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LEAPING STREAMS: A POSTMODERN EPIC AND AN
EVALUATION OF BECOMING AND BEING

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for
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Abstract

Leaping Streams explores the ways in which an epic poem form can be revived and repurposed to subvert traditional vampire narratives and mythology. I have experimented with writing in the genre of epic poetry, and I will highlight an unnamed, ungendered vampire protagonist. In an attempt to stretch the boundaries of the classic epic, I strayed from the typical heroic journey plot in a way that the protagonist is unaware that they are on a quest to become a different version of themselves. I also subverted the traditional epic meter in favor of free verse. Similarly, through attempting to recreate the vampire character, I imagined new ways for a vampire to manifest in society. The larger goal was to make the epic poem and the figure of the vampire more relatable and down-to-earth; which manifests as a postmodern text. Over the past two years, this project has challenged and extended me as a writer. It has produced a new, invigorating style of the epic poem as well as a refreshing dip into the mythology of the postmodern vampire.

Introduction

According to *Essential Literary Terms*, an epic poem is “... a long narrative poem on a serious and exalted subject...” (Hamilton 13). This definition is representative of classic epic poetry, which is based largely on a heroic journey or heroic protagonist. The importance of the heroic center of classic epic poetry is that the epic form was, in ancient and medieval times, saved to tell tales of heroes and heroic journeys. This was important in those eras because the reader audience was often surrounded by times of violent war between kingdoms. The heroic journey plot reinforced the idea that a person, or group of people, could experience any number of vehement perils and still come out on top. The hero figure became a popular trope to mirror and elevate the troubles of the time. In relation to writing style, most early epic poetry was narrated in third person, and they were nearly always written in a strict meter. While epic poetry has been utilized in the time since, it has been largely used in classic and modern contexts. *Leaping Streams* aims to challenge the classic epic format and content to discover what a postmodern epic poem would entail.

How would an epic driven by something other than the classic forms of heroism read? How would an epic poem look if told from a limited point of view, such as first person? What if the protagonist was a vampire instead of a heroic figure? Because vampire literature – like vampire mythology – has also remained unchanged for some time, how can it move forward without disregarding its past? A good place to begin this discussion is the ways in which vampires are turned and exist after being turned. In a volume of *Neophilologus* (an international journal of modern and medieval language and literature), the following quote depicts a possible origin for the vampire, “A primary theory originates from their belief in the existence of the astral body, an energy force which lives on after the human body has expired.” (Boyd 608). From *Dracula* to *Twilight*, many existing vampire texts testify to the endurance of this theory. Typically, the astral body manifests as the vampire existing in the same body of the once-human inhabitant. One must wonder, what would happen if there was a duality to humanity/vampirism? What if a vampire and a human were two minds fighting for control of the same body? What would a postmodern epic poem depicting the life of such a newly turned, and complex vampire, from the first person, look like and how would it read? *Leaping Streams* will explore these questions

through the eyes of a distinctive protagonist: an unnamed, ungendered, newly turned vampire unselfaware of the urgency with which their subjectivity is in crisis. While following this protagonist through liminal and confusing life, *Leaping Streams* will expand epic poetry and vampire literature as a whole.

Leaping Streams will strive to truly embody postmodernism. It will recognize that epic poetry and the vampire in literature have existed for generations in other ways, and it will run with that into unknown territory in both respects. One might wonder how it can still be considered an epic focused on a vampire if it is going to change what those terms represent, but that is exactly what postmodernism does. It muddles the lines of previously set standards and definitions to create a subjectivity of characters and stories rather than a selfhood and concrete plot. This will be evident in the protagonist in that they will struggle to understand *becoming* a vampire rather than *being* a vampire (the latter being the case in most modern vampire literature). *Leaping Streams* will also include sections told by the first-person perspective of a secondary character, and a third-person prologue, which are all aspects of this epic that subvert the mainly third-person story-lines with some first-person monologues of classic epic poetry.

Methodology

Leaping Streams will be an experimental epic poem. It will likely be written from the first-person perspective of a postmodern vampire. To stretch the limits of the defined classic epic poetry genre, this poem will focus on the protagonist's discovery that they have been living as a vampire unknowingly.

In *Epic Traditions in the Contemporary World*, an epic poem is described, "... as though it were a living organism, it is said to experience birth, maturity, and death" (Beissinger 4). The writing of this thesis will muddle what those terms mean. It will be an experiment to see if a plot can be born, and remain unknown, to its protagonist. Too, the 'maturity' of the plot will be the protagonist living their life in unknowing of the possibility that they are anything other than ordinary. The end of the story arc will most likely be a personal epiphany made possible for the protagonist when they realize retrospectively that they have been turned into a vampire. Besides the actual writing of this experimental epic

poem, the thesis process included reading a number of texts on vampire mythology, the vampire in literature, epic poetry, and the evolution of both epic poetry and vampire mythology/ literature. For example, reading parts of classic epics, like Dante's *Divine Comedy*, as well as more modern epics, such as Turner's *Apocalypse: An Epic Poem*, provided insight as to how formal or informal I want the language of my epic to be. Reading older and newer vampire literature has given similar insight into the postmodern vampire that I create.

One idea I originally had for a characteristic of the postmodern vampire is the inability to sleep. I thought this might manifest as vampires existing in a separate world, or a sort of 'astral plane,' when they would normally be sleeping. After writing my thesis, this actually manifested as a sort of confusion surrounding sleep and consciousness more generally. I created a separate 'place' or plane of existence, and the protagonist finds themselves there when regaining consciousness or waking up although they do not understand how. In this plane of existence, only other similarly disembodied beings are present. This 'separate world' has a dream-like quality when these individuals first lose their humanity, but over time they will learn how to control their passage between the two worlds.

I knew from the beginning of this project that 'my' vampire(s) would not necessarily be bloodsucking. In my research, I looked long and hard for a piece of established vampire lore that supported this notion that a vampire could, and does, exist without having to consume blood. In *The Vampire Book: the Encyclopedia of the Undead*, there is an entry titled: "The Vampire (Real Vampires)" which coins the term *psychic vampirism*, and it is upon this principle which I have constructed my vampire protagonist. Melton describes this *psychic vampirism* as "the process of draining the life force or energy (rather than the blood) of other people" (Melton 739). This is one of the key traits of my protagonist as *becoming* a vampire.

One of the most notable aspects of my epic, from a purely visual perspective, is the different uses of typeface. Since my protagonist and secondary character are unnamed, I needed a way to differentiate, for myself as well as the reader, who was 'speaking.' What I came up with was this:

all large portions of text in regular typeface are the protagonist,

all large portions of text in italics are the third-person narrator,
**and all large portions of text in bold are the secondary character - the
protagonist's lover.**

So, a section such as the above is an example of how dialogue between two or more of the characters may appear in the text.

There are also three main section headings from the protagonist's perspective: now, then, inbetween. These are meant to show, vaguely, from what point of this 'journey' the protagonist is speaking/writing from. 'Now' is the most current timeframe, or the closest to our time. 'Then' is from the beginning of the protagonist's journey, or when they first started noticing and experiencing changes in their life. 'Inbetween' is somewhere between the 'then' and the 'now' although *where* precisely is left indeterminate. There is, nearer the end of the protagonist's tale, a 'later' heading. The 'later' heading is the protagonist speaking from a point of acceptance of their situation, or a time after the 'now,' which can be read as being in the future.

Leaping Streams

A word, reader, before we begin:

*Imagine a world that you cannot imagine. Now imagine
It again. A world where the sky is green.
A world that may only ever exist in your
Dreams but one you want to be real.
You sometimes have access to this dream.
Even more rarely do you have access to this
World. You will figure it out one day.
You hope.*

*The protagonist of the following tale yearns to live
In such a world. A world they do not – nor ever will –
Comprehend. They will come to live there,
They hope. It will leave them in awe, and
It will leave them aching to never again
Open their eyes to the human plane of
Existence. They will start to feel lost – after
Their partner is gone. They will not know why.
Send them all the positive vibes you can
When this happens.*

*Soon after they will wonder if humans are real, if they themselves
Are real. You will lose the story soon after they realize
That they are no longer human.
It may leave you wondering if you are human,
Or if the thing you are in your dreams is the
True form of your person. The protagonist will
Feel like a friend that leaves your life with no
Explanation, no closure. Just gone. It will feel this way
For them as well.*

*Their companion is not really gone. It was our dear protagonist
who actually did the leaving.
They will never return to the human world as they were before.
It takes them a while to realize this.*

*There will be no names mentioned in this tale.
It is suggested that you try to avoid naming the character(s) yourself
as this could lead to incorrect assumptions
Only read their stories through the eyes of a person unknown to
Yourself. Try to imagine you are experiencing what they experience
Firsthand.*

*There may be more narration later in the epic. If there is not,
Do your best to be a narrator. Fill in the info you think is
Missing. As the reader, you may know best in the moment.
And remember, the sky is green in only some of your
Dreams.*

-Paresse.

...

now

It is, my dear, as some would say, the witching hour as I write this.
I want to recollect this story to you as best I can
but I also do not wish to cause you any greater
sadness.

It has taken me a long time to start this story
to remember this story to know where
it all began.

In this place this place this space ...

I know not ... *when* I am

for that I shall always be sorry

I have remembered us somewhat recently I believe
somewhat... some... where we existed
together. we were so happy I am so happy to have
finally remembered us what we felt like.

For a long time I did not realize how my essence was
fading from that world, from our world, from *our* world.
felt drawn to a sense of peace inside myself that I had never
known - you have to understand, have to... to realize I never

meant to leave I only meant to settle myself.

You know when we were together I also had another
you.

there were always more than one, more than you,
but you knew that.

more than enough of me to
pass around. some were lonelier than I knew needed more of me
than I knew. how could I have known their potential for
draining me? draining me right out of existence

maybe my becoming this was not their fault but they

told me if I let them *in* that I could know their peace
it could become my peace it Would be my peace.

how could I have known? how could I.

When you started fading from me how did I not notice that I
was really the one fading?

Why was it not more obvious to me that the world seemed stranger,
day after day after day after night.

that is what nobody is willing to say. how difficult it is to *become* something
outside yourself while all the while losing who you were?

maybe you will never even see this. will you ever feel it? do I have that
power here, I wonder, to invoke feeling in a place I left so so long
ago. All these words I have used when really all I wanted to say is:
welcome to my journey.

may my retelling be clearer to you than
it was to me as I lived
and breathed it.

...

then

something weird something quiet something red?
yesterday yesterday came so – no *went* so quickly.

I saw you I heard you I felt you but for an
instant you could not perceive me.

walked around the next bend in the path and

you were so worried when you looked into my eyes.

Where did you go?!

you almost never spoke with such high intensity.

I have been right here the whole time.

the disbelief in your eyes made me
acknowledge how shaky my voice had been.

it was not the first time, looking back.
last week I had to repeat myself four times that
breakfast was ready and when you finally heard me,
well. it is a bit cliché to say you could have seen a ghost, but
what else would make you so desperate so god damn
desperate to ask

honey, you know it is midnight, right?

my mistake, I guess. side effects of the sleeping pills.

back to bed then?

we walked in silence. you spooned me but not as long as normal. let out a sigh
I could not quite catch the nuance of. I thought I glimpsed a tear as you
rolled over. I wondered if you knew I had not taken a
sleeping pill in months. since I had been seeing the others again.

...

now

I feel that I cannot return. No longer
can I give up this other-world
For the sake of being with you...
I am unable to find you again no matter how
desperately I wish for it.

Your story is only just beginning
the first of many tales.
You will discover so many more wonderful
worlds – but please, please,
Remember my love for you.
you see, after so much time here,
if time *is* here, I know a lot of things.

not readily available knowledge; I have to
 work for it, but there nonetheless –
 I know that humanity is merely one leg
 of this multi-staged existence. in it for so long
 it is hard to know if there is anything before or
 after. but there is, and I know so because I have come
 to exist in such a place. but I no longer know if I
 still occupy the space of *after* or if I am now
before.

Never stop loving humanity, even if it keeps you
 From *being* it. Everything starts as human -
 At least in your existence it does. Everything else has left
 And returned as something else. If I thought these words would reach
 you, I would be concerned of telling you too much, too soon.
 Our *times* are not synchronous however.
 so beyond our understanding of how things worked we
 could not have cared less about any of that
 and now so foggy thinking seems so foggy.
 knowledge is there now but hard to grasp.
 our *when* not lining up so I will tell you all I can.

I write to you with the last scrap of love I could find
 Within myself. Neither of us have ever been
 Sure where or how we met. Or why.

I worry my feelings are waning from me now my feelings for... for
 you. for what I thought life was.
 I will write to you as long as I feel you feel who you are

...

then

I have not slept in days but the dreams
 Oh the dreams are so
 Vivid. feels like I am becoming new
 Like somehow I have been revived
 But something else is now my conscience.
 I walk outside and wince

It feels as though I do not belong here
 My mind is clearer, though,
 And oh how I love being
 Able to know peace.

have not seen you in days there have been others been others
 others but not you – how come not you?
 where are you going?
 are you going? Or am I the car in this case and you the
 landscape but my perspective is stuck and
 cannot see how much I am moving.
 how should I know which? how should I how should I
 when rest of it seems normal feels normal
 all I know is I have not seen you or do not remember
 seeing you. so confused by it why confused – a fight?

I see you now you're right in front of me.

darling I've been here all day I was just in the other room.

you smile. all day you said.

have you been here all weekend? you haven't gone off for work?

**no darling I haven't gone off I've been here
 all weekend. everything alright?**

I think I woke up mid-dream is all. all blurring together a bit.

all day. all weekend. but I have not seen – this place!
 not that I have not seen you dear but
 I have not seen this place this home our home
 it has felt other this time the way it did before moving together.
 Maybe I really did wake up mid-dream.

...

in-between

thinking that I am figuring out this
 liminality
 thinking that I am grasping how
 you feel so far although I still feel
 so close to myself – my real self – the one
 I oft kept hidden

hidden from others not hidden from you
 I believe you knew how I longed
 always longed to not cease existing but
 exist differently

right now I am somewhere else being something
 else being somehow truer to myself
 than I knew was possible with you –
 not because of you but because of the *place*
 of us that metaphysical place of existence
 so hard to escape when you doubt the reality
 of somewhere else entirely

after that last time together
 that last time of us fully knowing
 each other – fully understanding
 the essence of the other
 I thought I woke up
 and heard your voice but the voice

was not your voice - it was new yet somehow
 felt familiar the voice started telling me
 where and when I was
 said I had a choice to make said
 I had to decide how much I wanted to keep living
 in the world of us
 how much I wanted
 to keep living as a human – I asked
 there's a catch here, isn't there? not very often does
 this kind of choice not have some price to pay in return.

*you have to be willing to consume something – an act you probably thought
 only to occur in fiction or folklore.*

you have to be willing to drink blood to keep your human form.

I said to the voice
 there must be a mistake a mistake – I'm not, am I?
 you're saying all of them made this choice? to stay on earth,
 they decided doing *that* was worth it?

there are other ways you can see it – consume other

energies and become another living being. be a moth, for instance – you can see the world you knew that way, your physical form will exist there, but the need to seep energy from things will overrun you.

a moth? who in the hell would choose to be a moth over a – oh. the lights. moths and lights.

the voice stopped after I realized that.

I assumed if there was another option for me it would be death, real death. no continued consciousness. no chance of seeing our world again even less chance of interacting with it.

pondered and pondered and pondered
felt as though that was all I had ever done and all I would ever do again until the
voice came back wondering how I was handling my new reality. I asked the voice,

what did you choose? I assume you were once
faced with the same choice.

the voice responded,

it must have been centuries ago, the last time I was asked that by a newly realized one. yes, I did face a choice such as yours.

I asked the voice which guided me if I could give up my regard for time, if it was possible to exist without that care.

the next thing I remembered was waking up, hanging from a tree limb – I had taken the physicality of a sloth. the voice then said to stay that way I would have to devote my consciousness to helping others, I would have to guide them to their new selves.

is reincarnation as a human an option?

the voice sounded hopeless in its response,

reincarnation costs your memories. unless you agree to remember everything, always, for all of your reincarnations. no guarantee that those important to you would choose the same.

If I was capable of weeping in this place I would have.
 I understood why the most notable form of
 vampire was that which drank blood to sustain itself.

...

then

dancing, dancing with you is always
 my favorite. we are in some sort of activity hall,
 some community center – all I know of reality in
 this moment is you.

as if us dancing is all that stands between me
 and whatever is trying to lure me away.
 I feel as though I have danced with you everywhere
 and anytime there has ever been a dance
 as if we have transcended all borders, all laws
 of reality and time.

do not remember not dancing but I wake up
 on the kitchen floor you standing over me
 face pale as if you have seen a ghost in place of me.
 you speak softly, as though you are worried,

**I needed water, thought you were still out, didn't see you
 there and nearly fell
 over you. do you know that it's 3 in the
 morning? on a Tuesday? how much longer
 will you go on like this?**

dearie if I knew how much longer I'd probably already
 be gone. let's go to bed, yeah?

in the morning I ask

how long did we dance last night?
 the worry came back on your face as you said
**darling, we didn't dance last night,
 I haven't seen you in nearly four days.**

have not been home in four days? I do not

remember where else I could have gone
we were dancing, dancing, dancing.
it kept my mind busy from the place where I –
oh. the place where I was. my mind fooled me
somehow I was there with you but you were not
there with me.

I look deeper into myself for a notion of this place
besides the surface level of its existence
and this feeling rises up in me – the one where
you wake up from a nap and feel like
you have stepped into a whole new world,
except this new world is me and
the one out of which I stepped is everyone else.
and this time it is real – oh how I
may never know, may never remember
I may never know when or why I stepped
out of our world, dear.

I sense that if I ever step back into it fully
either the world or I will be changed
but no way of knowing now which it will
be. I ask you to not forget me now
even though I have slowly been drifting
further from you
into this place of myself.

...

now

turns out, the voice I had been hearing, the one of
the sloth, had been putting me in and out of
the human world as a moth for quite some time.
explains why I would remember being around
you but you would not realize
I had been there.
I had not yet made my choice, and apparently
that meant I was subject to different tests
of reintegration to see how I would react
to each.

After I had been made aware of this
 I was told my physical form would be suspended
 until I could decide what I was willing
 to do to get it back – if I wanted it.
 another option was, of course, to
 let my consciousness float around
 in whatever this dimension is and
 merely exist, with other consciousness clouds
 that have been stripped of their original physical forms.

how? how did I lose my body?
 moth bite, probably. unless someone I knew –
 one of them? it could not have been you, could it? -
 was a blood-sucking vampire,
 one of those long hikes likely left me
 with this strange infliction.

they never mean to do it, honestly.
 they are trying to reconnect to us
 in the only way they know how.

...

in-between

I have come to the conclusion that
 this *place* I am in is what the Christians might
 call *purgatory*. or something parallel to it.
 vampire bites do not affect the soul,
 it turns out, so when the body becomes too ill
 to save, our consciousness is set free *here*. we did not
 die, per say, so much as become disembodied – literally.

I have immense clarity of my mind currently
 as my physical body
 has been temporarily surrendered. the voice
 told me it will be recycled, that in some odd
 number of years some other human will
 be born that will closely resemble

the body which was once mine.
 anyway, since I am no longer being
 pulled between this place of minds
 and that of bodies, I can think clearly again.
 when I was being pulled in and out of both realms, I felt
 as if I was always just waking from one of those
 time-bending naps, the ones when you wake up leave you so
 disoriented that it is almost *otherworldly*.

so if you see *me* again, it will not, really, be *me*.
 I gave up my opportunity to drink blood to
 maintain my original appearance,
 so if I ever do return to earth in a human body
 it will be unrecognizable to you,
 and to the others who knew me.

correct me if I am wrong – that is a possibility – I
 believe you dream of me at times?
 see, dreams are so much more complex than
 anyone knows. every human has a connection
 to this realm, the one where I am.
 I hear your voice sometimes, like you are trying to reach me.
 but nothing I say ever reaches you.

it is not so much an afterlife as it is a parallel
 piece of our lives.
 most people assume that humans exist only
 in the place which they experience, the physical
 place of a singular universe. this is only partially true –
 it is actually possible to manipulate the parallel pieces
 while remaining on earth, the people that have figured this
 out are typically thought to be fictional or supernatural.
 vampires, witches, necromancers, werewolves
 and other were-creatures.
 the list goes on and on.
 all of us that have come to exist in this parallel realm also
 know another truth long discussed in science fiction:
 time is not linear.

...

Ok, reader, a word?

I am the voice to which our protagonist has been referring. it is hard for them to fully comprehend my existence. if we were all on earth together in this moment I would appear as a sloth – it is my preferred physical form when I must take one. slow moving, lovely creatures. you are probably wondering why would I ever need to be on earth again? or what my purpose even is?

I exist on the edges of all dimensions. I am capable of manipulating time, space, and all of their inhabitants. I most often just watch from afar and stay out of any and all happenings. sometimes, though, I notice a particularly confused soul: a consciousness who just really seems lost with their new position in the multiverse. the protagonist of this tale was one such soul. on earth, they were a human who never believed in anything beyond the reality of their world. sci fi never triggered in them any sense of wonderment of what else could be out there. souls such as this are extremely hard to comfort as they travel between dimensions – a completely normal and common thing for a soul to do after its body has been damaged or destroyed. it is hard to accept that you had been misled your entire life.

so I found them, floating on the edge of physical life and non-physical, sometimes also known as the spiritual. they had been given the gift of vampirism, a gift which not all things would see as gifts. I did my best to help them come to this realization on their own, it is

*always easier than trying to convince them.
once they did acknowledge and accept
what had become of them, they were quite
content to remain only in this realm, aware of their
thoughts and sentience and aware of the
other consciousnesses around them
but lacking any connection to their old realm.*

*though they spoke often of another human
with whom they had lived, they were
extremely reluctant about sacrificing any part of themselves
to stay with them. said if that person
had been a witch they would have
gone back as their familiar. but they had also
not believed in anything
commonly thought of as supernatural.
they are curious though, about other dimensions.
I told them to travel between them all takes
such a long time that they would end up
back where they started, but on a slightly different track.
controlling the borders of time and reality are highly
complicated and the cost is never being able to live the same
experience twice.*

*our dear protagonist disappeared after that. not sure
where they are off to, but I wished to let you know
that their story might be different – different how I do not
know. best of luck to you, reader, on the finishing of this tale.*

until we meet again.

-Paresse.

...

now

I decided after an indeterminable amount of time
that I would attempt to venture from this dimension on my
own because I figured the worst that could happen is I would

just cease existing.

I decided this after the voice the guiding voice
told me that at some point after traveling between all the
dimensions I would end up nearly where I started.
I figured if I could make it all the way
back round to a time and place
in which I might be able to know you again, even if
you or I would be slightly different there,
it would be worth it.

the realm I have been in makes it hard to distinguish
where to even start this notion of dimension or realm jumping
I thought of you. I thought that if I thought of you perhaps I would
get closer to our reunion.

I thought of you and suddenly I was I was standing behind a door.
behind a door meant I was in a room so I turned around –
this room *felt* familiar but looked so strange, so unknown.
I could not see myself, however, and I recalled the voice telling
me that to have a physical form I would
have to exchange or give something.
I had given nothing to be here, wherever *here* was now.
I would just be a remnant, then, of another time. I would
watch this world as its time elapsed, if time did elapse here.

it occurred to me that the room was dark,
but not in an absence-of-light
way. dark in an inversion-of-light way.
there were people, they entered the room,
but the atmosphere of the
room did not change – as if the people were somehow less
tangible or less important than the place.
I wondered what was on the other side of the door and –
and suddenly I was there.
it was my childhood home – except my childhood had not
taken place here. another child, with my name, with my family,
grew up here, but that child was not me.
I remembered that my parents once told me if they had not
gotten pregnant so soon after marriage

they would have built onto
 their home, renovated it.
 the room I first saw was the add-on.
 so in this dimension my parents waited longer to have kids.
 this reality split off from ours at that point – gave up
 its functionality of lights to exist.

this *entity*, the one we call the world,
 thrives on a system of give and take.
 that is where ‘matter can neither be created nor destroyed’ comes from.
 everything that ever was and ever will be already is,
 it is just a matter of manipulating it all
 from one version to the next.

I notice that the people here are my family
 my mom, other mom, me. and another child –
 other mom never miscarried here.
 the sibling I never had was alive here, in this reality,
 so close yet so far from our own.
 I appeared to be a teenager here,
 chuckled to myself at the notion,
 and as I did so, teenage not-me suddenly looked pale,
 if pale can describe the inversion of pale also.
 I swear not-me stared directly into where
 my eyes would be. they shuddered, turned round again,
 went back to laughing with their sibling.

I was unsettled at this; it meant that the not-me’s could sense me,
 somehow. I continue lingering; something, some feeling
 keeping me drawn to this place.

my mother, this other mom, got up and told the children
 it was time to go. what felt a mere instant later
 we were all in a skating rink. must have been someone’s
 birthday. so many kids I do not recognize –
 had this other me grown up in an entirely different neighborhood?
 I see, I see what has to be you, dear.
 much younger you than when I knew you of course.
 the paper party hat told me it was your birthday.

I never met your parents, when you and I were together.
yet here they were, in this weird out-of-our-timeline where
my essence lingered. such beautiful women, I thought.

I tried to clear my mind, trying to avoid wondering why we
never met each other's parents.
I was back at once to this place of consciousness, place of souls.
existing in this void seemed comforting now, after
experiencing something so seemingly impossible.

...

it became apparent to me, after that,
why time travelers are warned against
finding themselves, or the people they love.
I still needed to find you, though,
but I did not know what I could give to actually
be with you. interact with you, even if it was
only one last moment. I lullled around for a while
trying to decipher how I could know my human self
once more, so that it may know you, your touch too,
I hoped.

Paresse! Paresse, I have to give something, to go back.
can it be something less consequential if I only stay a
short time?

*My friend, you learn well. I would say quickly, but who is
to say how fast or slow time moves round here. But yes, say you
want to stay a human for a couple of days. Give something of
convenience to you, it should be enough.*

And if I want to find a specific person, I can do that?

*It has been done before, yes. But do not expect to find them
knowing you the way they did before. Alright?*

Before I even had a chance to ask what convenience I would
lose in seeing you, I was in a body again. my body, well
the one that had been mine. Picture this:

I am in a bar. the name sounds familiar, but I cannot quite grasp why. I look around – I notice I am in another country. not sure which one exactly. then the bartender approaches. sounds as if they are speaking French. I answer them. In French?! Ah, so that must mean I cannot talk to you. The convenience I gave was that cursed language, English. All I had ever known but it was still so *heavy*, you could just feel how pieced together it was with stolen bits.

Just then, you walk in. grab the end seat, closest one to the door. per usual for you. flag down the bartender. look towards me. not just in my direction, but directly at me. you smile. your eyes are almost the same, except they hold less pain here. when the bartender gets to you, you order something for yourself and point to me as well.

the bartender slides me a whiskey on rocks.

I stare into the glass a while, wondering how this is supposed to happen in just a day or so's time. will it be worth it?

I jump – something tapped my shoulder. it was you; you always were the bold type. you asked me something, I could tell by the tone but, and I'll be damned – I did not understand one word out of your mouth. you must have noticed my confusion, pulled out your phone and handed it to me with a 'new contact' page open. texting would make translating easier, and how could I say no? how could I struggle to get back to you the way I had and not do everything in my physical power to make it worthwhile? barely seconds after I handed your phone back that mine buzzed. I laughed upon seeing your name in that message, it was the nickname from your childhood you had told me you despised so greatly. apparently, this you, this other you, did not share that sentiment. we sat and finished our drinks. texted slowly with the help of google translate. it was cute, made me nostalgic for the time

I could never return to.

when we left the bar, you asked, via text of course,

**and what shall we do with the rest of this fine evening?
a stroll around downtown? window shopping in all the
closed stores?**

I replied, quite eagerly,

that sounds like quite the enchanting time. As long as
you promise to tell me what each and everything is,
in that weird language you speak.

so off we went, wandering around this city, strange to both
of us, both of us strange to each other. but the feeling was
there. the base feeling I always had with you, the you that I knew
for so many years.

this other you, talked to me for what felt as endless as that
existence outside humanity. the longer we walked, the more
we talked to each other, still not understanding the words
the other spoke but somehow knowing what they meant anyway.

we stopped, then. in front of a quaint, corner building,
we must be nearly out of the city. you looked at me,
asking with your eyes if I would like to come in. you texted,
**I'm renting a room from the owner, staying here for the
term. I'm allowed to have people over, so, come in?**

I just nodded. we went up to your room. it smelled like you.
like *my* you. I felt warm – my whole being felt warm in a way it
had not for a real long while.

I looked around while you changed into sweats and
climbed into the bed. you turned on the tv – it was already playing
Say Yes to the Dress. I laughed as you motioned me to join you.
I sat beside you. laid my head on your shoulder.

I fell asleep. I do not remember falling asleep, but I woke up.
I was startled at first – your arms were wrapped around me.
you were spooning me. I could not tell you the last time I had
been held, all of me at once. being in that timeless place
I had forgotten how comforting it was to be contained in the
presence of you, of someone I love so dearly.
I slid my fingers through yours, so that my hand held yours

to my body.

...

later

I fell asleep. I do not remember falling asleep, but when I woke, you were gone. except you were not the one that had dissipated, that was me. I would almost swear I could still hear the women on that show chattering about what fit they wanted or what style they did not. but I was no longer in that bed, your arms were no longer around me, my fingers no longer intertwined with yours. and I had not really awoken this time, because sleep does not really exist here. ah yes, *here*, back to this strange other place.

I am content. laying beside you one last time has left my being so inexplicably calm.
my dear, thank you. I am so glad I had the chance to find you again. if I can ever get this message, this story to you, I need you to know that I am wholeheartedly thankful that I can feel complete without you
now. being with you one last time reminded me that you were part of my *life*, not a part of *me*. it felt good to feel you again, to feel your essence with mine.
but I know now it does not matter what my soul becomes, if that is really what we are all made of. it does not matter! it does not. I do not need to find a suitable way to be a vampire – that is just another way to prolong my innate existential search to return to the place from which we have all come.

So here ends my letter from beyond,
from across that uncrossable stream
of life and death.

I love you, dear. may your journey lead you to experiences twice as riveting as your human life.

...

P.S.

I never asked if you believe in reincarnation or not, dear.
Do you?
It does not really matter, now
it is what I have chosen
that I am okay with a complete reboot
because I have experienced you when you did not know me,
and it was reassuring to know we still
connected.
and I am not worried that the *me* I will become will
become the wrong me I am confident that every me,
that ever was, is, or will be, will be the right me for their
situation.

Maybe memories are a bit vampiric in nature –
taking up space in our minds, all the time,
costing us, at times, the peace of unknowing.

So I am banking on it, actually, that all my knowing
will be lost to this universe, even that of
you and I.
I would hate, so much would I hate if my existence
and all I carry with myself – even here, in this not-place –
if it detracted from the peace of mind of who
I am becoming.

it makes me wonder, though, if I have done this before?
how many times have I chosen reincarnation,
chosen a blank slate?
have I always been becoming?
I am becoming now, but will I
become again?

have you become, my dear?
did you choose remembrance?
it is more plausible that we are all,
always, becoming.
that we are always part of the vampiric
cycle of consciousness and knowledge
and memory

the vampiric cycle of
becoming and being.

Goodbye, my dear.
you
were so much to me, always.
no matter who
you
were.

and may I be something to
you, again.

...

*And so, reader,
our dear protagonist has made
their choice. they are in the process of truly
becoming another, now.
they will inhabit a different body, be given a
different name.
the reincarnated bit is the very base of their
consciousness – the very center piece of who they were.
some may call this a soul.
it will be shaped and altered by the new, different
environment in which it will become.*

*reincarnation can be from any being, into any other
being. if they wish to retain their memories, they are more
likely to be reincarnated into a being with a similar or
same-type body, unless otherwise specified by request.*

*if a being, as our protagonist, does not retain their memories,
they can be reincarnated into a being of any body, of any
life-expectancy. this does have several implications, yes.
but worry not for the fate of our protagonist.
they are to become exactly what the universe needs them
to be.*

...

epilogue

[originally given as a lecture as part of a miniseries funded by the adhoc committee dedicated to finding out what happens after.]

I would like to start my time by reciting a short story I wrote after I awoke from a coma following a car wreck when I was a child. At the time I wrote this, I did not yet know that my mothers had been killed in the wreck.

restart

I open my eyes but I do not remember shutting them – where am I? it is white here, the walls are white, so brisk so sterile like a – like a hospital.

why am I in a hospital? how did I get here? last thing I remember – last I remember is my birthday party. at the skating rink.

was that real? who was there with me?
I remember seeing someone there that I'd never seen before. were they real?

Mom! mommy! where are you two? It's like I feel the presence of some- of something *behind* me, that I can't quite get at!

no response. a nurse pokes their head in the door and asks if everything was alright. how can I say yes? but how can I say no? and be trapped here even longer. I just nod. my eyes start to close themselves as I drift back to sleep.

The day after I wrote that piece a nurse asked me if I had written anything else. I had not remembered writing anything, I told him. what had I written? he handed me the single page on which I had

produced the above narrative.
 he told me it was in fact what had actually
 happened the first day I woke up.

He told me later that when I yelled out for
 my mothers, my voice changed distinctly.
 This has also happened in my life since then –
 every time in an instance of crisis or indecision,
 except for one.

I did my last semester of undergrad studying abroad
 in France, and I would frequent a bar in a small part of
 town a few blocks from the room I rented.
 It was typically the only bar I went to as I always
 felt somehow drawn to it.
 One night, near the end of my term,
 I walked in and sat where I normally do, but as I turned to
 call the barkeep over I noticed someone whom I had never
 seen *there*. they had one of those faces that *feel* familiar
 although you cannot actually pull the knowledge from your
 brain as to where you may have seen them.

Next thing I knew I was buying them a drink –
 and then they started speaking. in French. some of the
 most advanced French I had encountered. this was
 problematic, to say the least, for I only speak a very broken,
 basic level of French. So, I gave them my phone to input
 their contact info. we hit it off immediately.

after a few more drinks we wandered the town for a
 bit before retiring to my room for the night.
 when I fell asleep, I saw them in a dream.
 except it didn't quite feel like a dream. it felt more
 real, somehow, more real than even some days I've
 lived. when I woke up the next morning they were
 gone. I was still groggy with the strange sleep I had
 had, and called out

Where are you?

no answer. I have never *seen* them again.

but, after that encounter, I noticed something odd which has been occurring much longer than I have ever taken note of before. The voice of my consciousness, the voice in my head guiding my life, is not the same voice that I speak with on a day to day basis.

I've been told on several occasions that you never think of your voice in the same way that others hear it.

but after that night with that so familiar stranger it became apparent to me just how different the voice in my head truly was from what I hear in video playback and such.

because it was not my voice. It was, is, *their* voice.

all my life, at least as long as I remember, it has to have been their voice in my head. but how is this possible?

How can I possibly have another voice in my head, thinking with me, deciding with me, hiding itself as me for decades?

the answer I still have not uncovered. maybe it is, and always will be, inaccessible to me, in this place.

However, whether or not we know the answers we should still ask the questions.

With this in mind, I began to ponder how, and why, consciousness and dreams and the like are still so mysterious to researchers. How could I, in my personal life, try to discover for myself if anything *more* is related to these concepts?

I decided I would meditate. I would reach for that deeper part of myself, of my brain, that most people never even think about.

it felt like I was climbing into myself. as if the more I meditated the more I realized I had access to which I had never even tried to access before.

How was my own mind so skilled at hiding different things from me? as if I had repressed things I was *never* meant to access.

As I was climbing, I encountered a shallow stream. I was flabbergasted, how is my mind so intricate that

**my subconscious contains realistic landscapes?
climbing mountains and encountering streams
surrounded by meadows?
still haven't figured that out either.**

**Soon after I saw the stream, I came out of
my meditative trance. This was not intentional.
Something forced me back to a normal level of
consciousness.**

**I would spend months trying to access this place
again. I wanted desperately to cross the stream of
my mind.**

this proved near impossible.

**I began to wonder if whatever did prompt our
existence did this on purpose – is it possible that humans
are created with knowledge hidden within their minds,
not for them to access, but to assist the multiverse in its
functionality?**

**And, if this is the case, but some of humanity figures out
how to access this 'forbidden' knowledge anyway,
does it mean they are different from the norm, or are they
actually the default? which way do our brains have to flip,
from forbidden to accessible, or accessible to forbidden?**

**I obviously do not have the answers to these questions,
nor do I want you to think that I ever will.**

**But I want you to consider what I have told you
here today. I'm sure some of you will pass it off as
'hocus pocus bullshit'
which is fine to me. we all believe what we want,
in the end.**

**But think also what possibilities there are, on the
other side of the streams of our mind.**

**If you're afraid of water, would you be able to cross it?
maybe not. maybe you can, though, and it might just
set us free.**

Afterword

As you may have put together, the speaker of the epilogue is the partner of the protagonist, previously only seen from the protagonist's perspective. My hope with the epilogue is that it was clear to you that the partner was speaking from a very ambiguous place. They have not yet figured out what exactly is happening with the strange voice in their head – they merely know that it exists there and is not the same voice with which they speak. They are in this sense liminal, at once they are themselves and another, and one could also say that they are, in a sense, perpetually becoming each other.

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