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Sandra of the Tuliphouse or How to Live in a Free State
2001

Section 1

At Frederiksborg Castle, in what used to be the Danish countryside, about 35 kilometers North of Copenhagen, Denmark, I found myself awkwardly trying to return the gaze of someone who was not there. He silently faced me—a number of his friends stood some distance behind him: “Tournament Helmet, Steel, Northern European; possibly English, about 1500, designed for use in the tournament fought on foot in an enclosed field.” An unseen and now unknowable predecessor. Or, at least the empty space left by a predecessor, vacated after becoming obsolete.

What is the world-view of someone armored in plates of steel, I wondered? Hermit crabs and people may be the only creatures on earth who voluntarily armor themselves imitating the Rhinoceros, beetle, hedgehog and mollusk. But is the desired effect—protection—achieved?

Breaking away from the unseeing face, I stepped into the next room of the castle where my gaze was now most definitely returned to me. From inside a plain black frame with gold trim a young Royal, out for an afternoon of shooting, takes a moment to diplomatically acknowledge the viewer with a wave of his hat. There is an ambivalence deeply embedded in the gesture and openly registered in the curve of his lips. His expression is undefinable. Is he returning the gaze of his proud father, one of his humble subjects, or the painter himself? The portrait is certainly mimetic—but what, exactly, the artist sought to imitate is not clear to me. I remarked to the museum guard standing nearby that I thought there was something odd about this little fellow, and he replied, as if I didn't know already, “of course there is, it's a child.”

Most of the signifiers, so carefully painted in were unintelligible to me, making the little games-man look out of context. That is, until I noticed the building behind him in the distance. It was the same castle which I was standing in at that moment. His context was also mine. Another military obsolescence, still performing for the state.

About 30 minutes away from Frederiksborg Castle lies Christiania—my temporary home—the anarchistic community of twelve hundred people founded in 1971 on a squatted military base along the South-east edge of Copenhagen's old city wall. Tonight I will sleep in the Tuliphouse for the last time and tomorrow, move my belongings to an apartment, on Valdemarsgade, West of Copenhagen's center, in the neighborhood of Vesterbro. When I told my friends in Gothenburg that I would move to Copenhagen, the friend of a friend knew a family in the Free City looking for someone to take care of the Tuliphouse for a few weeks. So it was by chance that in addition to going to Copenhagen I also moved into Christiania

In the free city of Christiania one is reminded that physical patterns, no matter how small or large, always exceed physical reality. This is because few social values or actions are so abstract they fail to be reflected in material forms.

Entering through the Prinsessegade gate, and walking past The Prairie, across Carl Madsens Plads, down Pusher Street, to Nemo-land, The Tuliphouse, and beyond, you will find children's playgrounds, music shops, hash dealers, bakeries, bars, private houses, and horse stables, all contained in a variety of architecture built over the last four centuries. It is part of the obsolete armor of the

city of Copenhagen, with its bastions and moats, factories and drill grounds, barracks and officer's quarters, which the Free City now occupies.

On March 11, 1971 those calling themselves the ‘founders of Christiania’ wrote that their objective was “to build a self-governing society, where each individual has total personal freedom, while respecting the community. This society shall be economically self-contained, as a demonstration that psychological and physiological pollution can be avoided through collective effort. So formulated by Sven, Kim, Kim, Ole and Jakob, with rights for improvement.” When I first read this I wondered if both Kims who signed were men—where were the female squatters when the declaration was written?

For nine-hundred years the Danes have fortified themselves against attack. During eight-hundred of those years they were at war with their close neighbor, Sweden. Armed conflict is always a consolidating force—states have made war, but wars have also made states. The great expense of attack and defense produced centralized nation states. For the Danes, Copenhagen became synonymous with the state, a refuge for kings, capital, government, navy, industry, and the herring trade. The defense of the city was equivalent to national security.

The oldest surviving fragments of Copenhagen's fortification are from the 12th century—today buried deep below the foundation of the department store, Magasin du Nord and Christiansborg, the Danish Parliament. These stones were laid when European city-defenses consisted of great vertical walls keeping their citizens in, and their attackers out—a time of protracted siege-warfare—with battles that could last months and often years.

Fortified cities were also urban ecosystems which protected humanity from hostile elements of nature. But this was not always enough. In periods of declining population, humans still struggled to keep their place at the top of the pyramid:

“The whole of Europe, from the Urals to the Straits of Gibraltar, was the domain of wolves, and bears roamed in all its mountains. The omnipresence of wolves and the attention they aroused make wolf-hunting an index of the health of the countryside, and the towns, and of the character of the year gone by. A momentary inattention, an economic setback, a rough winter, and they multiplied. In 1420 packs of wolves entered Paris through breaches in the ramparts and unguarded gates. They were there again in September 1438, attacking people, this time outside the town, between Montmartre and the Saint-Antoine gate.”

To support myself I am working part-time at the Royal Theater for Mr. Strombeck—who is the theater's lobby manager. Mr. Strombeck is responsible for everything that happens in the lobby during the intermissions of the State Opera performances. He decides which cakes and sandwiches will be for sale at the concession tables, what wine will be served on the mezzanine, where the flower arrangements will be placed, and what, exactly, they will look like. He supervises the ushers, making certain they have enough programs to hand out, and takes responsibility for the safety of the public as they pass through. Three days a week I go to Mr. Strombeck's office to do his bookkeeping and manage his budget.

Residents of Christiania pay a flat monthly rent into the Common Fund which finances internal services like mail delivery and the Christiania newsletter. The rest covers electricity, water and sewage costs, paid directly to the ministry of defense which is still legally responsible for the property.