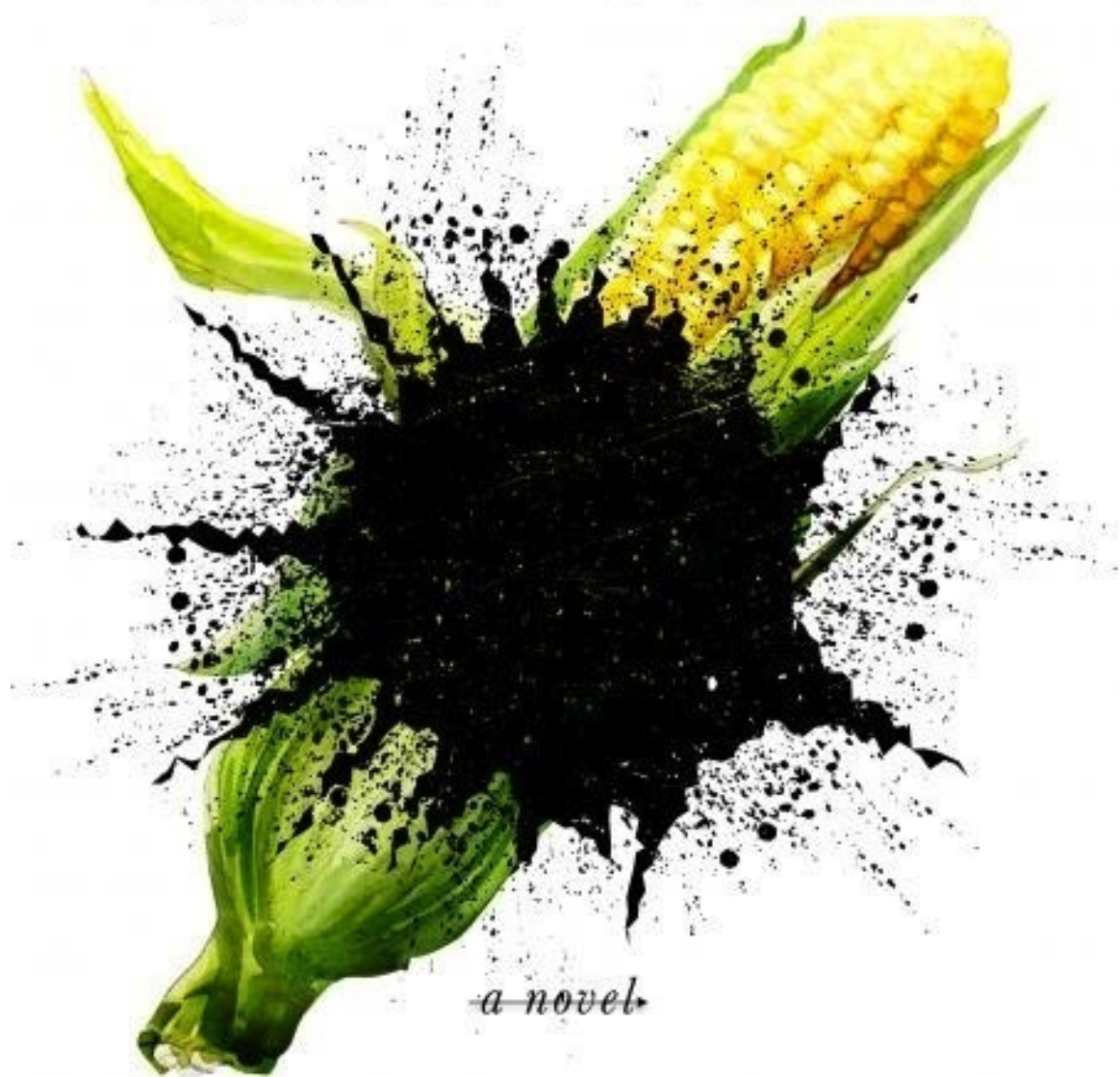


Chill or Fraud?



a novel

Carmen Petaccio

Is gentrified Brooklyn chill...or fraud?

That was the question I asked myself twenty-ish seconds ago, as soon as I finished typing the first chapter of *Chill or Fraud?*

I was in my twin-sized bed in my okay-sized apartment in gentrified Brooklyn. I was staring emotionlessly at the HD screen of my 15" Macbook Pro, thinking with all my heart.

"Gentrified Brooklyn," I whispered to myself. "Chill or fraud?"

There were, in my mind, two sides to the argument. One side of the argument upheld that gentrified Brooklyn was super chill, while the other side, of course, upheld that it was very fraud. Which side did I fall on? Chill side...or fraud side? I really had no idea.

"C' or 'F'?" I whispered to myself. "C' or 'F'?"

In some respects, one could argue that gentrified Brooklyn is one of the chilliest places on earth. Numerous chills live there, like David Sally and Jake Gyllenhaal. Numerous chill bars exist there, like Crown Inn and the Bossa Nova Civic Club. And numerous chill things happen there, like when I get super drunk and go to karaoke and sing Marilyn Manson's timeless classic "The Dope Show." Taking these things into consideration, gentrified Brooklyn *seems* to seem very chill.

Yet one could just as easily argue that gentrified Brooklyn is absolutely fraud. Mad frauds live there, like Jonathan Safran Foer and his white, vegan children. Mad fraud bars exist there, like Doris and The Levee. And many mad fraud things happen there, like the editorial process of VICE magazine and Lena Dunham's *GIRLS*. Not to mention pervasive income inequality. Not to mention the Duane Reade on Bedford Ave, the one that lets you buy craft beer in "growlers" with Ralph Waldo Emerson quotes on them.

I consider Ralph Waldo Emerson to be one of the chilliest men who ever lived.

That doesn't make those "growlers" any less fraud.

In fact, it makes them more so.

More so fraud.

...

Fuck it. Gentrified Brooklyn is fucking fraud.

Is saying “gentrified Brooklyn is fucking fraud” chill...or fraud?

That was the question I asked myself twenty-ish seconds ago, as soon as I finished typing the first section of the second chapter of *Chill or Fraud?*

I was in my twin-sized bed in my okay-sized apartment in gentrified Brooklyn. I was staring blankly at the HD screen of my 15” MacBook Pro, feeling very chill about diagnosing the borough as fraud.

“Fraud!” I exclaimed like a crazy person. “Gentrified Brooklyn is fraud!”

I closed my MacBook, snuggled my body pillow like a spider monkey, and began to recount all the fraud things in gentrified Brooklyn. I thought about ticket prices at the Barclays Center. I thought about the quality of clementines at Associated Market. I thought about the seven unlimited Metrocards I’d lost over the past year, and I thought about the MTA refunds for those Metrocards I would never receive. Just all fraud stuff.

Then I thought some more, unfortunately. I thought about BAM posting incorrect movie times on its website, I thought about the ineptitude of the promotional team at Community Bookstore, I thought about Bill de Blasio and artisanal killing and instagram pictures of food, and then, unfortunately, I thought about the Asian businessman, that motherfucker who monopolizes the vertical rail on the R Train every morning—that is—when the R Train decides to come to my stop, the Union Street stop, where I catch the R Train—when it decides to come—to my shitty job at the Strand Book Store, which pays \$9.75 an hour, a wage that doesn’t even cover my utilities bill, \$9.75 an hour, so my mom has to pay my rent, so I as a twenty-five-year-old man have to ask my mom to pay my rent, thanks in part to late capitalism and job polarization but mostly to my own shittiness as a son, as well as my lack of talent and drive and ambition, my mom has to pay for me to sleep in a twin-sized bed in an okay-sized apartment in gentrified Brooklyn, because I am a fraud, living in a city full of frauds, and I deserve every last instant of this disgrace I call my life.

I was in my twin-sized bed, snuggling my body pillow, thinking about the fraud.

And the more I thought about the fraud, the less I was able to breathe.

And the less I was able to breathe, the more I was able to panic.

And the more I was able to panic, the better I was able to start having a panic attack.

Which is what I did, right then, as I snuggled my body pillow in my twin-sized bed.

I had a panic attack.

Which is another probably fraud thing about gentrified Brooklyn.

My daily panic attacks.

Are my daily panic attacks chill...or fraud?

That was the question I asked myself twenty-ish seconds ago, as I was having a panic attack in my twin-sized bed in my okay-sized apartment in gentrified Brooklyn.

“This panic attack,” I asked myself. “Chill or fraud?”

If you’ve never had a panic attack, chill. I will explain how they are probably fraud.

Every panic attack begins with the same realization: this panic attack isn’t beginning; it has already long since begun. Psychological stressors too countless to name have built up over a time period too vague to define, and they have done so with your unconscious permission. So now you must consciously suffer. Attempting to identify the reasons behind your panic attack, whose severities range from your parents’ divorce to stubbing your toe to 9/11, only serve to intensify your anguish. If your mind & body discomfort has reached a point where you’re asking yourself, “Am I having a panic attack?” it is too late. They can strike anywhere, at any time, especially if you live in gentrified Brooklyn.

Which is, of course, where I live. In gentrified Brooklyn.

Now your panic attack is in full swing. Chemicals in your brain are working your heart like a heavyweight works a speed bag. Instead of just, you know, “being able to breathe,” you mentally have to command your lungs to gasp. One minute you’re standing woozily at the yellow lip of a midday subway platform, wondering whether the churro woman would save you if you fell in. Next minute it’s 3 AM, and you’re trudging 15 blocks in a downpour to buy a stethoscope from CVS, because you’re convinced you’re having a full-blown heart attack, there’s a well-documented history of heart disease in your family, and you’re a member of your family, so logic follows you’re having a full-blown heart attack. Now you’re dripping cold sweat in your twin-sized bed, completely naked, listening to your heart with a goddamn stethoscope. As if you could tell a heartbeat from anything else going on inside of you. What the fuck was your plan with this stethoscope?

Ten minutes later you’re back in the emergency room for the fifth night in a row. The miserable receptionist greets you by name, photocopies your paperwork from the night before. In triage, the EKG stutter-prints your results, confirming there’s nothing physically wrong with you, everything mentally wrong with you. Then you wait. You wait three hours, surrounded by the truly ill, until Dr. Schaffer appears at your bedside in the ER. Her eye shadow is book-thick and glittery, as always. Her Crocs are a shade of blue darker than her scrubs, as always. She shakes her pretty, disappointed head at your chart, instantly bringing your panic attack to an end, and you are, for a moment, at peace.

Until Dr. Schaffer asks, “How’s *Chill or Fraud?* going?”

And the panic returns, falls on you like a mob, because you have no fucking clue.

And in your unthinking panic you say to her, “I have no fucking clue.”

And she doesn’t hear you, so you repeat yourself, louder now.

Again, “...no fucking clue.”

You end up screaming it, for her and all the other emergencies to hear.

“I HAVE! NO FUCKING! CLUE!”

And the more you say it, the truer the words sound.

And the truer the words sound, the truer they seem to become.

And the truer your words become, the better you feel.

Until you’re feeling so good it’s like your panic attack never happened.

(Because well, technically, it didn’t. Everything was in your head!)

Then you’re hugging Dr. Schaffer like she just saved your life.

Then you’re sprinting out of the ER onto the streets of gentrified Brooklyn.

And summer morning sun through the buildings is drying last night’s rainfall.

And steam is rising off the sidewalks, thick with oil slick rainbows.

And you’re running as fast as you can, back to your twin-sized bed, so you can type:

“For the love of god, it’s chill! Gentrified Brooklyn is so fucking chill!”

Is saying “Gentrified Brooklyn is so fucking chill!” chill...or fraud?

That was the question I asked myself, twenty-ish seconds ago, as soon as I finished typing “Gentrified Brooklyn is so fucking chill!”

I was in my twin-sized bed in my okay-sized apartment in gentrified Brooklyn. I was staring joyfully at the 15” screen of my MacBook Pro, ecstatic about the chill.

“How?” I said to myself. “How couldn’t I see that it was chill?”

Here’s what I realized/Allow me to explain.

I realized that the chill/fraud balance in gentrified Brooklyn is unlike any other c/f balance in the world. There are intense, unfathomable concentrations of fraud, and small, negligible concentrations of chill. However, the concentrations of gentrified Brooklyn’s

fraud are so preponderant that they actually serve to *enhance* the relatively infinitesimal concentrations of chill, creating a type of hyper-chill paradoxical chill-fraud equilibrium whose existence depends fundamentally on fraud. Basically, that even an atom of chill could exist in gentrified Brooklyn's universe of fraud makes that chill atom become a universe of chill unto itself. Basically, gentrified Brooklyn is chill, if only because it is so fraud.

Because how can one call that twitchy muscle in one's chest a heart until one's seen the squat bodega men in jean shorts dumping yesterday's flower water onto the morning sidewalks of gentrified Brooklyn? Can human eyes perceive a sweeter, more hopeful light than the underground dawn of a delayed R-Train rounding its tunnel's bend? Is the human body ever freer than it is in the laser-glowing fog of the Bossa Nova Civic Club? Is the self ever less self-conscious? Are the shackles of worry ever lighter? Can a mouth truly be called a mouth before it's touched a Sicilian slice at Joe's? Before it's sipped a Hemingway daiquiri at Dram? Before it's tasted the special sauce of Calxico or the veggie burger of Nite Hawk or the oysters of Maison Premiere, whatever the fuck that means in French? How is a heart a heart until it's fallen into momentary love between subway stops, until it's held the stare of a perfect stranger to the threshold of creepy, until it's felt love's infinite possibility appear and disappear in public transit seconds? And, truly, what are ears if they haven't heard David Sally analyze Anthony Powell's 12-volume novel *A Dance to the Music of Time*? Would they know true music if they heard it? Or would all sound forever be noise? What type of chill are you if you aren't willing to endure the fraud for all that?

Most importantly, what about the most beautiful sentence in the English language?

What chill wouldn't want to live in gentrified Brooklyn when, at any moment, a gorgeous hipster can turn to you and say that beautiful sentence?

If I'm truly a chill, how can I live anywhere else when gentrified Brooklyn is the most likely place for me to hear it?

How can I live in a place less likely to have a gorgeous hipster girl to turn me at an artisanal cocktail bar, look into my fraud-suffering eyes, and say the most beautiful sentence in the English language?

How can I not be there?

How can I not hear her and fall into deep, instant love?

How can I not hear her say, "*Hail to the Thief* by Radiohead is super underrated"?

(Which is the most beautiful sentence in the English language.)

("Hail to the Thief by Radiohead is super underrated.")

Is there anything less chill than allowing those words to be heard by some fraud?

There isn't.

There never will be.

So I'm here, and I'm listening.