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This one is for Ulrike, my only Uli

Chance 1. *The absence of any cause or series of causes of events as they actually happen that can be predicted, understood, or controlled. Sometimes granted agency, as in:* ***Chance*** *governs all.*

Chance and the summer of love

Early on, before it had become apparent just how acrimonious, costly, and downright mean spirited the divorce would become, Chance had thought to find a place in or near the Presidio, a small house perhaps, with a view of the water, the proximity of redwood and cedar. The fantasy was short lived. The good places were expensive and hard to come by though nothing in the city was cheap anymore, that other Summer of Love a long time gone.

He'd settled finally for a modest one-bedroom apartment with a shared basement garage at the edge of the Sunset from whose front-most windows he might on occasion glimpse the sea. The streets in his new neighborhood, though raked at a slight angle to run downward in the general direction of the Pacific Ocean, were uniformly flat and treeless, bordered by long lines of gaily painted stucco and wooden structures. On sunny days he found these streets infused with such light as he'd come to associate with the deserts of the Southwest, their hopeful pastels bleached of meaningful distinctions. On foggy days the colors were made impotent as well, barely distinguishable from the damp concrete sidewalks, the asphalt streets, or the pale, slate gray sky. Analogies he might have drawn with his own life appeared tiresome even to him.

What he'd taken as the decline of things in general had coincided with a particularly disturbing case. It was not a complicated case. There were no legal or medical puzzles to be solved. There were only the facts, which he had summarized as follows:

At the time of my evaluation Mariella Franko was 34 months post a head-on motor vehicle accident in which her 68-year-old father was killed in gruesome fashion. (In an effort to avoid a wayward dairy cow that had wandered into his lane, her father had collided with an oncoming delivery truck. He was decapitated. His head rested in the rear seat. Mariella remained trapped next to her father's body till freed by the Jaws of Life. She remembers shouting 'Daddy!' many times while in the car.)

Review of emergency medical services indicates her Glasgow Coma Scale was 15 at the time of their arrival. Her chief complaint was listed as 'My daddy… I want my daddy!' She was medicated with intravenous fentanyl and transferred by ambulance to a CalStar helicopter that carried her to Stanford. Upon arrival, she was crying and asking for her father. No fractures or internal injuries were found. She was monitored overnight and sent home with plans for follow-up by a primary care physician.

A psychiatric evaluation done one month later describes anxiety, depression, startle reactions, spells of tachycardia, tachypnea, and perspiration together with intrusive thoughts of her father. It was noted that she had spent three months off work and attempted to distract herself by trying to watch television. Her social life had become very constricted, with severe withdrawal and isolation. She described a predominant state of hopelessness and lack of motivation. Ms Franko was found to be suffering from chronic post-traumatic stress disorder and major depression. A course of psychotherapy together with antidepressant medication was recommended.

Unfortunately, Ms Franko went on to receive neither psychotherapy nor pharmacotherapy and remained, at the time of my evaluation, anxious, depressed, and struggling to avoid any such thoughts, mental images, or feelings as might return her to the night of the accident. I agree that Ms Franko suffers from chronic post-traumatic stress disorder. She faced a life-threatening situation, believed

she was going to die, was present at her father's death, and was trapped in a vehicle with him under gruesome circumstances. The photographs I have been shown speak for themselves. It is unfortunate that a second psychiatric consultation was not obtained until more than 2 years had passed following the accident. And while her avoidance of mental health care professionals is understandable, it is exactly this avoidance to which health care providers should have responded…

Eldon J. Chance, MD
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There was more to the report but that was the gist of the thing. Someone's insurance company had retained him to evaluate the nature and severity of her psychological trauma. Chance was a forensic neuropsychiatrist and made the better part of his living explaining often complicated neurological conditions to juries and or attorneys who would soon be standing in front of juries, in cases ranging from personal injury to elder abuse to undue influence. He was sometimes asked for evaluations by other doctors and sometimes retained by family members or estates. It was not the practice he'd once imagined but it was the practice he had. He rarely saw someone more than once or twice and rarely worked with them as patients.

And so it had been with Mariella Franko. He had seen her only once, at the time of his evaluation. He did not know what had become of her, how her case had come out, or whether or not she had received any of the recommended therapies or medications. Nor, it no doubt goes without saying, was she the only patient he saw that summer. It was a season in which any number of cases might have occupied his thoughts.

J.C. is a 36-year-old, right-handed white woman with a long and complicated medical history. The product of an attempted abortion (born prematurely at 7 months) she suffers a mild form of mental retardation, the result of oxygen deprivation at the time of the botched procedure and premature birth. The patient admits to a long-standing incestuous relationship with her father and after seven miscarriages gave birth to a son with numerous congenital anomalies…

M.J. is a 42-year-old, right-handed black woman with several years of college education. The patient relates that at the age of 36, while walking from her job in a bookstore to her home in the Mission District, she was assaulted by an Hispanic male standing over six feet tall and weighing more than two hundred pounds. She has only partial recollections of the assault but remembers having her head struck repeatedly against a fire hydrant after trying to run from her attacker. M.J. states that over the next year she was extremely depressed and spent 12 months watching television or staying drunk. During this time she acquired a handgun and would occasionally discharge it in frustration and rage. Her closest friend was a pet rat, which she says would come over and put its paw on her hand to console her. M.J. currently lives alone in low-budget housing for the homeless and mentally disabled in San Francisco…

L.S. is a 46-year-old woman who grew up with an abusive alcoholic mother. The identity of her father has never been made known to her. L.S. is at pains to present herself as an individual with learning disabilities. She states that as a young child she seemed to learn everything 'backward.' She would read not only individual words but also pages backward. If she is forced to read a book beginning at the front, she seems to have little sense of the story until she is able to read it again from the end to the front. Although the bulk of L.S.'s time is spent caring for the 104 exotic birds she owns, her second greatest passion is reading about mental

illness and learning disabilities. The patient states that for as long as she can remember she has felt depressed, empty, and uncertain as to who she is…

D.K. is a 30-year-old right-handed white male last employed as a graphic artist in San Jose, now four years status post a pedestrian vs. truck injury at the Port of Oakland with resulting head injury. The patient states that while he is unaware of changes in his personality, he is also aware that others, including his wife, say that his personality has changed completely. His wife further states the patient has confided to her that he believes he will someday play a major role in a battle between Satan, Yahweh, and Jesus. Six months ago, in the context of believing it necessary to cleanse his body in preparation for the coming conflict, the patient ingested a range of household cleaners, including Hexol and Clorox…

Still, it was Mariella Franko who came along for the ride on those first dreary days of an unusually hot and early summer, hunting apartments in the City by the Bay, fielding papers from opposing attorneys, seeing patients, writing reports, watching as the money melted away like a late snow, departing with a good deal more rapidity and in greater amounts than it had ever arrived, watching as the life he'd so carefully arranged for himself, his wife, and daughter broke apart upon the rocks of a heretofore scarcely imagined reality.

His soon-to-be ex-wife, an aspiring photographer, was not self-supporting. Sales of her work could not be counted upon even for the rent of her studio. Her lover, with whom she had so recently taken up, a dyslexic personal trainer ten years her junior, worked only part time at a gym in Sausalito, and there would be little in the way of financial support from that quarter. Her attorney had already acquired a writ from a judge. Chance would be paying for both attorneys, his *and* hers. The house would be going on the market in the worst

of markets. His daughter's much beloved private school with its Monterey pines and views of the bay was appearing less likely by the day. The public school nearest their current home was the stuff of nightmare.

As for Ms Franko in this time of drought and ash – the skies were so often thick with it of late, the result of fires sparked by some mishap in the Richmond refinery east of the bay, complicated by the unseasonable weather and dry, accompanying winds – she lived with her eighty-nine-year-old paternal grandmother in an apartment building on the south end of Palo Alto. At one point in his evaluation he had inquired as to how her grandmother had responded to the death of her only son. Mariella had said that her grandmother was very sad. She said her grandmother took medication on a daily basis but did not recall its name. She did not know if the older woman shared any of her recurring nightmares or intrusive recollections of the event that had claimed the life of their father and son.

Oddly enough it was Chance who had experienced a number of recurring nightmares together with intrusive memories and vivid recollections of the photographs he'd been asked to look at and these accompanied by the image of this shy and diminutive creature, alone in those still-dark hours, inquiring of the now speechless effigy at her side. Off this, he would move to imagining her out there in the apartment in Palo Alto, alone in some no doubt terminally banal setting, attempting to 'distract herself by watching television'. What would she watch? he wondered. What could she possibly find that would not lead to the gouging out of one's own eyes? The image suggested Lear and unaccommodated man, the thing itself. Job at least had God in the whirlwind. Mariella got police procedurals and vampire bloodletting. And that was just the news. He seemed to recall that she worked full time as a packager for Granny Goose potato chips in San Jose and that prior to the accident her interests had included painting, drawing, and collecting small statues of frogs.

There came a night, alone in his new apartment, half in the bag, he had actually gone so far as to imagine his driving the forty-five minutes it might take to reach her. She was not unattractive. In his report, he had described her as follows:

> *A petite 39-year-old woman of Italian descent with black hair that is pulled back tightly into a bun. She has straight, almost classical, features and large brown eyes. Her fingers are well manicured and she wears no nail polish. She wears a leather coat over a tan pin-striped suit and brown leather high-heeled lace-up boots. Her general manner, while pleasant, is marked by a total absence of spontaneity. The interview proceeded in a series of questions followed by unelaborated answers.*

What he had thought but not recorded, what set her apart from so many of the others, was that she had about her some aspect of the caged bird, of a life un-lived. And it was just *that,* he thought, the horror of the life un-lived, that had found him out, in the midst of his own decline, wherein each day seemed at risk of being even more dimly lit than the one before it.

He held to the belief, possibly illusory, that there are times in a person's life, moments really, when the right word or motion, when a single touch might wound or heal. It was to this end that he imagined the drive. It was not about some sexual conquest. He might just as easily have enlisted the aid of another had another arrived. It was the *striking through* that he envisioned, the freeing of the caged heart. He knew better, of course. He could see all of this for what it was, the half-mad quixotic gesture better dreamt than executed because well… because that was what life was like in the end. It was an image in a glass darkly. It was all just half lived. There would be no drives and no interventions. The workings of the world would not permit them. In lieu of these he opted for additional wine. But my God, he thought

a moment later, refilling a glass, imagining for the simple sake of imagining it, his arriving unannounced upon her doorstep, what *would* she think? He heard the night made horrible with her screams.

He dozed thinking of Blake: '*Every night and every morn / Some to misery are born… Every morn and every night / Some are born to sweet delight. / Some are born to sweet delight, / Some are born to endless night*.' He woke later in the still dark to the waves of Ocean Beach through the walls of his room. Rising, he was treated by way of a bathroom window to a strange orange light upon the eastern sky – what he was willing to take as evidence that in the hills above the Richmond oil refinery, the fires continued to rage.