

03/08/09

The sky has milky, flawless skin. Clouds are smooth, straight white hair draped over invisible, perfect shoulders.

Tony presses his thumbs into the soft dimples of Julie's sacroiliac joints. He slowly circles them, and Julie sighs the tension out. Tony leans over and kisses them and Julie's body explodes. Afterwards, they kiss patterns all over each other and towel off the sweat. They shower together. They go up to the roof in their fluffy white robes and look at the night time traffic on the tall highway by the water. Julie pulls her phone from her pocket and they look up their favorite words in the on-line OED. They read them out loud. Julie likes sacrum, ischium, sagittal and axis. In her pronunciation, the words slowly rub up against each other.

In the slightly orange light emanating from the city, Tony watches Julie sleep, her face a closed door. Tony is completely amazed at the huge amount of patience he is finding in himself, when all he wants to do is burst through that door right now, fireman style. He touches her face. It's hot in there. He is looking forward to the surprises tucked away inside.

A grey sky hangs low, it's dark fingers touches the roofs of the buildings.

On a bench, on the pier in Redhook, their faces warm in the sunset, they sit, eye level with and hiding behind the heavy aluminum railing. They watch Japanese tourists take perfect photos of the Statue of Liberty with long lenses and tripods. The tourists have a Japanese guide who takes them to the right places to take perfect photos. That's their trip. One impeccable photo after another. Tony tells Julie that he really likes the exchanging anecdotes stage in a new relationship. Julie's brain is firing up fragments of stories now. About how her father left her mother to chase tornadoes and measure them with instruments and live in a trailer in Oklahoma. Mostly, he was processing weather data, gathered in thrillingly dangerous circumstances and trying to formulate the kind of all encompassing theory of the weather that takes decades to complete.

"He had this friend, James, who was a pilot. He flew planes through the storm wall and into the eye of a hurricane, Dad recorded wind pressure. James said the Dad's intuition was like a tall hairy spider, making unpleasant, sticky connections between random bits of information."

"After he left, men started coming to our house, one after another. They had slow reactions, like their faces just didn't really know what to do with what they were hearing. And the low voices, they all whispered. Maybe they didn't want me to hear what they told her. Maybe they didn't want her to hear."

Tony touches Julie's arm and looks at her eyes, glowing orange, reflecting the sun.

A few days after her eighth birthday, Julie went to visit her father in his trailer in Oklahoma.

"His car was big white and boxy, with a lexan bubble on the roof encasing a security camera. A monitor was taped to the dashboard with duct tape. It was like being inside a computer game, watching the camera inside the car. Everything rushed at you like it couldn't wait to meet you. He got into the car the morning after I got there and told me to stay inside until he returned."

"I heard this roaring outside and the trailer started shaking. I ran outside and saw walls and rooftops, sheds, fences, TVs and fridges lift up and disappear into a dark thick funnel. So, I went back in the trailer, turned the light off and hid behind the curtains. Out the window, the funnel seemed to be standing completely still. Except, it was coming right at me. Something was there, when I stood

frozen. Something there was watching me when the trailer started shaking. I hated that thing. It wasn't a figuring or an animal. It was something happy, childlike and innocent that I should have loved. Maybe it was a poster of a kitten hanging from a branch. Underneath it, ugly yellow letters spelled it out: "Hang in there". Maybe that was it, but....". Her lips slowly close around her clenched teeth.

Tony says: "And you don't hate him for abandoning you in a tornado?"
Julie shakes her head slowly.

"Back with my mother and the whispering men, I started hiding in my room all the time. I didn't want to go outside anymore. One of the silent men brought home lots of different newspapers every day. I don't know why. They would stack up in the living room, and I took them. The maps they print in newspapers became my rock posters. I put them on the walls in my bedroom with glue stick. After a few months, the walls were totally full. Then I took down the ones that I didn't like as much as the other ones, and added the new ones from the paper. One paper had a section called Highlight: Unusual or Disruptive Weather. On my thirteenth birthday, I had only those up on the walls. The ceiling was reserved for hurricane season, which was my favorite part of the year. It was so...liberating."

Julie looks at Tony: "That probably sounds over dramatic, and cheesy and pathetic, but I don't care". Her smile flashes a dimple. Tony says: "It must have looked amazing. So much more overwhelming than those glow-in-the-dark stars people glue to their ceilings."
They watch a seagull dive into the water and jump up on the park bench, cheering when it soars back up with a fish.

Julie says that a Greek philosopher named Theophrastus was Aristotles' right hand man who had ideas that fascinate her. Like many scientists after him, he thought that all natural existence requires some organizing principle. For him, the one that stood out above all others: motion, the basis of all change. For him, motion was an activity without a goal, an activity that was only future potential. And, that there is no activity without motion.

They stop on a small outcropping in the center of the Manhattan Bridge and lean over the banister. Tony feels impatient to interrupt the flow of information coming out of Julie and really wants to kiss her to stop it. He feels a small violence, almost like he wants to be mean to her to get a reaction that pulls her out.

Julie says: "When Henry Hudson and his crew first arrived, they were looking for a passage to China. They never realized the pure potential of this, one of the greatest natural harbors in the world."

"Beyond the Verrazano Bridge is the Atlantic Ocean. It's pure motion. Someone said that the waves keep it from being just a very big puddle between Europe and America. It's potential is that every wave in that ocean is finally going to meet what it moves toward. If you are on a boat on the Atlantic, the seeming endlessness of the water and the motion of waves are overwhelming. What makes it scary, sometimes deadly is when it interacts with the chaos in the atmosphere of the earth. A tiny perturbation can be amplified over time and distance. A small breath can become a hurricane months and months later. The universe transforms things over time and distance. It's like the whole thing is a giant computer using the laws of physics."

"If this was a different kind of story, maybe we could have gone sailing together and I could have showed you. Talking on this bridge is alright as well, I guess."

The weather is so absurdly perfect it's just not funny.

Tony works as a researcher on a TV show, Boston Legal. He recently wrote his first script for the show. One of the story lines centers on a weather modification lawsuit. He and Julie are excited to be doing this you know, really doing it together. And: the writers' room liked it. They made jokes about it. They only do that if they like something a lot. Like the ridiculous episode earlier in the season, that started as a complete flight of fancy, but then slowly de-fancied into solid grounding through an unravelling character. That one was pure genius, they all agree. That one, they still make new jokes about every now and then.

Tony thought out loud how it would add to the show to have a believable, passionate expert. After all, Julie inspired the script. He convinced the producers to let Julie read for the part. She wasn't a shoe-in exactly, the producers were torn between Julie's more than luminous skin and cheekbone assembly and her slumping shoulders, that body rushing in on itself. Though, they never doubted her passion, and admitted to a strong attraction to...they weren't quite sure what. When the show director finally saw her casting tape, he defended awkward posture vigorously as something that even the best actress should want to strive for in this weather modification expert character. Julie changed status from occasional set-visiting girlfriend to featured player for two days.

In the scene, Alan Schorr is facing opposing counsel and his weather expert (an actor) across a glass conference table. Julie walks into the meeting late. She sinks into a tall backed lawyer conference room type leather arm chair next to Alan Schorr. He looks at her slightly puzzled for a moment a little too long. Tilting his head to the left, he turns his face to the lawyers on the other side of the table.

"This is my colleague and weather expert, Julie Thompson. Julie? "

He gestures with both hands close to his chest.

Julie says: "The adverse effects of weather modification are just as difficult to measure as their positive counterparts. One negative effect that has been suggested is that cloud seeding can cause severe weather or drought in locations that are "downwind" from the target site. Some cloud seeding has used smoke containing AgI from generators on the ground to provide nuclei for clouds. The AgI is supposedly transported to approximately the -10 celsius region of a cumulus cloud by naturally occurring updrafts. However, there is concern whether the AgI actually reaches this region of the target cloud and, if it does reach that region, whether the AgI is uniformly dispersed over this region of the target cloud. While ground-based AgI generators are less expensive to operate than AgI generators aboard airplanes, airplanes are a much surer way to deliver the AgI to the appropriate region of the target cloud.

AgI does not magically disappear a few hours after its release. There have been sporadic suggestions in meteorology journals and symposia that enhanced rainfall may occur between 100 and 300 kilometers downwind from the point where the AgI was released. Aside from possibly modifying the weather at great distances from the intended target area, such effects could contaminate scientific experiments so that "natural" clouds in the control group may contain some AgI. Such contamination would make it more difficult to prove that AgI is effective in modifying clouds. However, even with our limited knowledge of atmospheric physics, we know that different types of clouds behave differently. Therefore, one must be careful not to apply successes (or failures) with one type of cloud to another type of cloud. Current knowledge suggests that cloud seeding produces a small perturbation of a phenomena that has much larger natural fluctuations. While a 10% increase in rain can be economically significant, this small increase superimposed on much larger natural fluctuations poses a very difficult problem for statistical analysis of cloud seeding experiments. However, in the case of Weather Consultants VS. the town of Shadygrove, Kansas where the center of the dispute is some abnormal flooding in the past 12 months, none of these unpredictable and possibly negative

side effects could possibly apply. The state of Kansas and Weather Consultants definitely agree on one thing: Weather Consultants didn't do any cloud seeing within 800 miles of Shadygrove in the past five years and therefore can not be held liable for any property damage resulting from the unpredicted flooding." Julie takes a breath and looks at the actor playing the opposing weather expert. She knows his first line by heart, but it's not coming. Tim yells "Cut! Standby." The camera crew huddles by the lens, remeasuring the focal lens, while the Tim, director watches playback.

Alan Schorr (or is it James Spader?) stares at Julie whispers "Wow, that was incredible. Did you remember that or make it up?"

Josh, the AC, says: "That's a wrap for scene Three Apple. Take a ten minute break everyone and clear set for redress."

Alan Schorr turns, his eyes slowly focussing on her: "Join me in my dressing room for a coffee break?"

Julie leans back in her chair and looks at Tony in the shadow, squinting against the lights on the set. Alan Schorr squints in Tony's direction, raises his eyebrows, and gathering his jacket into its buttons, leaves his chair and walks off the set.

At the end of the episode, studying the glowing end of his cigar with care, Alan Schorr says about Julie: "She has this capacity with facts. She not only kicks data in the ass, she informs data. She makes it human, something with the power to emote, evoke, even induce cartharthis. She becomes one with the weather and the measurements of weather."

Denny Crane swirls the glass, ice cubes tinkling in the wet, weak scotch and says: "Don't fall for her, Alan. She is just a guest star."

Julie at home, alone while Tony is working. Putting together data, feeling her way through it, in complete comfort, looking forward to Tony's return, waiting to share the new findings. Refresh, refresh, refresh. And the screen draws one radar image after the other, of a storm happening in some state she hopes never to see again. She holds on to each moment of the storm, looks at it, savors its unique beautiful shape and then relishes in letting it go. She only keeps the shapes just before or just after a momentous change. Hurricane landfall still gives her goosbumps. She can feel her insides shudder when the storm and the coastline meet. The potential for sudden change is so enormous and the implications so destructive. Its like the universe rearranging its own furniture as if preparing for a visit from City sunlight floods the room.

Through the window of the make-up room, Tony can see a gray paste of clouds moving back over the sun. There are tiny bits of rain on the window. Tony tells her that there were script changes, that the writer's room felt the need to make the plot less straight forward, and he tells her their solution to make it more interesting. That the writers, the director and the cast have such respect and admiration for Julie that they feel a stronger script was necessary to express her personal strength. That they shot a scene last night where Alan Shorr expressed his admiration for her. For the mystery to really shine, Tony says, Alan Shorr is going to be much more aggressive now than was written before. Julie asks Tony why he didn't tell her earlier. Julie isn't the one who is upset.

Julie sits in the witness box on the set. Julie and the room full of extras look at each other. Julie feels the back of her neck producing tiny beads of sweat.

Alan Shorr: "Julie, you are a weather expert, is that right?"

"Yes". Julie looks at him.

He walks up to the witness stand with large steps and starts gesticulating with shovelling like motions. "Weather modification is specific to the particular location in which it is performed. Positive results in one location and negative results in another are entirely possible, even under the same conditions. Isn't that the case, Julie?"

She nods slowly, carefully picking words from the swirl in her head:

"Scientists generally accept that cloud seeding can cause increased precipitation in specific circumstances."

"Isn't it true that mathematical models can't accurately depict natural atmospheric conditions and therefore offer limited insight. It's not just an inexact science with poorly researched particulars, it's much worse than that. It seems more like my two-year old niece: one day she wants the red Jell-O, the next day she throws it against the wall, emitting a piercing scream. She just makes a mess in my house, and my walls are washable, so I don't really care. Am I the only one who is disturbed by the idea that we are playing around with the weather encouraging it to throw tantrums like a two year old?"

Alan Shorr arches his eyebrows at the jury, opening his round eyes wide. He looks at Julie accusingly, like she is personally making his universe develop a giant tear just in the spot where it all used to make sense before she appeared.

The tiny beads of sweat on Julie's neck have developed into little rivers which, drop by drop run down her spine and directly into her skirt. She doesn't dare to move in fear that the back of her purple shirt will show a public imprint of her personal wetland.

"Julie, in your opinion, who owns the water in the clouds? Cloud seeding is unethical because in essence, it robs Peter to pay Paul. Or in this case, it robs Mary in Iowa to flood a basement belonging to Jane in Kansas. Tell me, don't you think that's highly problematic?"

Julie looks around the set, trying to find Tony's eyes, not finding them, she struggles for answers.

She says: "Cloud seeding does not divert rain from falling in one place in favor of another. Clouds normally contain more than enough moisture to precipitate, they just don't always possess a natural precipitation initiation mechanism. The chemicals used in cloud seeding help create precipitation by providing this initiation mechanism."

Alan Shorr squints one of his eyes in confusion, holds it for a minute before turning to the judge. "No more questions".