu[l]ar, [p][e]o[p]le who [c][l]ung to be[l]i[e]fs that [p][e]o[p]le [l]i[k]e Ted [C]ruz [a][c]tual[l]y h[a]d [d][e][c]ent i[d][e]as about the w[or]ld, that any p[er][s]on who [f]ound [T]ed [C]ruz to b[e] [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]i[c]al[l][y] in[t][r][i]nguing would obv[i]ous[l]y [b][e] a [l]ittle [r]eti[c]ent a[b]out im[b]i[b]ing [S]oju, [w]hen it [w]as obviously the [c]ase th[a]t, in f[a][c]t, [T]ed [C][r]uz [w]as [p][r]o[b]a[b]ly [o]ne of the [t]op [t]en most des[p]i[c]a[b]le [p]eo[p]le on the [p][l]a[n]et, [P][r]ia[p]us

[n]oted [C][r]uz's [p][r]eva[r]i[c][a]tions when [a]sked [q]uestions li[k]e 'D]oes [AI][C][A]P ever [i]nte[r][a][c]t w[i]th [I]s[r]ael,' [s][ay]ing how it once again [d]emon[s]tr[a]ted the i[nn][a]tely [d]e[s][p]li[c]a[b]le [b][a]se[l]ine of his [p]er[s]o[n]a[l]ity. But [p][e]o[p]le li[k]e the [m][e]d[i]an [s]e[c]ond [c]ousins [o]f [A][m]e[r]i[c]a would a[c]tually p[r]efer to [d]i[s][c]uss Ted [C][r]uz with a [m]o[d]i[c]um of n[i][c]et[y] than just imb[i]be [K]o[r][e]an [r][i][c]e w[i]ne as their [d]efault [d][r]in[k] of choice, [w]hich [w]as [c][l]ear[l]y [w]hy this [c]ount[r]ly [w]as on the [p][r]e[c][i][p][i][c]e of an i[r]ever[s]ible de[c]line, [i]f not [i]n the m[i]dst of [i]t al[r]ead[y]! This [c]ount[r]y was [c][l]ear[l]y [f]u[c]king [f][i]n[i]shed, [P][r]ia[p]us said, and it was [s]olely be[c]ause of thi[s] in[t]er[s][e]ction of [T][e]d [C]r[u]z, [S]o[j]u, and the [c]on[c]eptual [s]e[c]ond [c]ousin of [c]our[s]e, A[r]a[q][i] [r]ep[ea]t[e]d, [s][i]ow[l]y alm[o]st [b]e[l][ie]v[i]ng what [P][r]ia[p]us had [r]e[p][ea]t[e]d into his [p]oor ear[d]rums [d]ay [a]fter [d]ay th[a]t [w]eek. It [w]as [c][l]ear to [P]ria[p]us at [l]ea[s]t [th]at [th]e [s]e[c]ond [c]ousin w[a]s [a] to[p]i[c] they mu[s]t a[c]tua[l]ly [l]egi[s][l]ate [a]gainst, [n]o, [n]ot ju[s]t [p]lont[i]f[i][c]ate [a][b]out, [b]e[c]ause these [s]e[c]ond [c]ousins, they wouldn't ju[s]t re[s]cind [o]f their own [a][c]cord, [s]e[c]ond [c]ousins were [i]n[s]t[ea]d [i]nd[i]cat[i]ve [o]f a [s]t[r][u]ctu[r]al [r][o]t, [P][r]ia[p]us [th][ou]ght [th]at h[e] Jo Yu-[R][i] and A[r]a[q][i] should all [m]o[ve] to [c]o[m]m[u]ni[c]a[te] with their New York [s]t[a]te [r]e[p][r]esentat[i]ves to [s]ee [i][f] they [c]ould [b]eg[i]n dra[f]ting a [b][i]ll o[p]osing the [c]on[c]e[p]t of the [s]e[c]ond [c]ou[s]in [i]n th[i]s [c]ou[nt]ry, was that [d]oa[b]le, [d]id [th]ey [th]in[k]? [A][r]a[q]i took [a] [b]ite of

[a]n [e]gg [r]oll that was [s]ome[h]ow [s]till [s][c]orching [h]ot five minutes a[f]ter Jo Yu-Ri [p]ut the [p][l][a]stic [p][l][a]te [d]own on the t[a]ble. The [f][a]ct it [f]elt a h[u]n[d][r]ed [f][u]cking [d]eg[r]ees [ou]t in Mid[t]ow[n] [p][r]o[b]a[b]ly [d]i[d]n't hel[p].

η/ω 920:1187 .775

1.13 Jo Yu-R[i], wi[p]ing her [p]et[i]te [f]ingers on a thri[c]e [f]olded na[p][k]in, [s]mea[r]ing [s][e][e]ct [r][e]mnants of t[r]u[c]k [c][oo][k]ed egg [r]oll g[r]ease onto the [p]ure white [p]a[p]er, sh[oo][k] [h]er [h]ead [s][i]de to [s][i]de and [sh]owed A[r]a[q]i the [p]age of the [b]ook [sh]e'd just o[p]ened u[p], A[sh][b]le[r][y]'s [S]elf-[P]ort[r]ait in a [C]onvex [M]i[rr]or and [m]uttered [l]oo[k] at all th[i][s] [s][c][r][i][b][l]ing! in [r]efe[r]ence to the i[n]ane [n][o]tes the [p][r][e]v[i]ous [o]wner of the [p]a[p]er[b][a]ck h[a]d [s]trewn all over the first [p]age in [p]en[c]il. Ar[a]q[i] [a][s]ked her what [c]ond[i]t[i]on she'd [b]ought the [b]oo[k] in ex[a][c]tly, [w]as she a[w]are of that [l]evel of s[c][r]ib[b][l]ing [p][r][i]or to [b][u]y[i]ng [i]t, no, she [r]e[p][l][i]ed, [b]ut to [b]e [f]air n[ea]r[l][y] [e]ve[r][y] other [p]age of the [b]ook was [e]n[t]ire[l][y] [c][l][ea]n, un[t]il of [c]ourse this [f]inal [p]oem, the [s]el[f]-[t]itled [e]n[t]r[y] of the [c]ol[l][e][c]tion - obvious[l][y] [s]ome n[i]tw[i]t w[h]o [p][r]o[b]a[b]ly [h]ad to w[r][i]te, l[i]ke, a term [p]a[p]er [a][b]out it, [A][r]a[q]i [s]ugge[s]ted, [s]ome [k]ind of [d]i[s]sertation, and Jo Yu-[R][i] [a]g[r][e]ed, head bowed in [d]ef[ea]t. [A][r]aq[i] [a]lleged it [r]emained [r][ea]dable [e]ven if, s[u]re, the in[c][e][s]sant [p][e]n[c]il [s][c]r[i]bb[l][i]ngs w[er]e a [l][i]ttle di[s]t[r]a[c]ting,

[c]ertain[ly] off-[p]utting, he [c]ould [t]otal[ly] re[l]ate [t]o
th[a]t! The f[a][c]t of the m[a]tter [w]as it [w]as
in[c][r]ea[s]ingly [d][i]ff[i][c]ult to [p]lay [d[]i[s][c]ounted
[p][r]i[c]es for used boo[k]s these [d]ays, without [s]ome
[i]n[c]e[s]ant and/or [i][n][a]ne [s]cribb[l]ing
[d]o[m]i[n][a]ting the [m]argins of [s]e[l]ect p[al]ges,
without de[l][a]ys [i]n sh[i]pp[i]ng or un[e]xp[e][c]t[e]dl[y]
[b][e]nt [c][o]vers or s[u]b[p]ar [p]a[p]er[b]a[c]k [b]indings,
alth[ou]gh J[o] Yu-Ri did n[o]te of all the [f]ine [p][o]ems
the [c]olle[c]tion [c]on[s]i[s]ted of she [f]ound the [t]itle
[p]oem [t]o b[e] the l[e]ast e[s]ential, [s]o if one
[p]articular [p]oem had to [b]e [r]uined [b]y [s]aid
[s]c[r]ibb[l]ing sh[e] was at [l][ea][s]t g[l][a]d it [w]as th[a]t
one. [B]oo[k]s, [A]r[a][q]i [a][s]serted, were [a][c]tually
[b]e[c]oming [s][l]ow[l]y im[p]o[ss]i[b]le to a[c]quire, as
[p][r]o[d]u[c]tion volumes [d][r]o[p]ped [d][ue] t[o] the
[i]n[c][r]ea[s]ing [i][l]ite[r]a[c]y [a]ll [a][r]ound them - it
was [b][a][s]i[c]al[l]y a [c][a][s]e of when [b]e[f]ore a
[f]unctional em[b]argo would [t]a[k]e hold in [t]erms of
[a][c]qui[r]ing [d]e[c]ent [b]oo[k]s at [a]ffor[d]a[b]le
[p][r]i[c]es, they were [r][a][p]id[l]y [r]everting [b][a][c]k to
the Middle [A]ges or something, with [r]are
[l]i[b][r]a[r]ies g[a]ted aw[a]y [f]rom [a][f]i[c]ion[a]dos
[j]i[zz]i[ng] them[s]elves over [s][i]m[p]le a[c]cess to
[p]r[i]nt[e]d [p]a[p]er. [J]o Yu-Ri [th]ought [th]e
e[m]ergence of the [P]DF [b][a][c]k [m]ar[k]et [r][a]n
[c]ounter to A[r]a[q]i's hy[p]er[b]o[l]i[c] [c][l]aims [b]ut of
[c]our[s]e she [p][r]e[f]erred to [p]e[r]use [ph][y]s[i]cal
[c]opies as w[e]ll [s]o she [f][e]lt the ove[r]all [p]ull of his
[l]ament. [B]ut J[o] Y[u]-Ri then a[b]ru[p]t[l]y
[c]on[t]in[u]ed on [t]o n[o]te [i]n a [m]ore v[i]go[r]ous

f[a]shion her [a]g[r]ee[m]ent with [A][r][a]qi [r]egarding [P]ria[p][u]s, [d]id he kn[o]w [th]at j[u]st [th]e [o][th]er [d]ay, [w]hile [w]at[er]ing h[er] bok choy p[l][a]nts w[i]th h[i]s m[a][s][i]ve ph[a][ll][u]s, he [t]old [a] s[t]o[r]y [a]bout [r]en[d]ezvousing with [a]n [e]xotic [d]an[c]er? [P][r]ia[p]us [s][ai]d he'd m[e]t the [s]t[r][i]pp[er] just [a] [c][ou][p]le w[ee][k]s [p]l[r][e]v[i]ous and th[a]t sh[e]'d [a]sked to m[ee]t w[i]th h[i]m, which he [s]aid to Jo Yu-R[i] h[e] a[s]umed m[ea]nt she [i]n[t][e]nded [t]o b[i]lk him out of s[o]me [c][a]sh [a]t her [c][u]b in [A][s]toria, [b]ut [a][p]parently, to h[er] s[ur][p][r]ise, [P][r]ia[p]us wasn't [a][b]ove that, [s]o h[e] actual[l][y] showed [u]p to the [c][l][u]b, J[o] Yu-[R]i t[o]ld A[r]a[q]i, [b]ut [th]en, [th]e d[a]ncer, h[a]lf in the [b][a]g [a]c[c]ording to [P]ri[a][p][u]s, t[o]ld him she [a][c]tual[l][y] [m]eant to [m][ee]t out[s]ide the [c][l]ub, [s]o as her shift en[d]ed he too[k] the [d]an[c]er [d]own the [s]treet to [s]ome hoo[k]ah [s][p]ot, [s]m[o][k]ed [sh]i[sh]a then, a[c]cording to [P][r]ia[p][u]s, [q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te [r]ailed [h]er in [h]er [S]U[V] on a [s]ide [s]t[r][ee]t after she m[o]ved her [k]id's [c]ar[s][ea]t to the [s]ide. Jo Y[u]-R[i] was a [s][l]ight[l]y f[l][a]bberg[a]sted [a]t the [a][n]ecd[o]te, which [P]ria[p][u]s [c]ontinued, [n][o]ting [h]ow the chi[c]k [h]ad [s]ome [i]ssues w[i]th [s]u[i][c][i][d]al [i][d]e[a]tion, but to Jo Yu-[R]i, she [r]e[l][ay]ed to [A][r]a[q]i, it was [a] [l]ittle [c]on[c]er[n]ing, [n]o? j[u]st [b]e[c][au]se she'd h[i]red the g[uy] [b]e[c]ause his [ph][a][ll]us w[a]s [s][u][p]posed to [b]e [b]ene[f]i[c]ial [f]or [p][l][a]nt growth, and [w]hile [c][l][ea]r[l]y that [w]as id[ea]l for bo[k] choy [c]ul[t]ivation in [M]id[t]own [M]anhattan she wasn't [s]o [c]ertain she'd get the [m]axi[m]um v[a][l]ue of his [ph][a][ll]us if he was

- [p][l]owing [s][l]uts in [S]U[V]s on [s]ide [s]t[r][ee]ts
[n]ext to [sh]i[sh]a e[s]t[a]bli[sh]ments, A[r][a]qi
[f][i][n][i]shed?

η/ω 751:997 .753

1.14 [N][o], A[r]a[q]i [n][o]ted, it was [c]ertainly un[c]outh that [P][r]ia[p][u]s was, you k[n][o]w, [p]otentially having [s]ex w[i]th [s]tr[i][pp]ers out[s]ide [sh][i][sh]a [s][p]lots in Qu[ee]ns, but [s]t[i]ll w[i]th that [s]aid [n]e [h]ad [c]ome to [q]uestion Jo Yu-[R]i's a[r]ith[m]etic just [s][l]ight[l][y], [m]o[s]t[l][y] [b]e[c]ause while he under[s]tood the pha[ll]us of [P]ria[p]us was [b]eing em[p][oy]ed for [b]o[k] ch[oy] [c]ultiv[a]t[i]on [a]nd [e]ng[a]g[i]ng [i]n [i]ll[i][c][i]t [a]ct[i]v[i]ties, [a]nd th[a]t th[a]t [p]ar[t]i[c]ular [a]dd[i]t[i]on [s]eemed to [p][or][t]end [p]o[or] out[c]omes. But th[r]ee [p]lus f[our], A[r]a[q]i [s]aid, [d]i[d]n't [e][q]ual [s]even, not exa[c]t[l][y], be[c]ause tru[l][y] it [e][q]ualed [s]e[v]en [p]lus the [F]orm [s]e[v]en, [b]e[c]ause [s]ans the [F]orm [s]e[v]en it would [b]e [b]a[s]i[c]ally impo[s]si[b]le [f]or them to [e][v]en [c]on[c][ei]ve of [s]e[v]en. [B]ut, A[r]a[q]i [n]oted, Form [s]e[v]en [b]y its [v]e[r]y [n]ature [d]i[d]n't e[n]g[a]ge i[n] the [s][a]me unitary [m][i]x[i]ng [th]at [th]e [m][a]them[a]ti[c]al [s]even did, [w]hat Ara[q]i [w]as [s]aying, h[e] [r][e]ite[r]ated to Jo Yu-[R]i, [w]as that it [w]as [p]o[s]si[b]le [P][r]ia[p]us, [b][e]ing a divine [b][e]ing (of [s]orts!), was [p]r[o][b]a[b]ly n[o]t [t]ethered [t]o the [s]ame [r]u[b][r]i[c]s of a[r]ithmeti[c] as of[th]ers, [th]at [P][r]ia[p][u]s was ve[r]y [p]o[s]sib[ly] [c][o][s]er to the Form [s]e[v]en [th]an [th]e [m][a]the[m][a]ti[c]al [s]e[v]en, [i]n [w]h[i]ch ca[s]e, [w]hile s[ur]e, his

[s]o[j]our]ns with [c][er]tain [A][s]to[r]i[a] [s]t[r]i[p]pers was in [p][oor] taste, it might not [a][c]tually h[a]ve a [p][a][l]p]a[b]le effe[c]t on Jo Yu-Ri's [b]o[k] choy?

η/ω 250:336 .744

1.15 Jo Yu-[R][i] [f][a]shed [b][a]ck [b][r][ie]f[y] to a [b][u]l[b][ou]s [p]enis that was [s][p][r]ayed in [g][r]a[ff][i]t[i] onto the [f]oun[d][a]tion of a home on B[r]id[g]ham th[a]t she [p][a][s]ed [w]hile [w]alking to a [F]ami[l]y [D]o[ll]ar [th]e of [th]er [d][ay], it was [l]ike [e]ver [s]in[c]e she [e]m[p][l]oyed this [P][r]ia[p]us she'd [b]een [s]u[r]ounded on all [s][i]des [b][y] un[r]e[p]entant [p]len[is], which [p][r]o[b]a[b][l]y, she [r]e[f][l]ected, [s]er[ved] h[er] [r]ight [f]or going into [b]usin[ess] with a H[e][l][e]n[i]c [e]nt[i]t[y] ([e][s]p[e]c[i]a[l][l]y) a [s]o-c[al]led d[e][i]t[y]). At the [s]ame [t]ime [g][r]owing f[r]esh [b]o[k] choy [i]n M[i]d[t][ow]n [g]ave her a [c]ompet[i]t[i]ve [a]dv[a]ntage no one else h[a]d in [K]orea[t][ow]n, so was it [a]ll [p]o[s]sibl[y] worth it? As [A][r]a[q][i] [r]e[c]eived the [t][a]b ([a]fter [d][r][i]n[k][i]ng h[i]s [s]e[c]ond sh[i]tty p[s]eu[d]o [I][t]alian [p][i]sner), at four [t]wenty [p]m (as op[p]osed to J[o] Yu-[R][i]'s [r]e[c]eipt b[e]ing [r]e[c]eived at th[r][ee] [t]welve [p]m) he w[r]ote out the [t]i[p] and, when l[ay]ing the [p][a][p]ler down on the [t][a][b]le next [t]o Jo Y[u]-[R][i]'s the [t][wo] [r][ea][l]ized [b]oth [t][a]bs [c][a]me to ex[a]c[t]ly [t]wenty-nine [e]ighty-four a p[ie]ce, with [ea]ch [t][a]b ex[a][c]tly [c]on[s][i][s]ting of a [t]went[y] thr[ee] b[u][c]k s[u]b[t]otal with a dollar eighty [f]our [t]ax a[ss]e[ss]ment and [f]ive even [t][i]p, [w]h[i]ch [w]as a b[i]t of a [c]oin[c]iden[c]e,

al[m]ost like a ch[a]nce event th[a]t h[a]d [s]ome [s]ort of [c]os[m][i][c] [s][i]gn[i][c]an[c]e? The [t]wo [s]tared [a]t the [t]wo [t][a]bs in [s]ilence [a]s [a] chu[bb]y [w]h[i]te g[u]y hammering [a][w][ay] on his xy[l]o[ph][o]ne [s][I][o]w[l]y [f][a]ded to [b][l]ack.

ŋ/ω 266:335 .794

2.1 Ha[k]im Al[l]ah a[c]tual[l]y [d]esperate[l][y] n[ee][d]ed a wai[f]u in [C]air[o], [l][k]e [s][o] [b]ad, [b]ut he al[s][o] [f]elt a [c]ertain [l]onging [f]or [s][u]mmer, [f]or the [s][u]n [a]nd [th]e heat [a]nd [th]e [a][cc]ompa[n]ying [i]rres[i][s]t[i]ble urge to [i]ndulge [i]n [a] [n][i][c]e [c]old w[i]ne, [b]eing [b]orn after all in the [p]eak [s]u[m]mer [m]onth of [Au]g[u]st [i]n N[i]ne Eighty F[i]ve and [a]ll. [S]ome would [s]ugge[s]t there was [p]o[s]sib[l][y] [e]ven a [m][y][s]tical [e][l][e][m]ent [t]o it, [th]e [th]ir[t]eenth d[ay] of the [ei]ghth [m]onth, [p]erha[p]s an arithmetic [c]al[c]u[l]ation or [s]omething of the [s]ort, the [v]io[l]ent [v]a[c]i[l][a]tions h[e] expe[r][i]en[c]ed [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]ica[l][y]? Weren't [th]ose in [th]emselves a [r]esi[d]ue of an [i]n[d][i]v[i]s[i][b]le Oneness, [v]io[l]ent[l]y [v]a[c]i[l]ating [b]etween [s]tri[c]t [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]i[c]al [s][c]hools that [v][e]hement[l]y [d]is[a]gr[ee]d [w]ith [o]ne [a]nother? [W]asn't [v]a[c]i[l]ating bet[w]een [ph]i[l]o[s]o[ph]ical [p]oles, [v]io[l][e]nt[l]y, in a [s][e]nse, a real [d]i[ss][e]mb[l]ing of the [p]ern[i]c[i]ous [d]ua[l]it[ie]s and multi[p][l][i]c[i]t[ie]s we [e]ncounter [e]very [d]amn [d][ay]? A [m]iddle-[a]ged [m]an was a[d]orned in [d]a[pp]le [c]loth [s][i]tt[i]ng on the [p]atio [s]mo[k]ing a th[i]n [c][i]ga[r]ette and Ha[k]im, who [d]i[d]n't [s]mo[k]e

[r]egu[l]ar[l][y], [s]ud[d]en[l][y] f[e]lt [a]n [i]n[t][e]nse urge
[t]o [i]n[d]ulge in j[u]st [o]ne [c]iga[r]ette, [r]e[f][l]e[c]ting
[b][a][c]k to [p][a]st [m][o][m]ents, on e[q]uiva[l]ent
[p][a]ti[o]s where h[e]d [m]ay[b][e] [p]u[ff]ed a cigarette or
two, [w]here [e][v]ents [w]ere in[e][v]itab[l]y [f][e]lt, [f][e]lt
in the way that [f][ee][l]ings [m]ust in[e]vitab[l][y]
[e]xtend, [m]u[dd]ied and [d]isgusting to
[r]e[c]o[l][e][c]tion and tho[r]ough[l]y
in[c]omp[r]eh[e]nsible in [m]ate[r]ial ways. Ulti[m]ate[l][y],
it [w]as [o]n[l][y] [w]hen you [w]ere [s][m][o][k]ing
[c]igar[e]ttes that you a[c]tual[l][y] [f][e]lt things, and
[f]ee[l][i]ng th[i]ngs was usual[l]y [a] [k]ind of
[c]om[p]osite [ph]e[n][o]me[n][a]. Ha[k]im [p]ulled out a
[s][i]ngle d[i][n]ar [a]nd [a]sked the [g]uy for the [g][r]eat
[p][r]ivilege [o]f b[u]mming a [s][i]ngle [c][i]ga[r]ette,
[s][m]o[k]ing it next to the [m]an who was [o]bviously a
high [r]an[k]ing [c]ourt [o]ffi[c]er [o]f the [m]os[t]
[r]e[s][p]e[c]ta[b]le order, to which the [m]an [b][l]unt[l]y
[r]e[p]lied so[r]ry [l]ast one [b]ut there's [a] [c]amel
sh[o][p] [a][c][r][o][s]s the [s]t[r]eet that [s][e]lls th[e]m. In
no w[ay], sh[a]pe, or [f]orm was this [m]an [s][m]oking
the last [r]e[m]ai[n][i]ng u[n][i]t [f][r]om his [p]ack of
[c]iga[r]ettes. It would have [b]een [f]air[l]y c[l]ear to any
[p]erson with even hal[f] of a [f]unctioning [b][r][ai]n
[th]at [th]is [m][a]n h[a]d [m]any [m]ore [c]iga[r][e]ttes
[r][e][m][ai]ning [i]n h[i]s p[a][c]k, [th]at while [th]e
p[r]e[c]ise a[m]ount of [c]iga[r]ettes the [m][a]n h[a]d
[r]e[m]aining was un[c]ertain it was [a][s]o
[a]bundant[l][y] [c][i]ear [th]at [th]at [a][m]ount
[c]ertain[l][y] [e][q]ualled [m]ore than [o]ne. It [w]as
[u]tter[l]y ab[s]urd t[o] [a][ss][u]me this [m][a]n was

[s][m]oking his [l][a]st [c]igarette on the p[a]tio. W[i]th th[i]s [i]n mind, [p]urely [o]ut [o]f s[p]ite, Ha[k]im, a[f]ter waiting a [f]ew [m]o[m]ents in dee[p] [c]ontem[p]l[[a]t[i]on, [c][r]o[s]ed the [s][t][r]eet and [s][t]ood in [p][l][a][c]e at the [c]amel [s][t][a]t[i]on, where th[r][ee] [p][eo][p]le were al[r]eady im[p][a]tiently w[ai]ting in f[r]ont of a hand-w[r][i]tt[e]n sign that [r]ead [B][a]th[r]oom [B][r]ea[k] [B]e [B][a][c]k [i]n Ten M[i]n[u]tes. There was no o[p]tion [b]ut for Ha[k]im to [b]uy [a]n [e]ntire [p][a][c]k of [c]igarettes [p]ure[l]y [o]ut [o]f [s][p][i]te, a [s][p][i]teful [l][u]st to j[u]st [s][m]oke one [c]igar[e]tte. A h[ea]vy [s][e]t [p][a][s]ty [m]i[dd]le [a]ged [l][a][d]y wearing a b[l][a][c]k n[a]ps[a][c]k w[i]th th[i]nn[i]ng [l][i]ght [h]air [o]n the t[o]p of [h]er [h]ead was first in [l][i]ne, and would [r]e[m]ain [l]onger [th]an [th]e [r][o][l][y] p[o][l][y] [f]air-[s]kinned [m]an with the [m]acho a[cc]ent, or the [r]un of the [m]ill d[ay] [l]a[b]orer - yet, [f]ueled [b]y th[i]s [m][i]xture of [n]on[s]en[s]ical [l]ust and [i]rra[ti]o[n]a[ti]ble [s]pite, [H]akim [w]ould [w]ait n[ea]rl[y] [a]n [e]n[t]ire [h]alf hour for the a[tt]endant [t]o re[t]ur[n] to [p][u]rch[a]se th[i]s [p]a[c]k of over[p][r]i[c]ed [c]iga[r]ettes to [s][m]o[k]e a [s][m]all [p]er[c]entage [o]f [o]n the [p]ati[o]. He out[l]asted not [o]n[l]y the [h]eavy [s][e]t [p][a][s]ty fem[a]le and [h]er [i]n[i]t[i]al com[p]anions b[u]t even s[u]b[s]e[quent] [o]thers who a[pp][r]oached the [w]ind[o]w then [q]ui[c]k[ly] [l]eft exa[s][p]e[r]a[ted] at the [r][i]d[i][c]u[l]ous [w][ai]t, [a]t the [a]b[s]urd [c][l][ai]m on this [c]ardboard [s]ign. Yet on[c]e thi[s] e[s][c]a[p][a]de was [c]om[p][l][e]ted Ha[k]i[m] re[t]urned [t]o the [p]atio [t]o, to his [s]urp[r]i[se], f[i]nd the [s]ame [m]an [s]till [s][m]o[k]ing a

[c]iga[r]ette, wh[i]ch Ha[k]im [q]u[i][c]k[l]y [c]al[c]u[l]ated, m[u]st have been a [s][u]b[s]e[q]uent [c]igarette or, even worse, [a] [s][u]b[s]e[q]uent to [a] [s][u]b[s]e[q]u[e]nt [c]igar[e]tte, and the [s]ame h[ea]vy [s][e]lt [w]oman [w]ith the b[l][a][c]k n[a]p[s][a][c]k and thin [l]ight hair, now al[s][o] [s][m][o]king a [c]igarette, de[s][p]lite the [f][a][c]t she le[f]t the [c]a[m]el [s]t[a]tion [b]e[f]ore [b]eing [a][b]le to [b]uy a [p][a][c]k, wh[i]ch Ha[k]im [q]u[i][c]k[l]y [c]al[c]u[l]ated, [m]ust have al[s][o] [b]een [s]upp[1][i]ed [b][y] the [m]an in the h[i]gh [c][l]ass [c][l]oth. The [m]an just [m][o][m]ents [a]g[o] was [a][l]eged[1]y [s]m[o][k]ing his [q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te [l]a[s]t [c]igarette on the pati[o]. The [m]an in the [h]igh [c][l]ass [c][l]oth [m]ust [h]ave g[i]ft[e]d the [h]ea]vy [s][e]t p[a][s]ty fem[alle] her [c]igarette, be[c]ause [H]a[k]im [w]as just [w]ith [h]er, [a]t the [c][a]mel [s]tation, and she h[a]d n[o] [c]iga[r]ettes, the [o]nl[y] [r]ea]s[o]n sh[e] was [e]v[e]n at the [s]tat[i]on was [t]o ob[t][ai]n a[d]d[i]t[i]on[a]l [c][i]garettes. [S]o it was [b][a][s]i[c]ally [c]o[rr]o[b]o[r][a]ted [th]at [th]e man [a][d]orned in the [r]oyal [a]ttire, at the ve[r][y] l[ea]st, at the bare [m][i]n[i][m]um, had two a[d]d[i]t[i]onal [c][i]ga[r]ettes, if not th[r]ee a[d]d[i]t[i]onal [c][i]ga[r]ettes, [i]n h[i]s pa[c]k when h[e] [r]uth[1]ess[1][y] t[o]ld [H]a[k]im [h][e] was [s]m[o][k]ing his [q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te [l]ast [o]ne, [w]hich of [c]our[s]e [w][a]s [u]n[s]urprising, yet, [l][i]ke all imp[1][i]ed [l][i]es, it [s]tung Ha[k]im more [v]o[c]i[f]erou[s][l][y] [w]hen it [w]as [f]ina[l][y] [c]on[f]irmed [b]eyond a reasona[b]le doubt. [A]ll [o]b[v]ious [l][i]es are more [b]en[i]gn when [s]t[i]ll ex[i][s]t[i]ng [i]n an un[p]roven [s]tate, [d]e[s][p]ite [b][e]ing obv[i]ous, [b]ecause an [b][l]atant [l]ie, once

[p]r[o]ven, [d]e[s][p]ite the [f]act it[s] e[s]sen[c]e was [a][l]r[e]ady [a][s][u]med [f][i]ct[i]t[i]ous, [d]e[s]pite [a][l]r[e]ady having [a]ttained [a] [c]ertain [r]ea[l]ity as [a] [l]ie, [s]t[i]ngs [w][i]th a [c][er]tain vig[or] [w]hen [f]ina[l]ly [c]on[f]irmed as a b[l]atant di[s][t]ortion of the [t]ruth. All [t]ruth is ul[t]imate[y] [d]i[s][t]orted [t]o [s]ome [d]e[gr]ee, and we know th[i]s [i]mp[l][i][c][i]t[l][y], yet [w]ithout [f]ail [w]e're [m]onu[m]ental[l][y] [d]ejected upon [c]on[f]ir[m][i]ng [c][er]t[ai]n [d]i[s][t]ortions of the [t]ruth. W[e] [b]el[i]eve the obv[i]ous [l]ie to [b][e] [f][i]ct[i]t[i]ous, ha[v]ing [b]een ob[v]ious, that [i]t [w][i]ll mean [n]othing [o]nce confirmed as [a] f[a][s]it[y], [a]s [n]othing h[a]s e[ss]entiall[y] [b]een [a]ltered, [w]hat [w]e [a]lread[y] t[r][ea]ted as a [p][r]o[b]a[b]le [l]ie [s]im[p][l]y [b]e[c]omes an a[c]tual [l]ie, yet when the [o]bvious [l]ie shi[f]ts [f]rom [a]ss[u]med t[o] p[r][o]ven, [i]t [i][rr][a]ctional[l]y [c]on[c][a]tenates [a]nd be[c]omes [a]n [e]ven [m]ore [e]g[r][e]gious [l]ie. [H]a[k][i]m [h]ad [b]een sh[a]me[l]ess[l]y [b]etr[ay]ed [b]y a [m]an who owed him [l]ess [th]an nothing in [th]e [w]orld, yet [w]asn't it [plerha]p[s] [th]e [c]a[s]e [th]at by the [s][o]le a[c]t of [s]m[o][k]ing [c]igar[e]ttes, to [s]ome [e]xt[ent], the man [e]n[t]ered in[t]o a [s]ocial [c]ontr[a][c]t of b[e]n[e]vo[l]e[nt]ly [a][c]qui[e][s]c[t]ing [a] [r][e][q]u[e][s]t for [a] [s][i]ngle [c][i]ga[r][e]tte at shitty [d]ive [b]ars. To [s]moke a [c]iga[r]ette at a [d]ive [b]ar is [t]o vo[l]un[t]a[r]i[l]y en[t]er in[t]o a [c]o[m]m][u]ne of [i][k]e-m[i]nded [c][i]t[i]zens bu[mm][i]ng [c][i]garettes [o]ff each [o]ther [o]n [o][c]c[a]s[i]on, [a]nd, with th[a]t in mind, wasn't [f]alse[ly] [c][l][ai]m[i]ng toba[cc][o] [p][o]verty in [s]uch [a] [s]etting [a] [f][aux] [p][a]s of the

[h]ighest order? [H]a[k]im [c]ame [a]round to the ide[a] it was as he [s]m[o][k]ed t[wo] [b][r]and [n][ew] [c]iga[r]lettes on the [p]ati[o] f[r]om his [b][r]and [n]ew [o]ver[p][r]iced [p][a][c]k, [a][f]ter [s]omewhat [s]ar[c][a]sti[c]ally o[ff]e[r]ing the m[a]n in the [r]oyal attire [a]n [a]dd[i]t[i]onal [c][i]ga[r]ette [a][f]ter h[i]s [s]o-called l[a]st [o]ne w[a]s [d][o]ne, [a]s he [d][r][a]nk f[r]om the [w]h[i]te [w][i]ne the bartender was [n][i]ce e[n]ough to [k]eep on [i]ce for him [w]hile he [w][ai]t[e]d [a]t the [c][a]mel [s]t[a]t[i]on [f]or [u][p]wards [o]f [a] hal[f] an hour, [p]urely [o]ut [o]f [s][p]ite.

η/ω 1374:1805 .761

2.12 At [th]e age of [th]irty five, [w]h[i]ch [i]s, [w]e k[n][o]w, [o]n[l][y] tru[l][y] d[i]v[i]s[i][b]le [b]y the [n]um[b]ers se[v]en and f[i]ve, [i]t's [a]lm[o]st [i]ne[v]ita[b]le to [a][rr][i]ve at the [r]ea[l][i]zation [th]at [th]e [s]k[y] [i]t[s]elf [i]s [l][i]ttle more than a t[i]n roof, Ha[k]im [c]on[s]i[d]ered [a]s he [s][a]t on the p[a]tio [ey]eing the [d]ouche [b][a]g in the ro[y]al att[i]re [w]al[k] a[w][ay], [th]at [b]e[y]ond [th]e [s][k]y our [s]en[s]es [r]e[l][ay] to us on[l][y] mi[r]ages and [l]u[r]id [f]al[s][i][f]i[c]ations, pure[l][y] [o]ut of habit, [w][i]th n[o] [i]ll [i]ntent [w]hat[s][o]e[v][er]. It's ne[v][er] been w[i]th [i]ll [i]nt[e]nt that our [s][e]n[s]es have utter[l][y] [l][e]t us down in [n][ea]rl[y] [e]ve[r][y] [r]egard, [i]t's [s][i]mply the [i]ntr[i]n[s][i][c] [n]ature of things that [c]ause our [s]en[s]es to [r]e[l]ay [l]u[r][i]d fal[s][i]ties. [S][a]ns [m]e[m]ory there [c][a]n't be [t][i]me. At the [t]ender age of [th]irty [f][i]ve all of [th][i]s w[i]thout [f]ail be[c]omes

[c]lear to you, [th]at every[th][i]ng [i]s ae[s][th][e]t[i]cs [i]n a [c]ertain [s][e]nse, [th]at [th]e [s][k]y [i]t[s]elf [i]s ju[s]t a t[i]n roof, [a]nd Ha[k]im went [b][a]ck in[t]o the [b]ar [t]o [a]sk the aged [b]ar[t]ender, who it [t]urned out was [o]nly a [c]ou[p]le [y]ears [o]lder than him, for just [o]ne [m]ore [w]ine, [w]here a [y]ounger [m][a]n and his [w][f]e [c]om[p][l]ained a[b]out [b]eing [b][a]nned [f]r[o]m [s][o]me [l]o[c]al e[s]ta[b][l]ish[m]ent. The young [m][a]n [c][a][l]c[u]l[ated how [m][u]ch [m][o]ney he spent [a]t thi[s] e[s][t]a[b][l]ish[m]ent, how [m][u]ch [m][o]ney they were [f]or[s][a][k][i]ng [b]y [s]o un[f]airly [b][a][nn]ing him, [n]ever t[a][k][i]ng [a] [s]e[c]ond to [a][n]alyze whe[th]er [th]e [a][m]ount of [m]oney he [w]as [s][p]en[d]ing at [o]ne [b]ar [w]as e[v]en ad[v]isa[b]le to [d]i[s][c][l]ose in [p][u][b][l][i]c, w[i]th [c][o]m[p][l]ete [s]tr[a]ngers. There was a [c][r]i[m]inal [e][l][e][m]ent to th[i]s b[a]n[i]sh[m]ent [i]n [th]e eyes of [th]is young [m]an, [a]s th[i]s was a [s]itu[a]tion where he was [c]omp[l][e]te[l][y] [s][a]ns fault, where this e[s]t[a]blishment had [a][c]ted [e][rr]o[n]eous[l][y], to the [e]xt[e]nt the [e][rr]or was [a][c]tual[l][y] [c][r][i]m[i][n]al. He'd [n]e[v]er [b]e [a][b]le to go [b][a][c]k to th[a]t [b]ar again. [B]ut would they [s]ur[v]ive e[c]o[n]omi[c]ally [s]ans his [p][a]tro[n]age? [W]h[e]n Ha[k]i[m] [w][e]nt down the [r]oad, [l][ea][v]ing the [r][i][v]eting [c]on[v]ers[a]tion [o]f the y[ou]ng man behind him, to h[i]s [d][i]s[m][a]y he [d][i][d]n't [f]ind a [s][i]ngle wai[f]u [m][a][r]au[d]ing [a][r]ound the [c][i]ty, the [c]lit[y] was [c]omp[l][e]te[l][y] void of [a]n[y] [a]nd all waif[u]s. No, just [s]ome mi[dd]le-aged [d][u]des [d][i][s][c]u[ss]ing the [c]u[rr]ent [s]tate of the [F]at[i][m][i]d [m][i][i]ta[r]y. How [t]o [t][r]an[s]cend the [t]in [r][oo][f]

[w]as al[w]ays a matter of g[r]eat [d]i[s]p[u]te, and a [r]e[c]u[rr]ing voice [w]ould [w]hi[s][p]er to [H]a[k][i]m [i]n [h][i]s [s][ee][p] that very [n]ight [th]at [th]ere was [n]othing [b]eauti[f]ul in [th]e [s]t[r][ee]ts [th][a]t [a][f]ter[n]oon for a [s][ple[c]i][f][i]c [r][ea]son, [b]e[c]ause the [d]igestion of [b]eauty at [c][er]t[ai]n times [c]an make a [p][er][s][o]n [e]x[c][e][p]t[i]onally [d]ly[s][p][e][p]t[i]c, this was [p][r]ot[e][c]t[i]on. H[a][k][i]m [a]g[r][ee]d, [s]t[i]ll ta[s]ting the [s][i]x [f]ala[f]els he [s][c]ar[f]ed down on his way home even a[f]ter br[u]shing his [t]eeth m[u][t]iple [t]imes, [v]iol[ent]l[y] [v]a[c]i[ll][a]ting [i]n h[i]s own w[ay] [e]ven as h[e] r[e]-en[t]ered in[t]o a [c]alm, [d][ee][p] s[l][ee][p] where [h][e]d [h]ave a [r]e[c]u[rr]ent [d][r][ea]m of [k][i][ll][i]ng h[i]m[s]elf to [c][l]eanse h[i]m[s]elf. [H]a[k]im would [k][i]ll [h][i]m[s]elf [i]n h[i]s d[r]eam, yet a[f]terward he'd [s][u]b[s][i][s]t [i]n a [s][u][p]rior [f]orm, [p]o[s]t [s]u[cc]e[ss][f]ully [k][i]ll[i]ng h[i]m[s]elf, [v]oid of the [m]e[m]o[r]ies that [h]aunted [h]im, de[p]ri[v]ing him of a [p]ea[c]e[f]ul [s]lumber. He [q]u[e]stioned th[e]se [v]oices h[e] [f][r][e][q]u[e]ntly [h]eard [i]n h[i]s [h]ead, their o[r][i]g[i]n, the ones [c]on[s]tantl[y] [c]a[ll][i]ng h[i]m un[t][i]l, [f]inally able to ass[er]t [c]on[t]r]ol of his envi[r]on[m]ent, he [s][c][r][ea]med A[l]ah is One [r]ep[ea]tedl[y], un[t]il the [c]on[t]ain[m]ent of his [d][r][ea]m was [c][l][ea]nsed by his y[e][ll]ing. With Ha[k][i]m in a [s]t[a]te of g[r][ea]t [d]i[s]t[r]e[ss] and only hal[f]-awa[k]e, The [P][r]o[ph]et [M]uha[m]med a[pp]eared b[r][ie][f][l][y], as a [m]i[rr]or [i][m][a]ge of h[i]ms[e][f], and [u]ttered n[o]thing he [c]ould [r]e[c]o[l]l[e][c]t.

3.1 Enz[o] t[o]ld Daria [h]ow [h]e was [c]on[s]i[d]ering that it [w]as [p]erh[a]ps [w]ith a tyr[a][n]ni[c]al ex[a][c]t[n]ess th[a]t h[e] [p]ro[c][ee][d]ed about his l[i][f]e, [r][i]ght up th[r]ough [h]is w[ee]kl[y] [h][i]gh [f][a]des, that he [c]on[s]idered a l[a]tent geom[e]t[r]i[c]al [t]ly[r]anny to [b][e] [p]o[s]si[b][l][y] [r]uth[l]e[s]s[l][y] gu[i]ding his l[i]fe as he [t]oo[k] [q]ui[c]k note of a [q]u[i]te [s][i]zeable [p]o[s]terior in [l][i]ght b[l]ue jeans that [w][a]s [w][a]ll[k]ing [r][i]ght [p][a]st him [a]s he a[p]proached the large [b]r[i][c]k [b]u[i][l]d[ing] that [c]ontained the [D]e[p]art[m]ent [f]or E[c]ono[m]i[c] [D]evelo[p][m]ent on a sunny [F]ri[d]ay [a][f]ternoon [a]t [f]our [p]m on the [d][o]t. [D][a]ria knew Enzo wal[k]ed there [t]o [t]ry and [s][l][i]p the [c][l]er[k] a [q]u[i][c]k [s]o-[c]alled [b][u]sin[e]ss [r]egistr[ation] [f][or]m [b]ut [b]e[f]or)e she [c]ould [c]on[f]ir]m what she already k[n]ew [f]or a [f]act Enz[o] went on [t]o [n][o]te that it [t][ur]ned out the [c]ity [c][l]erks' o[f]fi[c]es [c][l][o]sed hal[f] an ho[ur] [ear][l]y [f]or their [s][o]-[c]alled [s]ummer hours, wh[i]ch as [i]t [s][o] h[a]ppened [w]as right [a]t [f]our pm. Enz[o] m[u]ttered [w]h[a]t the [f][u][c]k be[f]ore [c]on[t]inuing on [t]o [n][o]te that he [w]as [w]earing his [n]ew [t]an [W]al[m]art [m]esh [b]as[k]et[b]all shorts [w][i]th h[i]s [w]hite [v][a]ns [a]s the [v]oluptuous [w]oman [w]al[k]ed p[a]st him, by [c]ont[r]a[st], [w]ea[r]ing [w]ire [r]immed gl[a]sses on the t[i]p of her th[i]n nose, [s]u[r]ounded on th[r]ee [s][i]des [b][y] [c]ur[l]y [b][l]a[c]k [l]o[c]ks. A[c]cording to Enzo [s]ometimes it w[a]s j[u]st p[r]e[f]e[r]a[b]le to [s]it on a [r]oo[f] with your shirt o[f]f

and think a[b]out [f][u][c]k[ing] [n][o]th[ing] [f]or a l[i]ttle b[i]t [e]ven [i][f] [i]t was [f][i]ve [f]i[f]t[ee]n on a [F]r[i]day a[f]ter[n]oon, there was, [a]fter all, [r]e[p]etition and [n]um[b]er, he said to [D]a[r]ia, [b][u]t [d]id all [n][u]m[b]ers [a]ctuall[y] [r]e[p][ea]t? [D]a[r]ia [n][o]ted she'd [b]een [n][o]ti[c]ing a[n] i[n][s]ane amount of [f][i]ve [f][i]f[ty] [f][i]ves and [t][wo] [t]wenty [t][wo]s p[l]us [e][l][e]ven [e][l][e][v]ens and e[v]en one [e][l][e]vens of [l][a]te but to d[a]te she'd [r]e[f][r][ai]ned [f][r]om any a[tt]empt [t][o] g[oo]gle an explan[a]tion. B[u]t w[a]sn't it the [c][a]se, Enzo in[t]erje[c]ted, [s]in[c]e they'd g[o]tten [o]nto the [t][o][p]i[c] of [s]e[q]uen[c]es of in[t]egers any[w][ay], [w]asn't it the [c][a]se [th]at [th]e [s]e[c]ond [c]ousin as a [c]on[c]eptual art[i][f][i]ce was [c]o[l]e[c]tive[l][y] a[cc]e[l]e[r]ating the down[f]all of their [c]ount[r][y], I mean, Enzo [s][ai]d, [s][e][c]ond [c]ousins [a]re in a[gg]re[g]ate [a]ll b[a][s]i[c]ally [c]u[nts], r[i]ght? In Enzo's m[i]nd it was the [c][l]ear[l]y the [c][a]se [th]at [th]e [s]e[c]ond [c]ousin was [b]a[s]i[c]al[l]y obje[c]tional[b]le, a p[i]t[i]ful [c][l][i]ng[i]ng to a [s]o-[c]alled b[l]ood[l]ine that [w]as, even [w]hen more potent, [s]till [s][o]mewh[a]t am[b][i]guous [i]f [n][o]t [n][o]n[s]i[c]al. [W]hat [w]as [b]lood any[w]ay? [D]a[r]ia, for her [p][ar]t, [d]idn't have a [p]arti[c]u[l]ar[l]y [s]trong o[p]inion on the [c]on[c]e[p]t of the [s]e[c]ond [c]ousin [o]ne [w]ay or [th]e [o][th]er, [b]ut she adm[i]tt[e]d that she [d][i][d][n]'t have as [b][i]g [o]f [a] f[a]mily [a]s Enzo, which [p]erha[p]s [p]layed a [p]art [i]n her [q]u[i]zz[i][c]al n[o]nch[a][a]nce? N[o], Enz[o] went on, the [s]e[c]ond [c]ousin w[a]s [s]omething [i]nd[i][c]at[i]ve of a [s]tru[c]tu[r]al [r]ot, in f[a]ct it was [s]omething th[a]t [p]ro[b]a[b][l][y] n[ee]ded [a]ctual

[l]egis[l]ation to [b][e] [p]ro[p]er[l][y] [c]om[b][a]tted, [b]e[c]ause these [s]e[c]ond [c]ousins - they wouldn't just [r]e[s]cind of their [o]wn a[cc]ord. [N][o], Enz[o] and Da[r]i[a] [b][o]th, they [n]eeded to [s]tart [p]let[i][i]on[i]ng [l][o][c]al [r]e[p][r]esenta[t]ives [t]o [a][b][o][i]sh this [c]o[n]c[e]pt of the [s]e[c]ond [c]ousin.

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3.12 It was [a]b[u]ndant[l]y [c][l]ear to Enz[o] [th]at [th]ere was a [r]e[c]u[rr][ing] s[p][l]itt[ing] [i]n[t][o] [t][wo] that was [p]erh[a][p]s the m[o]st ne[f]arious [a]ct of all, [th][a]t [th]e [f]irst of [th]is or [th]at in[e]vita[b]ly would [b]e[c]ome [e]x[t]ended [t]o the [s]o-[c]alled [s]e[c]ond of the [s][a]me [s][u]b[s]tr[a]te, [b][u]t why? It was th[i]s counting, th[i]s [l]ur[i]d [l][i]near [e]xt[e]nsion that [p]erha[p]s off[e]nd[e]d [E]nz[o] the m[o]st, to which [D]a[r]ia, th[i]nk[i]ng a[b]out her [b]ok choy with [a]n un[e]r[r][i][ng] s[e]nse of [d][r][ea]d, was on[l][y] [p]artial[l][y] [p]laying a[tt]ention [t]o. They'd [f]undamentally [f]orgotten [s][o]mething a[b]out n[u]m[b]er, Enzo [s]aid, they'd be[c][o]me a[d]di[c]ted to [d]ivi[d]i[ng] [a]nd [a][dd]i[ng], ex[t]en[d]i[ng] [a]nd sub[t]r[a][c]ti[ng], in[s]tead of fo[c]u[s]ing on [c]on[c]e[p]ts more [s]t[ee]p[led] in [p]urit[y]. [E]nz[o] f[e]lt as [th][ou]gh [th]ey were meant to [r]ecall [s]omething e[s]sential a[b]out [n][u]m[b]er, [b][u]t [n][ow], [s]omeh[ow], that was im[p]os[s]i[b]le [f]or [th]em, [th]at [th]ey'd [f][or]gotten [f][or] good [a]n [e][s]e[n]tial a[s]pect of num[b]er, which [m][a]de [e]very [s]itu[a]tion they [e]ncountered i[m]m[e]asura[b][l][y] [m]ore [b][l][ea]k. The [s]e[c]ond

[c]ousin it[s][e]lf was nothing beyond a [s][y]mptom of a much greater [s][i][c]k[n]ess, the [c]o[m]m]on [c]old of [c]ounting [n]um[b]ers, [o]f [b]e[c]o[m]ing u[n]i[t]a[r][y] un[t]il they [r][ea]ched [i]nf[i][n][i]ty. [N]othing was [m]ore [i]nf[i]n[i]te [th]an [th]e u[n]i[t]a[r]y, [y]et the [u]ni[t]ary bec[o][m]ing [i]nf[i]n[i]te was [u]tt[er]ly [a]b[s][ur]d! Eve[r]ything was [s][p][i]t [i]n[t][o] [t][wo], or [s][p][i]t [i]nto th[r]ee, [a]ll [a]round them were [d]o[p]pelg[a]ngers [a]nd [t]r[i]n[i]ti[e]s of [w]h[a]t [w][a]s [w]h[a]t. Mu[t]ipl[i]c[i]t[y] [c]oul[d]n't ex[i][s]t th[i][s] way! Enzo [c]on[t]inued as [D]a[r]ia [s]imul[t]aneou[s]ly [c]on[s][i][d]ered b[r][i]ng[i]ng up a few [c]on[c]erns she h[a]d with [a]n [e]m[p]loyee she'd [c]on[t]r[r][a][c]ted [s][p]e[c][i]f[i][c]ally in a bo[t][a][n]i[c]al m[a][n]ner, but who, g[i]v[e]n h[i]s unorthodox methods, had [s]tarted to [c]on[c]er[n] h[er] given [s]ome of his [m]ore li[c]entious ha[b]its. Of [c]our[s]e [b][o]tan[y] and [p]er[s]onal [m]atters were [p][r]o[b]a[b]il[y], in [m]ost [c]a[s]es, [c]on[s]idered [c]om[p][l][e]te[l][y] [s]e[p]ar[a]te [i]ssues, but [d][ue] t[o] the [s][p]e[c][i]f[i]c nat[ur]e of th[i]s [p]lar[t][i]cul[ar] job it had [b]egun to [b]other [D]aria just [s][l]ight[l]y. Enzo, for his [p][a]rt, had [a]n [e]n[t]ire [p]ack of [c]liga[r]ettes [i]n h[i]s [d][r]awer, he [s]aid to [D]a[r]ia, [b]e[c]ause he'd [b]rought a whole [p]a[c]k [th]e o[th]er [d]ay, ju[s]t [p]urely out of [s][p]ite. [D]id she [w]ant [t]o go [o]ut [o]n[t]o the [d]e[c]k and [w]ha[c]k a puff or [t]wo f[r]o[m] o[n]e? Was she [d][r][u]n[k] en[ough] yet? To [s]mo[k]e a [q]u[i][c]k c[i]g? Be[c]ause she [c][l]ear[l]y wasn't [l]i[s]te[n]ing to a[n]y of the fu[ck][i]ng sh[i]t he was [s]aying a[b]out int[e]gers or [s][e][c]ond [c]ousins, a[b]out the non[s][e]n[s]i[c]al d[i]v[i]s[i]on of [e]ve[r]ything

[a]ll [a][r]ound them! No Daria [w]as, she [w]as [i]st[e]ning ([k]ind of ...), it was [j]ust th[a]t she was [j]ust a t[a]d [p]r[e]o[cc]u[p]ied, [e]ven [b]efore [c]oming [b]y she'd [b]een wal[k]ing through a [s]mall [c]ourtyard [i]n the [c][i]ty, [t]a[k]ing [n][o]te of the [b][i]g [t][r]ees g[r]o wing [n]ext to the large [b][r][i][c]k [c]ondo [b]u[i]ldings, [c]ont[e]mpl[a]ting [c]o[nn][e][c]ting with [n][a]ture, but also w[i]th [i][n]a[n][i]mate obj[e]cts as [w][e]ll? It [w]as [o]ne thing to [c]o[nn]e[c]t with [n]ature and trees [a]nd [p][l][a]nts, th[a]t was almost [c][l]iche, [b]ut what a[b]out [c]o[nn]e[c]ting w[i]th [i][n]a[n][i][m]ate objects [m][a]de of [p][l]a[s]tic by w[al]ge [s][l][a]ves in East [A]sia? Sh[e]'d r[e]cent[y] a[tt]ended d[i]v[i]ne [i]turgy [f]or the [f]irst [t][i]me in ages, she [t][o]ld Enz[o], and while o[cc]asionally [s]ta[r]ing u[p] at the [s]e[r]ies of i[c]ons [p]eo[p]le would have [i]nd[i][s][c]r[i]m[i]nately [k][i]lled [p]eo[p]le [f][or] w[or][sh]i[pp]ing just [a] [f]ew [sh][or]t [c]enturies [a]go, she [c]ould have [s][w]orn a [s]et of voi[c]es [w]ere [s]pea[k]ing to her, [s][o]lely in her [m][i]nd, [c]om[f]or[ting] [h]er but al[s][o] in[f][or][m]ing [h]er [th]at [th]ere would be an u[p][c]oming t[i]me [th]at [th]ey'd [s][n]a[p] their [f]ingers and she'd [f]i[n]al[l][y] re[t]urn [t]o them, [a]s if th[a]t [w]as [w]here she [a]ctual[l][y] be[l]onged, [i]n th[i]s [p][l]ane she [c]ould [h]ard[l]y [c]om[p]re[h]end, yet [c]o[mm]uni[c][a]ted to her with no [p]r[o][b]l[e]m. She [e]xited her [b][o]d[y] just [m]o[m]enta[r][l][y], f[i]lled w[i]th [p]ure [r]e[l]ief, [th]en [th]e b[e]ings [r][e]ite[r]ated [a] [t][i]me would [a][rr][i]ve [w]hen they [w]ould s[n]ap their [f]ingers and she'd [r]e[t]urn, [f]i[n]ally, [t]o them. [P]erh[a][p]s she'd h[a]ve [d]i[s][c]ou[nt]ed the en[c][ou]nter if she h[a]dn't, on a

whim, she [t][o]ld Enz[o], [d]e[c]i[d]ed to g[o] up [t]o [t]a[k]e [c]ommunion with her [d]ad, [a]nd [a]s her turn f[i]nally a[r]r[i]ved to im[b][i]be the [b]lood of [C]h[r][i][s]t Him[s]elf, she [n]ot[i][c]led [s][i]tt[i]ng [c]alm[ly] to the [l]e[f]t of the p[r]iest [w]as a [W]ind Tun[n]el b[r][a]nd [f][l]oor [f][a]n. The [e]x[a]ct same [f]loor [f][a]n she'd, [a][f]ter [t]a[k]ing [e]n[t]irel[y] [t]oo [m]an[y] [m][u]shrooms [o]ne par[t]i[c]ular [e]vening [e]ons ago, [e]ng[a]ged [i]n [a]n [e]xten[d]ed [c]onvers[a]tion w[i]th [r]egar[d]ing the t[r]ue n[a]ture of things, [d]u[r]ing which a [c]ertain [c][l]a[r]it[y] [d]e[s]cen[d]ed [u][p]on her, final[l][y] [u]n[d]er[s]tan[d]ing, with the [u]t[m]ost [p]u[r]ity, her [t][r]ue o[r][i]g[i]n and, [i]n [t]urn, the [p][r]i[m]al [s]our[c]e of all things.

η/ω 817:118 .731

4.1 Ultimatel[y], whe[th]er [th]e [c]ults of Aph[r]odit[e] eng[a]ged in [s][a][c][r]ed p[r]o[s][t]itution or n[o]t is [s][o]mething [s][c]h[o][l]ars of h[i][s]to[r][y] are [s][t][i][l] [b][i]tter[l][y] [t]orn [a][b]out, [b]ut there ex[i]st [p]erha[p]s [l]eg[i]t[i]mate [r][e]a]sons to [a]g[r][ee] with [ei]ther c[a]m[p]. On the one h[a]nd, if the Greeks engaged in, what [c]ertain [p]art[i][c][i][p][a]nts of the [S][y]m[p]osium at [l][ea][s]t [b]e[l][ie]ved to [b][e], an a[b]utting [s]a[c][r]ed [f]orm of [p][e][d]e[r][a]st[y], th[e]n [i]t [r][e]all[y] th[a]t [f]ar[f][e]tched to [s]ugg[e]st [d]judes [i]n [C][or][i]nth were [b]anging wh[or]es in [a]n [A][ph][r]o[d]ite tem[p]le, [b][u]t j[u][s]t [i]n an [i]nten[s]e[l]y [r][i]tua[l][i][s]t[i]c way? [I]sn't [i]t [p]o[s]si[b]le A[ph][r]od[i]te w[a]s, in [s][o]me [s]en[s]e, a [p][r]e-wa[i][f][u]? The t[r][u]e o[r][i]g[i]n of the

[w]aifu as [w]e k[n]o[w] it. L[a]ter that [n]ight, at I[t][ae]won P[o][c]hu in [K]ore[a][t]own, [A]ra[q][i] was [s]urre[p][t]itiousl[y] [s]aving [h]en[t]ai j[plegs on[t]o [h]is [c]ame[r]a [r]oll as they [s][a]t [a]t the [s]mall window table over[l]oo[k]ing W[e][s]t Thirty [S][e][c]ond, [s][p][l][i]tt[i]ng an eel [a][pp]etizer with [J][o] Yu-[R]i, who [a]fter [a] [c][o]u[p]le shots of [S][o][j]u, was [s]udden[l][y] [m][or]e f[or]th[c]o[m]ing than sh[e]d been [p][r][e]v[i]ous[l][y]. [U]n[a][w]are of yet [a][s]o [u]n[c]on[c]erned [w]ith [A][r]a[q][i] [s]aving [h]en[t]ai jpegs [i]n[t]o [h][i]s [ph][o]ne's [c]ame[r]a [r][o]ll, J[o] Yu-[R]i [f]ound her[s]el[f] more [c]om[f]ortable with, you kn[o]w, shar[ing] her [f]eel[ing]s [a][f]ter [a][b]out h[a][f] [a] dozen sh[o]ts [o]f [S]oju. Was she her[s]elf [p]o[ss]i[b]ly e[n]g[a]ged i[n] a[n] ... ite[r][a]tion of [s][a][c]red [p][r]o[s]titution? No! Em[p][l][oy]ing some [G][r]ee[k] demi[g]o[d] to [r]ub his [c][o][c]k on your b[o][k] ch[oy] [p][l]ants [w]asn't - [w]ell, she [d]i[d]n't know [w]h[a]t it [w][a]s ex[a][c]tl[y], she m[u]ttered to [A]r[a][q][i]. May[b]e [a]vant-g[a]rde [b][o]tan[y]? [B]ut [i]n [a]ny [c]a[s]e def[i][n][i]tel[y] [n][o]t [p][r][o]s[t]itution! A[r]a[q][i] [n]oted that: wasn't it [p][o][s]sible th[a]t [s]ome thing or [s]ome one [h][a]d [s]ome [s]ort of, you kn[o]w, [h][o]ld on [P]ria[p][u]s? That mayb[e] the [d]ude just n[ee][d]ed help, [s]ome a[s]s[i][s]t[a]n[c]e, that all th[i]s [sh][i]t [sh]e was [s]o con[c]erned about, [v]is-a-[v][i]s his [r][e]cent whore [m][o]nge[r][ing] was the [r]esult of [c]ertain [s][o]meth[ing] [h]a[v]ing a [v]i[c]e g[r]ip [h]old on [h]im? [W]ell, [c][l][ea]r[l][y] he [w]as a [l]ittle off-[k]ilter! she said, [th]at m[u]ch [th]ey [c]ould [b]oth agree on! [B][u]t the e[ss]en[c]e of that [c]ond[i]t[i]on, the [c]ond[i]t[i]on of

[b]eing h[y]p[n]otized [i]n [a]n a[b]utting [m][y][s]t[i][c]al [m]a[nn]er, [w]as she the m[o]st a[p]p[r][o][p][r]iate [o]ne to [s]ay, or was it [p]o[s]sible she [d]i[d]n't [a][c]tually [c]are, [th]at [th]is was an [e]x[c][l]u[s]ive[l]y [c][a][p]ita[l]i[s]t [e]n[d]eavor, [th]at her [r][o]le in [th]e wh[o]le m[a]tter was s[o]le[l]y [r][a]tiona[l]ist, th[a]t [a]s [l]ong as her bo[k] choy im[p]arterd a [c]om[p]let[i]tive leg u[p] in the h[ea]t of [K]or[e]atown she [d]i[d]n't [c]are [o]ne [w]ay or [th]e o[th]er. And, [b]y [th]e [w][ay], [th]e [b]lok choy at I[t][ae][w]on [w][a]s [a][t]r[o]cious, she n[o]ted, [s][o] [a]t least th[a]t was good! The f[a][c]t of the m[a]tter was Jo Yu-[R][i] [c]ould d[e]f[i]n[i]tel[y] [q]u[e]stion how she [q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te a[rr]ived here, [s]o to [s]peak, a [b]udding, [b]arely [s]e[m]i-[s]u[c]ce[s]sful, [r]e[s]tau[r]aun[t]eur [i]n [M][i]d[t]own, a J[o]hn[s]on and [W]hales [d]r[o]pout and Food Net[w]or[k] jun[k][ie], hel[p][l]ess[l][y] [p]e[r]using [C][r][ai]g's [L]i[s]t ads, [d][e][s][p]e[r]ate for a [l][e]g u[p] in the [m]o[s]t v[i]c[i]ously [c]om[p][e]t[i]tive [r][e][s]tau[r]ant [m][e]t[r][o][p][o][l]is [p]erh[a][p]s on the [p][l][a]net, when she [s]t[u]m[b]led [u][p]on [P]ria[p]us's [p][l][i]ght, [d]e[c][i][d]ing [t]o [t]a[k]e it on [a]s a [b]o[t][a]ni[c]al [a]dv[a]ntage. [P]eo[p]le would [a]lways note in [a]we [h]ow [h]er blue eyes [d]i[s][p][l]ayed a [c]ertain re[dd][i]sh gold t[i]nt a[b]out them, [p]o[s]si[b][l]y [s]ome [f]aint [S][p]a[n]ish [b][l]ood on her [F]i[l]i[p]i[n]o mother's [s]ide? It [s][ee]med her [K]o[r][ea]n-A[m]e[r]i[c]an i[d]entity [w]as al[w]ays [s][l][i]ght[l]y un[d]er[m][i]ned b[y] th[i]s [C]atho[l][i][c][i]sm of her a[d]o[l][e][s]c[e]n[c]e. [C]atho[l][i][c][i]sm has a [t][e]n[d][e]n[c]y of [m]a[k]ing

[e]ve[r]y[o]ne [a] fourth gene[r]ation
I[t]alian-A[m]e[r]i[c]an, and Jo Yu-Ri f[e]lt this [t]ugging
[a]t [t]imes [a]s w[e]ll, [b]ut then again, it wasn't [q]u[i]te
[1][i]ke the g[uy] ne[c]e[ss]ari[ly] owed her a[n]ything,
[b]e[c]ause there w[a]s [n]othing in their [c]ontra[c]t
([w]hich [w]as [n]on-ex[i]s[t]e[nt]) that [s][t][i][p]ulated
[h]ow [h][e] should [s][p]end his f[r]ee [t]ime. Yet,
[A][r]a[q]i in[t]erje[c]ted, [i]s there [n]ot an [i]m[p]li[c]i[t]
[a]g[r]eement i[n] a[n]y [b]usy[n]ess [r]e[l]a[ti]on[sh]i[p] to,
you know, [l]ike, he [s][ai]d, wh[e]n George [C]o[s]t[a]nza
[b]e[c]ame a h[a]nd [m]odel in [S]tein[f]eld - he wasn't
[t]rave[l]ing a[r]ound [l]aying [b]r[i]c[ks] and d[i]pp[i]ng
his [t]oes [i]n[t]o a[m]ateur [b]oxing [i]n h[i]s [f]ree [t]ime!
Ye[s], the Co[s]t[a]nza [a]n[a]logy was an [a]pt [o]ne
here, yet again there [w]as the [q]u[e]stion of the
[e]s[s]e[n]c[e] of [P]ria[p]us [h]im[s][e]lf, [h]ow [h]e
[i]n[t]er[a]cted, or [w]as [i]n[t]er[a]cted [w][i]th, [i]n the
[c]or[p]or[real] [s]phere, which be[c]ame [a]n
[i]n[c]r[ea]sing[l][y] [l]atent issue as the two
[r]e[q]u[e]s[ted] a [s][e][c]ond [b]o[tt]le of [S][o][j]u. It was
p[o][s]si[b]le, [J][o] Yu-Ri [c]on[s]idered, that his [c]o[c]lk
wasn't ex[i]st[e]nt [i]n the w[ay] she m[ay] have
[i]n[i]t[i]ally th[ou]ght.

η/ω 869:1111 .782

5.1 Of [c]ourse Ha[k]im [e]n[t]ered the [e]s[t]ab[l]ishment
[l]oo[k]ing sole[l][y] for [A]m[i]n[a], [a]s [a]t the time h[e]
was [c]om[p][l]e[te]l[y] [c]a[p]tivated [b]y her [b]eauty,
unw[i]ll[i]ng to [p][ar]t w[i]th th[i]s [p][ar]t[i][c]ular
[i]m[a]ge of her [f]orm that [r]e[l]ent[l]ess[ly] [r]i[c]ocheted

w[i]th[i]n the [c]on[f][i]nes of his m[i]nd, [c]a[p]tivated, not like he'd [b]een once [b]e[f]ore, [b]y the [c]om[p]a[r]ative witch[c][r]a[f]t of [c]le[v]er [c]on[v]er[s][a]t[i]on. [N]o, in[s]tead [H]akim [f]ound [h]im[s]elf [h]yp[n]otized [b]y the [b]lunt [p]lure [f]orm of her [b]eauty, with [n]o [e]d[i][f][i][c][a]t[i]on or [e]xt[r]a[p]o[l][a]t[i]on, with [n]o [c]a[p]itu[l][a]t[i]on to [r][ea]son - or [e]v[e]n to [f][ee][i]ng [f]or th[a]t m[a]tter! It was [s]im[p][l]y the [c]a[s]e [th]at [th]ere was [n]o in[t]er[l][o][c]utor, [n][o]t even a[n]y [r]em[o]te [c]on[t]em[p][l]ation of this ve[r]y [f]orm that s[o] [c][l][ea]r[l][y] [h][a]d w[a][f]ted [H]a[k][i]m [th]rough [th]e [d]ouble [d]oors th[a]t [e]vening, tr[y]ing to [f][i]nd what [c]ould [p]lerha[p]s b[e] d[ee]med a wai[f]u. Now of [c]ourse there's a [c]om[p]lex hei[r]archy of [r]ef[r][a][c]tion to [m][a]tters li[k]e th[e]se, of which [H]a[k][i]m, [h]aving [a] [d]e[c]ent [a][m]ount of [ph]ilo[s]o[ph]i[c]al e[d]u[c]ation, [w][a]sn't un[a][w]are of [p]er [s]e, ho[w]ev[er], [wh]eth[er] or n[o]t it [w]as at the [t][o][p] of his [m][i]nd at the [t][i]me is a [s]e[p]arate [m]atter en[t][i]rely (it wasn't!). There are [l]ong [r][a]nge co[r]re[l][a]tions - did a [f]e[m]ale [l]oo[k] [l]i[k]e s[o]me[o]ne [f]a[m]ill[ia]r, [f]rom [y]ears ago, li[k]e [p]erh[a][p]s ex[a][c]tly the [s]ame? [I]n f[a][c]t, [i]t was [p]os[s]ible Ha[k][i]m [a][c]tua[l][y] m[i]s[t]oo[k] th[i]s [p]lar[t]i[c]u[l]ar wai[f]u [f]or another [p][er][s]on en[t]ire[l]y at [f][ir][s]t, ba[c]k [f]rom his [s]e[c]on[d]ary [s][c]hool [d]ays. He wasn't even c[er]ta[i]n [i]t was h[er] when he [f][ir][s]t [s]t[u]mbled [u]pon her [f]orm. [H]e en[c]ountered [h]er [f]orm but [r]e[c]alled a [c]o-ed he [w]as [a][c]quainted [w]ith [f][r][o]m [s][o]me years [a]go,

[a][ss]u[m]ing in[c]or[r]e[c]tly [A][m]ina was in [f]a[c]t an old [f][r]iend. She in[f]ormed Ha[k][i]m so[f]tly her [n]ame was Am[i][n]a, as if [p][eo][p]le were [p]o[ss]ib[l]y [l][i]stening [i]n to each [s][y][l]able [u]ttered fr[o]m her exqu[i]s[i]te[l]y [p]ro[p]ortioned [l][i]ps, as [i][f] [s][p]e[c]i[f]i[c]ourt jesters [w]ere [w]aiting [i]n the [w][i]ng [t]o [t]ran[s][c]rime their [c]onver[s][a]t[i]on to [l][a]t[e]nt go[s]s[i]p [c]o[l]umn[i][s]ts. [S][c]ho[l]ars, [f]or their [p]art, would ultimate[l][y] [r]et[r]oa[c]tive[l][y] [c]on[f]i[late] [t]wo [p]o[ss]ible A[m]inas as well, [m]i[m]i[ck][i]ng un[i]n[t]entionall[y] their own [s]our[c]le of [s]tud[y]. The f[a][c]t th[a]t Ami[n]a was, [t]e[c]h[n]i[c]all[y] [s]pea[k]ing, you k[n]ow, an or[ph][a]n [i]n a [h]arem [d]i[d]n't [f]aze [H]ak[i]m in the l[ea]st, be[c]ause [a]ll [o]f the [p][r]ophets [p][r][e]v[i]ou[s][l][y] [n]oted hi[s]to[r]i[c]al[l][y] were, if [n]ot [p]u[r]e who[r]e-monge[r]s, then at [l]ea[s]t [s]ym[p]a[th]eti[c] to [th]e [p][l]ight of [th]e [p]ro[s]titute, the [p]ro[s]titute [s][i]m[p]ly ex[i][s]t[i]ng as [a]n [e]x[t][e]nsion of the [d][e][s]ti[t]ute and [d]own[t]ro[d]den as a wh[o]le. Hak[i]m [s]aw n[o] [r]ea]son to [d]iverge f[r]om his [p][r]e[d]e[c]e[ss]ors [i]n th[i]s [r]egard. There's a [c]ertain i[d][e]a [th]at [th]e [d][ee][p]est [r]ela[ti]on[sh]ips are the ones b[a]sed on [s]o-[c]alled illumin[n][a]ting [c]onver[s][a]tion, [p]redi[c][a]ted u[pl]on getting to [q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te k[n][o]w each other, [y]et [y]ou [c]ould [c]ounter [th]at [th]ere's a [c]tual[l][y] [n]othing to k[n]ow of us [r]eal[l][y] [a]t all, th[a]t we're [p]urely [r]e[f][r]a[c]tions of a [s]our[c]e [i]n[f][i]n[i]te[l]y [s][i]m[p][l]er than w[e] [s]ee]m to [b][e], that con[v]olutions are [b]ly th[eir] [v][er]y nature

[f][i][c]t[i]onal and [s]tee[p]ed in [h][y][p]o[c]r[i][s]y. [H]a[v]ing a gr[ea]t [c]on[v]ers[a]tion is the a[c]ute [f][a][ll]a[c][y] of [h]um[a]nit[y], [b]e[l]ie[v]ing you've di[s]co[v]ered [s]ome eternal [b]ond with [a]nother [p][er][s]on is [p][er]ha[p]s an [a][ff]ront to [A]llah [H]im[s]elf. [H][a]kim and [A]mina [d][i][d]n't [d][i][s]cuss them[s]elves at [f]ir[s]t, and when [th]ey did [th]ey st[r]uggled to [r]e[c]all who they even [w]ere, [w]hich [w]as a[p]p[r]o[p][r]iate. [H]a[k]im's [m]ad[n]ess, [h][i]s [i]n[d]i[s][c]r[i][m][i]n[a]te [k][i]ll[i]ng [o]f [o]thers was based [i]n th[i]s i[d]ea. There was an i[m]m[e]d[i]acy to their [c]o[m][i]ng [i]n[t]o [c]on[t]act [w]ith [o]ne another. Ha[k]im, [a]gain, [d]i[d]n't [c]ontem[p]late [A]mina's [b]eaut[y], [s]im[p]l[y] [b]e[c][au]se it w[a]s [a]n [i]m[p]o[s]si[b]le a[c]t. [M]e[m]o[r]y was [s]omething they [b]oth [s]t[r]uggled to inte[r]a[c]t with. [A][m]ina's beauty was [a] [m]otor [s][k]ill. Her out[l]ine was a re[c]o[l]e[c]tion [s][o]me[o]ne would n[e]ver be[c][o]me [c][o]nscious of, a [l][ur]id [m]e[m]ory a [p][er]son [c]om[p][l][e]te[l][y] forg[o]t a[b]out [b]ut [s]till [s]tayed hugging their [b][o]dy li[k]e a shar[k] jaw. It was the i[m][e]d[i]acy of A[m][i]na's [b]eaut[y] that [s][l][o]w[l][y] [b]egan to er[o]de Ha[k][i]m's [s][an]it[y]. [P]ossession [s][an]s [c]ontem[p]lation [c][an] [b]e [c]on[f]using [f]or [s]ome, Ha[k]im n[o]t ex[c]lu[d]ed, [b]e[c]ause we [o]ften [c]on[s]i[d]er [p]ossession a[k]in to gr[o]wing [o]ld and [d]e[c]aying with [s][o]me[o]ne, [r][e]p[e]ating [v]ows in[t]o an o[p]en air that, if [r][e]a[r]anged just s[l]ight[l]y, would [b]e[c]ome hea[v]y as [b][r]i[c]ks. At the [t]ime he [p]a[s]sed [th]rough [th]e [d]ou[b]le [d]oors to [p][a][c]e an eye on [h]er, [H]a[k]im in[c]orre[c]tly [a][s]sumed

[A]mina's [b]eauty to [b]e of [a] de[c][ay]ing n[a]ture, [b][a][s]i[c]a[ll]y that he [c]ould [p]oss[e][s]s her in a [c]ont[e]m[p][l]ative [s][e]n[s]e. Ha[k]im [m]ade a [p]oor a[tt][e]m[p]t [t]o seem [l]i[k]e he wasn't [l]oo[k]ing for [A][m]ina as he wal[k]ed [th]rough [th]e [d]ou[b]le [d]oors, her [b]eauty [a]lready [w][i]th[i]n h[i]m [b]ut in a [w]ay that [e]schewed [c]on[t]emp[l]ation [e]n[t]ire[l]y. Ha[k]im [l]u[s][t]ed for de[c]ay, to [p]oss[e]s[s] [b]eauty in a [c]ont[e]m[p][l]ative [s][e]n[s]e, to [r]e[c]lite vows in air [p]o[c]kets of [b][r]i[c]k, [a]nd [A]mi[n]a d[a]nced [a]round his [a]m[b]i[t]i[ons], to [b]e ho[n]est, [f]air[l][y] e[ff]ort[l]ess[l][y]. [H]ad [H]a[k]im [b]een [a][b]le to [p]ro[p]er[l]y [c]ontem[p][l][a]te this ve[r]ly [r][ea]l i[m]m[e]d[i]a[c][y] of A[m][i]na, then [p]erh[a][p]s his [s][a]nity wouldn't h[a]ve [s][l][o]w[l][y] er[o]ded in the m[a]nner [i]t ultim[a]te[l][y] d[i]d. When he exe[c]uted th[o]se [c][l][o]sest to h[im] on a wh[im], [i]n [i]n[c]rea[s]ing[l]y vio[l]ent [a]nd [d]r[a]stic ways, [s][l]i[c]ing off [h]eads and [s][l][i]tt[i]ng th[r]oats by the [h]un[d][r]eds, it was on[l][y] [b]e[c]ause Ha[k]im funda[m]en[t]a[ll][y] [m]i[s]i[n]t[er]p[re]ted the i[m]m[e]d[i]a[c][y] of A[m][i]na's [b]eauty. [H]ad [h]e [b]een a[b]le [p]er[c]eive her [b]eauty [i]n [i]ts [a]c]tual [s]en[s]e [a]s o[pp]osed [t][o] r[u]th[l]ess[l]y a[tt][e]m[p][t]ing [t]o [t][e]ther it [t]o his own [c]on[t][e]m[p][l]ation, then he p[r]o[b]a[b]ly wouldn't have gone [b]atshit [c][r]azy! [C]ourt off[c]ers would [b]e [b]eheaded [b]e[c]ause [A][m]ina's [b]eauty was [a] [m]otor [s][k]ill to Ha[k][i]m, wh[e]n he in[c]orr[e][c]t[l][y] [b]e[l]i[e]ved it to [b][e] a [r]o[m]an [à] [c][l]ef. Y[e]t isn't an [e][r]oded [s]anit[y] ne[c]e[s]sa[r][y]? [C]ould we [p]o[s]sibly [s]uggest that?

When [H]amza i[b]n A[l][i] [p]ro[c][l]aimed [H]a[k][i]m to [b]e divine in[c]arnate, was it [p]o[s]si[b]ly [b]e[c]ause [H]a[k]im [h]ad [s][a][c]ri[c]ed his own [s][a][n]ity to [m]a[k]e A[m]i[n]a's [b][eau]t[y], [w]hich [w]as of a [p][u]rel[y] [w][ai]fu var[i]ety, [d]e[c]ay? Ha[k]im would [d]i[s]a[pp]ear [y]ear[s] [l]ater, in [f][a][c]t [n]ot [l]ong [a][f]ter [t]wo [d]i[s]torted [A]mi[n]as [a][pp]leared [t]o h[i]m [i]n [d][r]eam, one [d]ark, [th]e o[th]er of a [l]ight [v]a[r][i]ety, yet [s]till e[v][en] th[en] he [r]em[ai]ned un[a]ble to [d][s]entangle [w]hat it [w]as he [s]aw. Y[e]t in [a]ny [c][a]se, all th[a]t's [p]erh[a][p]s a [b]etter topic for a [l]a[te]r [d][a]te, [b]e[c]ause [w]hen Ha[k]im [w]al[k]ed [th]rough [th]ose [d]ou[b]le [d]oors [h]is [s][a]nity [h][a]d alrea[d]y [s]tarted to [d]e[c]ay, his men[t]al [f]a[c]ul[t]ies were [a]l[r]ea[d]y in a [s]t[a]te of [d]i[s][a][r]r[ay]. As Ha[k]im [f]o[c]used his e[n]ergies on th[i]s [f]al[s]e [i][m]age of [d]e[c]aying with A[m]i[n]a his [s]a[n]ity it[s]el[f] [b]e[c][a]me [d]i[l]a[p]i[d][a]ted. H[a]mza ibn [A][l]i [c]alled him H[a][k]im [A][l]ah. It wasn't ne[c]e[ss]a[r]ily the [ph][r]ases Amina [r]e[p][ea]ted that [r]ea[ched] Ha[k]im, but [m]ore [s][o] the [m][o]de [i]n wh[i]ch she [s][ai]d th[e]m. She'd whi[s][p]lered [p]ure [n]on[s]ense to Ha[k]im that was [n][o]thing if [n][o]t t[o]tal[l]y [l]ogi[c]al [o]n[l]y a [f]ew years be[f]ore his [f]riend H[a]mz[a] would d[ee]m [h]im [H][a][k][i]m [A][l][a]h. Ha[k]im would [s][p]end his nights and w[ee][k]ends [l]oc[k]ed [i]n h[i]s th[r][ee] hun[d][r]ed s[q]uare foot [l][i]v[i]ng [s][p]a[c]e, [a]n [a][s]ceti[c] [d]e[c][i]s[i]on of his own [a][c]cord, and m[e][d]i[t]ate [e]x[t][e]nsivel[y] on the beaut[y] of [A]min[a], its [t][r]ue n[a]ture, [r][e]c[r][e]a[ting] her g[e]o[m]e[t][r]y [i]n h[i]s

[m]ind, [s][p][ea][k]ing with A[m]i[n]a [i]n h[i]s [i][m]agi[n][a]t[i]on, [c][r]e[a]t[i]ng an in[t]er[p]er[s]o[n]al [b][r]and of [b]eauty [b][a][s]ed en[t]irely [on] [c][on][t]em[p]l[a]tion, [o]ne [w]here they [w]ould de[c]ay [t]ogether in[t]o old [a]ge, a human sh[a][p]e that f[a]des with [t]ime, exi[s]ting [s]ole[l][y] [t]em[p]oral[l][y], [n]ever [e][m]a[n]ating [a][n]ywhere [e]xc[e]pt into the [m][e][m]o[r]ies and [ph]otog[r]a[ph]s wh[i]ch [d][i][s]tort and [f]al[s]i[f]y [e]ve[r][y]thing worth[y] of [ou]r [a]we. This was [h]ow [H]akim's sanity [e]roded. H[i]s a[s]ceti[c][i]sm [p][l][a]yed at [l]ea[s]t a [p]art [i]n h[i]s own [d]ec[ay], [b]ut mo[s]t[l]y [b]e[c]ause he [e]mp[li]oyed a[s]c[e]ti[c]ism to [c]reate [i][m][a]ges [i]n h[i]s [m]ind, [t]o d[e]lve in[t]o his [m][e][m]ories as i[m]ages as if th[ey] [c]on[t]ai ned [a]n [e]ss[e]nce [m]ore i[mm][e]d[i]ate than A[m][i]na's beauty. They [d]i[d]n't! [I]t's the [p][r]o[l][i][f]e[r]ation of the [i][m]agi[n]ed [i][m][a]ge that ul[t]i[m]ately [d][r]ives us [a]ll [b]a[s]i[c]ally in[s]ane [a]ll the [t]ime without [f]ail, [b]e[c]ause of the [d]i[s]tan[c]e we [p][l]ace [b]e[t]ween our[s]elves and the image, [b]y ne[c]e[s]sity of [c]ourse! [B]eing [d]eprived of the i[mm][e][d][i]ate [b]eauty of [A][m][i]n[a], Ha[k]im ch[o]se to [a][sc]eti[c]ally [a][tt]empt [t]o [r][e][c][r][e]ate it via his [o]wn [i][m]agi[n]ed [i][m][a]ges, [e]x[i]st[i]ng al[m][o]st [e]x[c][l]usivel[ly] w[i]th[i]n the [c][on]fines of his [o]wn [c][on]templative [s]tates, but where[a]s his ([s]ee[m]ing[ly] sh[a][ll]ow) in[t]er[r][a][c]tions with A[m]i[n]a [r]e[qu]ired [n]othing, they [m]erged in[t]o each o[th]er [s]ans [c]onscious [th]ought, his [i][m]agi[n]ed [i][m][a]ges [w]ere f[l][ee]ting, al[w][ay]s [d]e[c]ayed i[mm][e][d][i]ate[l][y] [p]ost-[c]on[s]tru[c]tion. At [f][i]ve

thirty [f][i]ve [p]m one a[f]ternoon [th]e [th]ought o[cc]urred to Ha[k]im [th]at he'd been [f][or]ty [f][or] his ent[i]re l[i]fe, [d]e[s][p]ite the [f]a[c]t he'd [d]i[s]a[p]pear [f][or]ever at ju[s]t thirty [f][i]ve. He was [s]t[i]ll ob[s]e[ss]ed w[i]th [d][i][s]tan[c]e. [N][o], it was [p]re[c]i[s]el[y] the [n][o]tion of [d]i[s]tan[c]e that [d]rove his [s]a[n]it[y] o[ff] the [f]u[ck]ing [c]li[ff]. Ha[k]im's g[r][ea]t[e]st c[r]e[a]t[i]on was [p]erha[p]s [D]ar al-Ilm, or it [c]ould have [p]o[ss]i[b]ly [b]een his own [i]nter[a][c]tion w[i]th h[i]s [s][a]nity, [b]e[c]ause [p]erha[p]s [b]y d[ea]ling with [A]m[i][n]a's [b]eauty in[c]o[rr]e[c]t[l][y] Ha[k]im ulti[m]ate[l][y] [a][rr]ived at the t[r]ue [n]otion of [b]eauty, [r]ather than [m]o[d]e[r]ate[l][y] [d]e[l]u[d]ing himsel[f] and [d]ecaying with a [p]a[l]ata[b]le [f]i[b], h[e] [s]t[a]m[p][e][d]ed [f]ull [f]or[c]e in[t]o [d]e[l]usion. He [l]ost [t]r[a][c]k of his [s][a]nity [c]om[p][l][e]te[l][y] [b]e[c]ause of it, in a [s][e]nse a[cc]urately [a][ss][e][ss]ing the false [n]otion of [A]mi[n]a's [b]eauty as an [i]tem you [c]ould de[c]ay [b]es[i]de. The [s][a][c][r]ed [p][r]o[s]titute [i]s [i]n[c][a][p]able of de[c][ay], there's in f[a][c]t [a]b[s]o[l]ute[l]y nothing more [a]b[s]urd than g[r][o]wing [o]ld with a [s][o]-[c]alled [s]a[c][r]ed [p][r]o[s]titute. How [c][ou]ld y[ou]?! In [T]en [T][w]enty [O]ne, Ha[k]im [w]ould [d]r[ea]m of [t]wo [d]is[t]orted Am[i]nas and then he [t]oo would [d]is[a]p[pe]ar, not as [a] result of [a] [p]ala[c]e in[t][r]igue, or [a] [s]u[r]re[p][t][i]t[i]ous m[ur][d][er], or [a]ge and [d]ec[ay], be[c]ause [e][v]en if those e[v]ents [s][ee]med to o[cc]ur, we should [s]tr[ess] [th]at [th]ey're no [l][e]ss [v]eil-[l]i[k]e [th]an [th]e [v][ei]ls Ha[k]im wit[n][e]ss[ed] [a]round [A]mi[n]a's [b]eauty. No, to [b]e [c][l][ea]r, it's fair[l]y evid[e]nt [H]a[k]im [h]im[s][e][f]

be[c]ame a wai[f]u [i]n h[i]s thirty [f]i[f]th year, [w]hich [w]as entirely [a]p[p][r]o[p][r]iate. [D]i[s][a][pp]ear is [p][r]o[b]a[b]ly the in[c]o[rr]e[c]t word to [d]e[s][c][r]i[b]e it! [b]e[c]ause Ha[k]im g[a]ve a[w][ay] his [s]anity in a ve[r]y [r]eal [w][ay] the [s]e[c]ond he [w]al[k]ed [th][r]ough [th]ose [d]ou[b]le [d]oors to g[r][ee]t Am[i]na [i]n h[i]s own esta[b]lishment, the [e][s]ta[b][l]ishment where he [s]aw him[s][e]lf [e]n[c][l]osed, [l]i[k]e in a [l]arge [b]ox [l]i[k]e [c]on[t][ai]ner, one [S]pring af[t]ernoon, the [s][a]me [p][l][a][c]e he con[t]em[p][l]i[al]ted the ide[a] that [A][l]l[a]h is the ve[r]y mi[rr]or [i]n wh[i]ch you [s]ee your[s]elf, [th]at you're [th]e mirror [i]n [w]h[i]ch [H]e [w][i]t[n]e[ss]es [H]is [N][a]mes. [W][e] [s][ee][k] to [c][l][ai]m [b]eauty in a [s]ub[j]ect-ob[j]ect rel[la][ti]on[sh]ip [b][e]cause [c]ertain [b][e]lings have m[a]de them[s]elves [s][ee]m to [b][e] that w[ay], not [t]o [t]ri[c]k us ne[c]es[sa]rily b[u]t j[u]st to [i]nno[c]ently [c]ause us to g[o] a[pp][r]o[p][r]iately in[s]ane, and vi[a] that [a][pp][r]o[p][r]iately [i]nsanity f[i]nally [a][rr][i]ving at the [p][r]o[p]er [n][a]ture of b[eau]ty. [A][m]i[n]a in her cu[rr]ent st[a]te enjoyed the f[a][c]t th[a]t [H]a[k]im [h][a]d [h][a][f] of his [r]obe o[ff] [i]n the [m][i]ddle of the ven[ue], his fa[c]e bl[ee][d][i]ng, [t]o[ss]ing d[i]nars [i]n[t]o the air [s]cr[ea]m[i]ng at [m]en [t]w[i]ce his [s][i]ze th[a]t [h]e [h][a]d [m]o[n]ey! [D]i[d]n't [th]ey k[n]ow [th]is? He'd fu[c]k[i]ng [k][i]ll them all, then he'd e[l][i][m][i][n]ate their fa[m]i[l]ies, then he'd [a][ss][a][ss]in[a]te the a[cq]u[ai]ntan[c][e]s of their [s][e][c]ond [c]ousins! But [s]a[c][r]ed [p][r]o[s]ti[t]utes are of [c]ourse inv[e]t[e][r]at[e]l[y] [d][r]awn [t]o this exact [t]y[p]e of in[s]a[n]it[y], a [s]ort of [D][i]o[n][y][s]ian [l]osing of the

[s]elf. Years [l]ater Ha[k][i]m would dr[ea]m of [k][i]ll[i]ng h[i]mself [r]e[p]leatedly as a m[e]th[o]d of c[l][ea]ns[i]ng him[s][e]lf, a [r]elated [p][r]o[c]less. It's p[r]o[b]a[b]ly in[t]e[r]acting with the a[t][r]o[c]ities of [b]eauty where the g[r]eatest [l]e[ss]ons are [l]earned, [b]ut [c][er]tainly [n]ot [i]n [a]n [i]n[t]er[p][er][s]onal and [q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te [d]ee[p] [c]on[v]er[s][a]ction [d]ri[v]en w[ay]. No, it's [v][i][a] [a] [d]i[v][i]ne imm[e][d][i]acy that e[v]e[r][y]thing be[c]omes i[d][i]otic and your [r]ational self is f[i][n]ally [r]e[c]log[n][i]zed am[o]ng eve[r]y[o]ne as an [u]nwel[c][o]me inter[l]o[c]utor, [u]na[b]le to w[r]a[p] [h]is [p]ea[b][r]ained [h]ead a[r]ound [w]hy you're not [c]u[rr]ent[ly] [w]ea[r]ing [a] shirt in [a] [p]ub[l]i[c] [p][l]ace.

η/ω 2314:3044 .760

5.12 [W]alking [th]rough [th]e, in [r]et[r]o[s]pect s[o]me[w]h[a]t ominous, [d]ouble [d]oors Ha[k]im [t]oo[k] note of the [s]ame [t]in [r]ooft that [c]om[p][r][i]sed the [s][k][y] on [d][i]ve [b]ar [p]atios as A[m]i[n]a [m]ade it [c]lear she had [b]usi[n]ess [t]o [t]a[k]e [c]are of, [sh]e was a[f]ter [a]ll on [sh]i[f]t, but [th]at it [w]as [a]lso im[p]ortant [th]at [H]akim [w]ait for [h]er, [p][l][ea]se! [D]on't [l][ea]ve! Just wait a [m]i[n]ute! [B][u]t [f][u]n[d]a[m]entally there was [n]othing [f]or the [t][wo] [t][o] [d]is[c]uss [b]eyond A[m]i[n]a [s]taring [s][i][l]ent[ly] into Ha[k]im's [e]yes for ex[t]ended in[t]ervals of [t][i]me. When she fi[n]a[ll][y] m[o]seyed [o][v]er [t]oward [h]im as [h]e [s][t]ood [n]er[v]ou[s][l][y], [s]till [n]ear the [d]ouble [d]oors, [h]e told [h]er [h]e wan[t]ed [t]o [t]a[k]e her

[q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te [o]ut [o]f this place, m[a]yb[e] [e]ven, h[e] [d]i[d]n't k[n]ow, t[a]ke her out to [d]i[nn]er? [a]nd she [l][a]ughed in a way that [s][p]oke to the [s]eeming [i]m[p]o[ss][i]b[i][l][i]ty of the i[d]ea, and, in turn, Ha[k]im [c]on[s]i[d]ered the [f]al[s]e [d]ua[l]ity of the [ph][y]s[i][c]al and the [P][l]atoni[c], [c]on[s]i[d]ering th[a]t, [a][c]tual[l]y, the [p]r[o]p[er] [d][i]v[i]s[i]on of [k]ind when it [c]ame to [l][o]ve w[a]sn't ph[y]s[i]cal and [s]p[i]r[i]tual but [i]n[s]tead [th]e [d]e[l]ayed and [th]e imm[e]d[i]ate. There was [n]o [d]ia[l][e][c]t[i]c pr[e]s[e]nt here, [n]o [l]ong [c]onversations on the ph[o]ne, [n][o] getting to k[n]o[w one a[n]other's [s][o]-[c]alled [s]e[c]r[et]s and [i]n[d]ulg[i]ng [i]n [th]e [th][r][i]ll[i]ng [i][d]io[c]ly of what's h[i]dd[e]n, of the a[m]use[m]ent par[k] of tiny l[i]ttle [s]e[c]rets. There i[n]evitab[l][y] would [c]ome [a] [t]ime when [A][m][i][n]a [a][c]tual[l][y] [a]sked Ha[k][i]m [t]o [t]ell a l[i]ttle [m]ore about h[i]m[s]elf, that it [s][ee]med [l]i[k]e, [n]ow [th]at sh[e] [th]ought a[b]out it, she [b]arel[y] [e]ven k[n]ew him! [t]o which Ha[k]im [c]ons[i]dered h[i]s own [t]rauma, [w]hich of [c]ourse [w]asn't exa[c]t[l]y [r]eal, he [c]on[t]emp[l]ated his youth with a [r]are [m]o[m]en[t]a[r]y f[er]v[or] and w[i]tn[e]ssed [th]at all [th][e]se [m]e[m]o[r]ie[s] be[c]ame [m][a][s]s-p[r]oduced [a][c]tion [f]igures [c]om[p][l][e]te[l][y] [m]el[t]ed in[t]o a stri[p] of [p]ave[m]ent [i]n the unforg[i]v[i]ng[l]y b[l][i][s]te[r][i]ng [C]ai[r]o [s]un, [a]nd [a]s he [t]urned [t]o his [l]eft, [s]o[l]e[l]y to e[s]c[a]pe Amina's [e]v[e]r int[e]n[s]ify[ing] g[a]ze, [h]e [c]ouldn't [h]el[p] [b]ut n[o]te a [S]an[d]ra [B]ullock [p][o][s]ter for a [m]ovie [c]alled [M]iss [S]e[c]r[e]t [A]g[e]nt h[u]ng [u]p adj[a][c][e]nt. [R]epeating the title [a]gain to [h]im[s]elf [H]a[k]im

[s][l]ow[ly] [a][rr][i]ved at the dis[q]u[i]eting [c]on[c][l]usion [th]at [th]ere [p]erha[p]s [e]xi[s]ted [a]n [e]ntire [S]and[r]a [B]u[l]o[c]k [e][c]onomy [a]ll [a]round him, that [e]ntire [s]wathes of the f[i]lm [i]n[d]u[s]t[r][y] were [i]n[d][i]s[c][r][i]m[i]natel[y] [d]e[d]i[c]ated [t]o the [r][u]th[l]ess [p][r]o[d]uction of a[dd][i]t[i]onal [S]an[d]ra Bu[l]o[c]k [c]ontent, ex[c][l]u[s]ive[ly] [c]on[s]t[r]u[c]ted for a [r][a]venous [S][a]nd[r]a [B]u[l]o[c]k f[a]n [b]ase. [P]eo[p]le, [n]ot at all in ob[s][c]ure [n]um[b]ers, [a]b[s]o[l]ute[ly] [a]dored [S][a]n[d]ra [B]ullo[c]k, [a][p]arentl[y]! [B]ut how [c]ould this [b][e]? [th]at [th]ese shit [s]t[ai]ns j[u]st [c]oul[d]n't get en[ou]gh [o]f [S]an[d]ra [B]ullo[c]k, [c]ould th[ey]? to the [e]xte[n]t a[n] [e]ntire i[n][d]u[s]t[r]y had developed to [q]uench [th]e [[th]irst for [th][is] [S]an[d][r]a Bullo[c]k [c]on[t]ent. Oh no! M[iss] [C]on[ge]n[ial]ity wasn't [n][ea]r[l][y] e[n]ou[gh] [S]an[d]ra Bu[l]ock [f]or these [l]u[r]id m[a][ss]es of [S][a]ndra [B]u[l]ock shit [s]tains! H[o]pe [F][l][oa]ts was [b]are[ly] [s]cratching the [s]ur[f]ace of [w]h[a]t [w][a]s [c][l]ear[ly] [a] Ma[r]i[a]n[a] t[r]ench-[l]i[k]e itch [f]or the [u]n[a][d]ulte[r]ated p[r]o[d]u[c]tion of [S]an[d][r]a Bu[l]o[c]k [f]ilms. [S]p[le]ed and [D]e[m]o[l][i]t[i]on [M][a]n [a]nd The [P][r]o[p][o]sal - n[o]! these in[s][a]tiable zealots [d]e[m]an[d]ed [M]iss [S]e[c]ret [A]gent as w[e]ll! [M]iss [C]onge[n]ia[l]ity the [S][e][c]ond: Armed [a]nd [F][a]bu[l]ous, [n]ot e[v]en that a[c]ute[ly] [c]ock[s]u[c]king [f]ilm [c]ould [s]u[ff][c]e [f]or these [c]o[c]k[s]u[c]king [C][r]u[s][a][d]ers of e[v]e[r]ything [S]an[d][r]a Bullo[c]k. To H[a][k]im's [a][m][a]ze[m][e]nt, [M]iss [S]e[c][r]et [A]g[e]nt was [s]till [s]omehow ne[c]e[ss]a[r]y! [B]ird [B]ox, Ocean's [Ei]ght - this

end[l]e[s]s [l][i][s]t of [i]n[s][i]p[i]d [f][i]lms, [c]ould there [e]ver [b]e [e]nou[gh] [B]ullo[c]k? Ha[k]im thought, [a]voiding [A]min[a]’s gaze, [r]ea[l][i]zing his en[t][i]re ch[i]ldhood was a b[l]ob of [p][l]astic [m][e][l]ted in[t]o a [C]ai[r]o [p]lave[m][e]nt. There [e]xis[t]ed [a]n [e]n[t]ire [s][u]b-[p]o[p]u[l]ation that [s][u]b[s]i[s]ted [s]eeming[l]y [s]ole[l]y on [S]andra Bu[ll]ock films? H[a]kim asked [A]m[i]n[a] if sh[e]’d [s][ee]n that [m]ovie p[o][s]ted [o]ver there, [M]iss [S][e][c][r]et Agent? With [S]and[r]a Bu[ll]o[c]k? Was that, [l]i[k]e, a [s]e[q]uel to Miss [C]onge[n]ialit[y] by a[n][y] chance? A[m]i[n]a [n]oted ex[c]ited[l][y] that sh[e]’d a[c]tua[l][y] [s][ee]n the [s][e][q]uel to [M]iss [C]onge[n]i[a]l[y], that it was [c]alled Armed [a]nd F[a]bu[l]ous, [s]o she [c]ast doubt u[p]on whether [p]arti[c]u[l]ar film [c]ould [b][e] its [p]ro[p]er [s][e][q]uel, [b]ut th[e]n [s]lugg[e][s]ted that it was [p]o[ss]i[b][l][y] [p]art of a t[r]i[l]og[y]? This [S]an[d][r]a [B]u[l]lo[c]k in[d]u[s]t[r][y] had [b]een a[ll]owed to [p][r]o[l]ife[r]ate, [s]eeming[l][y] in[c]e[ss]ant[l][y], and now Ha[k][i]m r[ea][l]ized, once and for all, that h[e] and A[m][i]n[a] ba[s]i[c]a[l]y [l][i]ved [d]e[r][i]lative [l]ives in [w]hat [w]as fun[c]tional[l][y] a [S]an[d][r]a Bu[ll]o[c]k [d][r]iven e[c]o[n]o[m]y.

η/ω 866:1118 .775

5-13 [A]ll [a][r]ound [h]im, [h]is w[h]ole [l]ife, he’d [b]een un[r]epentant[l]y [s]u[rr]oun[d]ed [b]y [S]an[d][r]a [B]ullo[c]k’s [f]il[m]og[r]a[ph][y], [b]ut [o]nl[y] in this [m][o][m]ent [d][i]d th[i]s un[f]ai[l]ing[l]y [d]e[p][r]essing [f]a[c]t [b]e[c]ome [a]p[p]a[r]ent to him. In [f][a][c]t,

[A]mina [c]ontinued, gl[a]n[c]ing [a]t the [p]o[s]ter [a]gain, Miss Se[c]ret [A]gent was [a]ctual[l][y] just a[n]other [n][a]me for [M]iss [C]ongeni[a][l]it[y], the [f]irst [f]ilm, [n]ot Armed [a]nd [F][a]bu[l]ous, [h][a]d [H]a[k][i]m s[ee]n [i]t? It was [a][c]tually [p]retty d[e]c[e]nt! Bu[l]lo[c]k [p][l][ay]s a [q]u[o]te-un[q]u[o]te [t]ou[gh] and [t]om[b]oyish [F][B]I [a]gent in the [A][c]tion [s][a]sh [C]omedy, it was a film th[a]t [c]ontained [a][c]t[i]on yet also [c]om[e]dic re[l][ie]f, as [B]u[l]o[c]k was, [d]espite [b][e]ing tr[a][d][i]t[i]onally [a]ttr[a]ct[i]ve, a [t]ough [b]ut also [t]om[b]oyish [d]e[t]e[c]tive, which challenged [t]ra[d][i]t[i]onal gen[d]er [n]orms. One [a][s][p]e[c]t [A]mi[n][a] enj[oy]ed [a][b]out the film was the [b]a[l][a]nce of [a][c]tion with [s][p]urts of [c]om[e]dic [r]e[l][ie]f! She [l]oved [s][p]urts of [c]omi[c] [r]e[l]ief! This would [c]ontrast with Bu[l]o[c]k's [l]ater wor[k] [i]n a f[i]lm [l]i[k]e [B]ird [B]o[x], where she'd [t]a[k]e a [m]uch [m]ore serious [t][ur]n in h[er] [a][c]ting [c]areer. H[a][k][i]m [a]d[m]itted to [A][m][i]na th[a]t, [a]ctual[l][y], h[e] [b]e[l][ie]ved [S]andra [B]u[l]o[c]k, well, that she [s]u[c]ked. [N]o, [n]ot that she [w]as the [w][or]st p[er] [s]e, no there were obvious[l]y [m]ore at[r]ocious a[c]t[r]e[ss]es th[a]n [S][a]ndra [B]u[l]o[c]k. [B]ut how [m]any ex[a][c]t[l]y? [B]e[c]ause San[d]ra [B]u[l]lo[c]k, a[cc]or[d]ing to Ha[k]im, was a [p]arti[c]u[l]ar[l][y] [n]auseating [p]erso[n]a[l]it[y]. He just found her, he [d]i[d]n't k[n]o[w], [a] [b]it of an [a][n]noying im[b]ecile? While, [n][o], [h]e [h]adn't [s][ee]n ma[n]y of her [f][ea]ture [f]ilms [s]tart to [f][i][n][i]sh he [d]i[d]n't [f]eel like h[e] [n][ee]ded [t]o [t]o [b]e [a][b]le [t][o] [a]rrive at [a] [f]airly [c][o]n[f]i[d]ent [c]on[c]l[u]sion that she was

[b][a][s]i[c]a[l]ly v[o]mit in[d][u][c]ing. She [c]ertain[l]y [w]asn't a pi[ll]ar of [c][r]eative [b][r]i[ll]ian[c]e! The [w]orld, in Ha[k]im's m[i]nd at [l]ea[s]t, [d]i[d]n't re[q]u[i]re any [f][ur]th[er] [S]andra [B]u[ll]ock [f]ilms! This i[d]ea, Ha[k]im [s]aid, th[a]t [S][a]n[d]ra [B]u[ll]o[c]k should have [b]a[s]i[c]a[l][y] an entire in[d]u[s]t[r][y] [b]uilt a[r]ound her, [f]or the [s]ole [p]ur[p]ose of [p]ro[d]u[c]ing [m]ore and [m]ore [S]an[d][r]a Bu[ll]o[c]k [f]ilms, it [s][ee]ms [c]om[p][l][e]te[l][y] ab[s]urd to me! [S]an[d][r]a Bullock? If there's a [s]ingle [d]ata [p]oint we [c]an [r]efe[r][e]n[c]e to [s]ugg[e][s]t that our [s]o[c][i]et[y] [i]s [i]n [d][i]re n[ee]d of [r]e[f]orm I th[i]nk [i]t's the [p]u[t][r]id [f][a]ct th[a]t a [m][o]vie was [p][r]o[d][u]ced and [r]e[l]eased un[d]er the [t]itle [M]iss Congenia[l]ity [T]wo: Armed [a]nd F[a]bu[l]ous! [Th]e [f][a][c]t [th][a]t, not only was th[a]t [f]ilm [a][c]tually [p]ro[d]u[c]ed, [b]ut this en[t]ire [S]an[d]ra [B]u[l]o[c]k in[d]u[s]try [c]on[t]inues to o[p]e[r][a]te and [p][r]o[l]i[f]e[r][a]te, even to this [d][a]ly? how [c]an you [n]ot [b]e just a [l]ittle o[ff]en[d]ed [b]y that, Ami[n]a? It's [a]ll just [a] [t]ad [g][r]o[t]esque you have to ad[m]it! Well I dis[a][g][r][ee]! [A][m]ina [r]e[t]orted, I like her [m][o]v[ie]s, Ha[k]im! I think she's [a][m][u]s[ing], [b]ut [a]lso [b]razen in a way [I] f[i]nd en[d]ea[r][ing]. En[d][ea][r]ing, Ha[k][i]m [r]e[p][ea]ted [e][q]uall[y] in [d][i]gu[s]t and [d][i][b]el[ie]f, en[d][ea][r]ing? [N][o], I w[a]tched [B]ird [B]o[x], and I'll [s]im[p]ly [n]o[t]e that my [l]ef[f]t [n]ut [a][f]ter a h[a][f] an hour [r]un is [m]ore endea[r]ing [th]an [th]at [m]ov[ie], A[m][i][n]a! And [S][p][ee]d with [K][e]a[n]u [R][ee]ves? [C][m]on! [O]h, and d[o]n't even [s]tart with H[o]pe [F][o]ats! the [f]act there [e]xists [a]n [e]ntire

[s]ub-[p]o[p]ulation of [E]g[y][p]t[i]ans [d]e[d]i[c]ated to, what? the [c]o[l]e[c]ted [S]and[r]a [B]u[l]o[c]k [f]ilmog[r]a[ph][y]? is just ab[s]o[l]ute[l][y] [m]ind [b]ogg[l]ing to [m][e]! - it's [a]ctual[l][y] [a]n [a]ffront to [g]ood taste [A][m][i]na, it's [a][c]tually the be[s]t [C]hri[s]tma[s] [g]ift [o]f [a]ll time to utter ab[s]urdity, it's [s]omething w[e] n[ee]d to em[p][l]oy teams of our finest [s][c]ho[l]ars [t]o [s]tu[d]y [t][o] [p][r]o[d][u]ce [r]igo[r]ous [c][a][s]e [s]tu[d]ies [d]e[t]ailing [e]x[t][e]n[d]ed [h]y[p]othe[s]es as to [h]ow this [s]t[a]te of [a]ffairs was [a]llowed to o[c]cur!

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