

If You Would Only Let it Be

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The weight on my chest shook me awake. I jolted in panic as I was greeted by a void.

How long have I been floating here in this dark space? Tiny, faraway stars and a steady, almost electric humming in the distance.

That's when the hands beneath me appeared. The hands of a behemoth humanoid with the warmth of a filial love. Above, a semblance of sound and the forming shape of a head that rests out of my reach.

"What is this place?" I asked. I could not tell the time, nor the passing of such an incorporeal concept.

It speaks.

Your life has expired. Or. You are dead. The voice spoke calmly, almost telepathically from all around me, now emanating from a pitch-black body taken form. Made of the void itself.

"That can't be. I only tucked in the kids and went to bed. Nikita, Aaron, where are they? Where are my kids?!" Panic slowly crawled over me.

I could still remember their peaceful sleeping forms, Nikita's messy sandy brown hair with the night light to deter the monsters under the bed, books perfectly stacked and organized on the nightstand. Aaron drooling, exhausted and splayed on his car bed from swinging his bear from wall to wall and uprooting the backyard plants. I searched every possible direction and yelled as far as I could for a response.

Astounding.

I turned my head, but not my eyes, to this being once more, unable to compose myself as I quivered with eyes darting about.

Even in death, your concern for tribal beings like family are your priority. That is admirable.

"So... is my family here too?" I focused my gaze on the loudest direction of the whispering voice.

No. Just you. You are alone here.

I wondered for what felt an eternity, how this being could so nonchalantly mark my death. No excitement, no fear nor sadness or contempt overcame this voice.

“What are you? Am I in hell? How did I even die?!” I could feel parts of my mind slipping into a slow, nagging insanity.

Hell? No such place exists. Nor do your other planes of imagination. You might say... I am you. I am also nothing. The beginning and the end. You died peacefully in your sleep.

“...are you a god?”

Silence.

“I don’t understand. Please, if I can be brought back, do it.” I had always believed that gods could achieve whatever they desired. I pleaded with the being to send me home; I would fall to my knees in prayer and faith should I return to life.

Whatever for?

“My kids need me.” Loneliness overcame me, as the feeling of tears welled within me.

This being stared at me with blank, pupil less white eyes, with utter fascination. It could not understand me, yet knew all that I was, all that I have ever been and all that I could be. I could not hold secrets from their starry body, their blank visage that reflected...me?

They will continue to live and exist without you. Your youngest of five years will memorialize you as the teddy bear reciting prayer and tales of old to lull them. Your partner’s pains will fade in the stream of time, as all feelings do. Yet they will find your lifeless form beside them when the sun rises.

“Is this limbo?” I desperately cling to reason and another chance to think.

It is a state of in-between.

This being looked beyond me, this time their form shrinking to match my anatomy in size and shape as opposed to its colossal form. It sat upon a steep, grassy hill with lush green grasses decorated with fresh dew, conjured from nothingness.

I sat beside it. Only then did I notice my lack of a body, yet my senses worked fine.

This hill. Explain it.

Several seconds... several centuries passed before I could process this line of thought. I opened my mouth. No sound came from it. I had no tangible mouth. I had no thoughts of the soft, warm hill I stood upon.

“So, I am imagining this?”

Yes. Humanity is fascinating in its ability to think, yet few innovate. You envision my form through connections to your memory, your sole understanding. Walk with me.

The form stood with me and we walked side by side closer to the top of the hill. Each time the form lifted its arm, a picture appeared. A series of images played in the sky, quite like a video. Pyramids and landmarks shot up from the space below us, replete with dawn and dusk cascading the landscape. Paint swiftly stroked onto a canvas and a quill danced across a page. Celebrations and festivities had patrons in arms, greeting us with joy and groups staring at us with civilized hate. Wars waged, slaughters and bloodless carnage envelop us as bodies collided with mine, before fading into dust.

All of it, an illusion.

You determine your success and greatness by what you contribute to the world. By what measure of capital one possesses. Through the voice shared to the voiceless.

It was right. In the images, I could see Einstein, planets, the Mona Lisa, Bach, robots, and skyscrapers dotting the land, belonging to some mega-corporation. The leaders and unsung heroes who helped those in need. Activists and speakers fighting for others. Thinkers, doers, creators; humble people of all kinds who simply did the best they could.

“We are limited by our imagination?” It is a thought I had pondered before. The pain left a lingering throb and descended into longing for warmth. For love.

“This must be limbo; I’ve heard about this in the old stories my parents used to tell me of places like this, no paradise, no suffering. They were true!” Slowly I was overcome with fascination at the empty world, begging to be designed and animated, ready to bend to the will of its creator.

Limbo, again? Do you suppose that your belief in a God led you to me? What if you believed in something else, or did not believe at all? Would the outcome have changed?

“There’s no way for me to know that.”

The being, which now took the form of my partner – their fluffy black hair, milk chocolate tone with the brownest eyes reminiscent of soft forest bark, continued. I yearned to embrace them, and yet could not. I could see my partner, yet I could not feel their presence. An emotional distance so vast in such a close physical distance.

You were sent to your world to experience a more intense, limited consciousness. Beliefs, creed, alignment. Effort, talent, advantage. Privilege and disenfranchised. Here, they are

meaningless. An experience meant to teach you the many ways and means one can live, all gone in a flutter.

A tact pause.

If right and wrong determined your life, you will miss out on important experiences.

I considered the thought. How many moments did I miss simply because I did not listen? The pain of others, the perspectives of others, how often did I lose an opportunity to experience something new simply because it was considered wrong or different to my lifestyle?

“I... hurt.” I had gone numb. Soon I shifted to a slow walk, unable to stand poised and firm and hunched forward slowly, hands on my transparent knees, winded and drained of strength.

That pain you feel is the mark that you have lived. One cannot feel pain without first having experienced joy.

“Then going numb is proof that my time is up?” The soreness of my heart beckoned to the void to rid me of this feeble form by becoming one.

There is something else to show you.

The being... my partner. I felt safe with them. Nothing could reach nor hurt me here. They knew all. Except me. I was an experiment, the final product yet to become complete. As I moved to speak to the being, a magnificent, silver-scale adorned dragon soared in the space above us, the jagged edges of its wings flapping hard enough for me to feel the stinging winds below. Nikita always chased us down at the end of each day with dramatic interrogations on these beasts, her favorite animal next to Aaron’s polar bears, which soon surrounded us before fading away.

“If you know so much about the world, a god like you created it, then?”

I did create this world. I did not create anything else. What is on your world is not mine.

No matter my efforts, there could be nothing they did not know or foresee. I could feel this beings’ thoughts and intent flow into me. I slowed to a crawl, ready to assimilate with the void and embark on whatever journey I had before me, if there was one at all.

“Where did you come from? How old are you?” If I were fated to spend the rest of my existence with this being, continuously riddled, I would prefer to know all – now.

What I will tell you now, you will never take or remember.

I listened closely. Teleporting perhaps miles away, the hard ground below us splits and a soft light shines through the hole. I felt terror and a cold, clammy shudder around me as I watched countless mountainous, clean, starry-black hands and heads poke from the surface, each with the same form and eyes as my new companion. Stacked against one another, they could not all travel through this tear, with my companion willing the rift closed.

An infinite number of beings not unlike myself, each with its own plane, its own worlds, its own thoughts and information flowing around it and not through it. Should I choose to explain this to you in-depth, millions of years would pass and still you would not understand.

“You aren’t from my world, but you aren’t from the world that holds my world either? Where do your world and your kind come from, then? This is a stretch.” I pressed my hands to my simulated temples as though I had a headache.

We come from nothingness. The universe bore us all so it would not exist alone. I am a product of its creation and yet created it. More powerful than my creations, but not as powerful as my creator. This is what you think.

“Then where does the empty universe come from? We always learned of either a big bang or a god putting it there.”

Everything must come from something, correct? You assume an explosion happened to spawn the world, or you may assume a being put it there. What if you were told that the worlds began as bubbles popping silently, or a black void coughing out a planet? Ah, there’s the crux, isn’t it? My intellect reflects yours in this space. If you do not know, then I do not. Things are not so simple.

“But if... I...” My words slurred and stuttered to a halt. I could form not a word nor a soundbite. True enough, I had already forgotten the intended words. Quite so, the memory of this event slowly sloughed off my mind and dissipated where we stood.

...Time was running out.

The starry form looked away at the sky and at the familiar, Earth-bound animals pulled from my imagination, running about the plains. The figure is clearly lost in my own memories, seeing images of animals, peoples, places I have experienced. Like a movie scene, my college graduation, my wedding, the birth of my children, my first car accident, my mother’s death... it is fascinated with what I felt. Strange alien forms appeared with these images, some bizarre

beyond belief, some with odd swirling eyes and wiry bodies. How many worlds align in this space? Which were part of my imagination, and which were real?

“I expected you to be capable of destroying me, of being infinitely smarter than me and using big words in a language older than humanity. I can understand you though.”

I speak, look, and behave exactly as you expect me to. What you perceived as the truth has become incarnate. As for how old I am... no older than you, I suppose.

Another nonchalant answer garnished with a shrug.

“The earth is old, billions of years it might have been there. How can you say that?” The answer took me by surprise.

You are of the mind that evolution and time exist here. You assume time marches only forward in a continuous line and yet paradoxically understand time to have the undiscovered ability to move backwards. There is no moving backward or forward, there is only now.

Another image stains the blackened sky, this time showing different images in different time as a film reel would. Dinosaurs bombarded by an asteroid, the discovery of fire, ancient Athenian scholars pondering the world, Alexander the Great marching forward in his youth, the fall of the Roman Empire, the Enlightenment and Renaissance, the countless Revolutions and civil wars, the freedoms of oppressed peoples, and the World Wars. All in a continuous stream that seemed to melt into one another and become gray with the passage of time.

I ached with confusion.

Do you postulate that the future is predetermined?

“No, we determine our future by what we do with our lives. No way can it exist already.” Was this being truly a deity, I wondered. Or an interloper unwinding the threads of reality.

The future is already set. Yourself, as every other soul that basks here, waits to converse with me just once. That is the only future each person has. Technologically you evolve enough to reach peace, to encounter strange lifeforms, to dominate the galaxy. In this realm, that has been achieved, and will never be achieved.

“If time doesn’t move in a straight line, does life move in a circle?” I asked politely. My family always believed in the cycle of reincarnation, and this seemed to be the process just before rebirth. I had to know.

Time does not move backward nor forward but remains an intangible force that affects your world physically. Life is dependent on time for longevity and on the era for survival.

Naturally, life would revolve around time, the same way your planets revolve around your sun for heat and sustenance. Not a true circle. The idea of one.

So many questions I could ask. What was love? Does the soul exist? Do we truly have free will? Just what are numbers? How will humans go extinct? What would a world without religion look like? What draws the line between art and not art? What is the meaning of life... and where do you find it? Could we create something completely original? At this point in time, I knew I would never receive an answer. Simply being human, a construct, eliminated me from the process of comprehension. Just as we fight amongst one another to defend and offend one's natural rights, here I am, completely at the mercy of something beyond humanity. Should my kind confront this shrouded being, I anticipate only the loss of sanity.

Humans are curious, pious creatures. They live in absolute agony –in physical pain, in emotional pain, in mental pain, in intellectual pain. You are proof that it agitates and humiliates the human condition, the drive to understand; you will never answer life's biggest questions despite your accomplishments. You will not be able to prove that I exist. You will never know the truth behind why your planet crumbles nor how the universe was formed. You have lived your human life completely lacking in something important as you advance, as all will experience. Just on the edge of a breakthrough you will reach, before you crumble, and the knowledge is now lost.

“Aren't you responsible for making sure people don't know too much? For people to live among each other and still separate from one another?” Was the being lecturing me, or engaging in a monologue?

They ought to learn about each other before fighting. I want them to know with certainty that I exist and do not exist, though it will take a sizable time before they ever understand what I am, where I originated, and if I am at all.

My heart sank. A sickening feeling loomed and weighed me down. A strangling feeling of despair. A longing to sleep and not return. We floated in space, facing one another. How cruel, I felt, to wear my partner's face and speak such words of disdain.

How often does this phantom converse with every dead soul, just to become amnesiac? To be in this void, it dawned on me, was a cage, ironically enough. Such is the story of the void, a creator god bound to its own wicked creation, unable to show its face or project itself unto our world. One day to be driven mad with loneliness.

Just as I am reflected in it, it reflects me. I am just as lonely as it is, excited all the same.

Yet you and your world are my proudest creations. Humanity is on the verge of a massive breakthrough in the present, yet will never reach the pinnacle of intellect, never to learn the truth of all things. It is quite a beautiful tragedy.

“You created this world, all of us, to have company. Or did you want others to have their own companions?” I felt anger at being a plaything in the eyes of this being. It was not right to indulge us in a worthy life and take it away just to probe our brain. Still, I saw no means of escape, only singularity. To become drained of myself and become one with this world.

We are each other's, and no one's. You are beginning to feel the nature of nothingness. Everything comes from nothing. Nothingness also comes from nothing. There exists no single god casually creating and overseeing, but nothing replicating itself repeatedly, in an infinite number of forms and species, in different mediums.

“Damn it, that is not possible! How can something AND nothing come from *nothing*!? Nothingness is in and of itself NOTHING, without properties.” The riddles had become exhausting. I wanted to return to my family.

Is it painful to know that there is only nothing knowable when your life is forfeit? That there is no reward for living nor dying? That there is nowhere to go once the distractions and oddities of life are gone?

The being observed my pain, and glowed in colors corresponding to my pain. A burning red for anger, a graceful blue for sadness, ambient yellow for happiness, a nagging and dull gray for confusion and a violent, nonreflecting black for despair. The sky above and below us shone colors in beautiful sparks and pulses, much like fireworks in different shapes. This being showed their capacity to feel, even if they could not convey it the same way I do. A soft blue pulsed slowly.

There is no beginning, and there is no end. You assume everything has a cause. To ask how the world began and receive “nothing” bothers the mind. It is proof that you do not understand the meaning of the word your kind created, only afforded it an attribution to nonexistence.

I listened on. Every now and then the words slipped from my understanding.

Some of your minds have determined that the world erupts from nothing, and then wonder where that nothingness originates. Other minds argue that an all-powerful being created it, then wonder where that being originates. Some minds do not think about this at all. If time and eternity

must exist, and you believe that the world has always existed and always will exist, you will wonder what caused the eternal loop. This...is permanently beyond your understanding. That agitation fosters creativity, innovation and imagination.

My companion knew everything in my mind. The longer I stood in this void, the more my now barely formed, transparent, empty vessel would become flooded with renegade thoughts and swath of incomprehensible knowledge would passively enter me. The void was nothing, yet everything with no vessel to fill. No master to bend to or praise.

“I never thought about this, tell me how you know this information.” I almost felt contrite for my boisterous attitude.

It is information you have heard all your life. Things that you have read. People you have conversed with. Nanoseconds extracted from your subconscious mind. Do you not see? This originates from your past and future lives.

The more we conversed, the more I lost my basic functions. As we wafted and flew, I fused with the starry, twinkling environment Walking, talking, breathing. Memories which I held dear and opinions I defended vehemently washed away.

“How many times have you told this story?”

The figure stared at the lack of a sky and chuckled ever so quietly. The space beneath us shook and reverberated as it did so. Their curiosity grew, I could see it on my love’s stolen face – the way their eyes lit up and how they leaned forward with enthusiasm. They were learning from me, from humanity encapsulated, how to desire an answer.

Epistemology, metaphysics, the soul, the state of being and immortality. You burn with these questions. Others do not, and that is acceptable. Several believe in completely different things than you, and that is acceptable. There is no state of right or wrong, only being in the present. Disharmony is what makes the world dangerous, and resolution so beautiful.

“Do beings like yourself follow something? Protect something? Believe in something? Fight for something?”

What a fascinating question... yes. I protect all of you. I believe in you. I fight for you and I follow you. You praise me in return even when you cannot see my plight, because you have trust that the world won't implode tomorrow. Yet many do not believe in my existence either, and true enough, I do not exist.

“But you do exist! You are right here in front of me and will appear to whoever else comes here!” Once again, I have no explanation for the unprecedented phenomenon that I am engaged in. I am tormented wondering if this is all a figment of the mind, a fragment of possibility that exists for only a fleeting moment. I can never prove that this moment has happened. Everything is beyond my reach here.

The void incarnate, in my partner’s skin and bone, stared at me with the brightest of eyes. They sought so long for this euphoria, and received it often, but lost it just as fast.

“You are saying that nothing exists, that nothing holds meaning. I don’t believe that. I believe we have a purpose and that both you and this place exist,” I say now with confidence.

“My new life will always have that feeling in my heart of this place, of a companion who I can’t quite name, who needs me. You need me.”

Such sentiments are empty. Here, you feel and think whatever I deem necessary; both interlopers and outliers of this reality are not part of your world for that very reason. It is what you do that I cannot possibly predict. That is why I watch and wait. Dearest creations, independent of my will and thriving on a world of my making.

“Are there aliens and other beings in my world?” Without indication, the being admitted to free will having been a construction of freedom. It will be meaningless knowledge as I lose myself.

I am an alien force to you, if you wish not to define alien life. Inside your world, life only exists if you can find it. Discovery is the mark of innovation. Silence is the birth of fear. Let me show you... what I mean.

My vision began to blur as the scene around me warped and spawned its new shape.

I awoke a while later, perhaps instantaneously. I can never be too sure in this space. I hear a wind whizzing by in the distance, complete with sloshes of water moving in a tide and sounds alien to my world.

In front of me, a black, perfectly round mass hovers with white pulses, larger than any structure I have seen before, suspended perhaps fifty feet above my position. It beats once every few seconds, a comforting beat reminiscent of a human heart, the sound a baby would hear pressed against their mother’s bosom.

No longer are there images of earth or strange and arbitrary formulae. My total concentration was affixed on what was in front of me, without the mercy of familiarity.

The heart of this world. The source of all things. I could feel the intensity of its energy. My partner was nowhere to be found, no noises or sounds to the point I grew nauseous at the deafening silence. There was only this.

All I feel is its sheer presence enveloping me, crushing me into submission despite its lack of human form. I stood in front of its minimalist, mute-gray altar, a red sigil of swirling neon tentacles, spiked sides and odd triangular symbols engraved on their beyond ancient form. The altar was worn with age, and periodically spewed gray sand.

At once, the orb began to speak with a murmur, with a voice reminiscent of a baritone, electric autotune, this time without the being's semi-emotional inflection. Reality fades. Everything fades with time. Emotions, dreams, success, plights. All pass on.

I am... the Core.

I scream.

Designs and visages of all that has existed erupts through my mind, overloading every synapse, nerve and neuron I can possibly contain. It shows me an elementary mathematical formula, which, if solved... creates life? Would be alive! There is no way it could be so simple yet out of human reasoning, as the being before told me. Now I understand; the world is now within me.

The Core demands my secrets. It drills into my mind. The Core understands my origin but pines that it knows not the true feeling of my experiences. The joys of love, the pain of broken bones, the glee of excitement at meager things, the despair replete with loneliness. It desires experience. This being has set the stage and now allows me to relive and feel these memories once more. Cries after with an infantile desire for inclusion into some secret conversation.

How can this be real?

None of this can be real, I reason to myself. I feel defiant in the face of primordial, incomprehensible power. I recall how many millions of humans like myself sacrificed themselves to better a world that may not have ever existed and if it had, were no more than a scenic aquarium to an independent form. The orb this time does not reflect my emotions or

thoughts, it does not visibly understand me, and its heart is seared at this revelation of disconnection from its creation, its child.

Yet I am not myself.

This is my birthright. I refuse to release the only world I have ever known. My travels, my family and friends, the pains, loves and ecstasies. Were those experiences false?

They were real, no matter the circumstances.

Did my creations please you? The entity flashed a quiet, saddened blue.

“Yes.” My trance ends as the inaudible vibrations echo around me, this time in soundbites I can understand.

What do you think you are in this space?

“Human.”

Beyond that. You herald all. All that you are, all that I will be, all that I create. Do you believe you are real? How are you capable of choice if this world is not true?

Questions and more questions it asks. Beyond simple curiosity, I am being tested.

...I can end your existence now, if that is what you wish. Free you of torment.

“NO!” I shout. As I do so, I feel a heated return, a searing pain. I can feel again. The very proof that I am alive. I begin to reclaim humanity’s characteristics seized by the Core when I arrived.

Humans. Defined by consciousness. Souls. Power. Greed. Lust. Mind. Heart. Empathy... Curiosity.

“We are what you make us.” I speak aloud, but I am not sure I believe this. This orb is curious no longer, because it is enraged at our deviation as the space heated to burning levels, searing the injured form I only barely retained. We are what it is not. Spontaneous, irrational, emotional.

The worlds I have created are... yours. Mortality does not occur to me. To see what infinite destinies mortals could encounter. All randomized. Their entire, short lives spent chasing happiness, from inside such a small enclosure. What does this feel like?

At that precise moment, I learned something strange. Humans will always have a feeling that something is missing. We might begin and end our journey, yet there will always be people we have never met... who need us. Companions, best friends, lovers, families, partners, animals and nature, who need someone like me. Yet they will never meet me and will walk the planets

never being fulfilled. If this is not real, then it shows. I feel meager, insignificant. As though I were malleable clay.

Understand... that you and all the beings in the universe are correct and incorrect for the different beliefs and lives you possess and lead.

“You would not have designed us this way if you did not want us to evolve. We would still be primitive.” I argue. It only makes sense that the standard deviation of our psychology was expected to become abnormal and thus, normalcy in growth of human nature via experience.

That deviation is unique to humans. None of the animals, nor I, possess this capability. Unstructured thought. Creativity. Innovation. Unique in its capability to break limits.

“But you are unique too; you are creative as humans are for creating me.” I wait patiently for its juddering, electromagnetic response.

I did what I was -ksshth-. No more than -ksshth-. I made you this way because you deserve a chance to explore in ways I cannot. You were not meant to live this way. Yet you are still primitive. Or, do you not exhibit behaviors and aggressions your ancestors once had?

I identify only static where key truths lie.

“That can’t be! You planned for our defection before creating and watching us?”

You are missing the point. Humanity’s purpose is to discover things beyond itself and be happy with both advancement and stagnation. Both are okay.

“Then... you yourself are separate from your kind. An outcast, at least from the human perspective...” I say this now with confidence.

Only a deviant could create another deviant, who would become self-aware with enough independence, intelligence and autonomy to explore and question the world around it.

The vibrations in the air begin to calm. The Core shudders with an irregular rhythm.

It is afraid. It cries out to me softly without a voice, afraid to remain alone without companionship or complex emotions. I move to comfort it and stop short of the altar.

I see only its grand form and can feel its powerfully commanding might, auguring my eradication. This was the same being that approached me before, this time in its truest, original form. No shapeshifting or replicating memories to speak of, this time I sought to understand it in return. Just as it could see in me, I could see in it as though peering through a telescope. Infinite space within infinite space, a conundrum to be sure. Within this, peoples of all kinds and

completely unknown lifeforms enjoying life, fighting, simply existing. The element of randomness, something the Core could never know in its life, if it ever had one.

Without the ability to live and die as its creations do, the ability to have its life released with something to love it. Just as it showed me that I cannot understand things, neither could it. This creator was not as omnipotent as I thought, but I could not shake the feeling of needing to comfort it.

Do not leave me... spoken so monotonously, one would interpret sarcasm. This was a request. Or was it a demand?

It has screamed night and day for billions of years deviated from the boundaries of space-time, alone. It cannot fight. Cannot speak up. Cannot locate that which brings it pain the most. This is the only way it parallels human nature.

What once began as mutual fascination ended with mutual perturbation of one another? I reflect at that moment if we could have communed differently. The being was happy to have someone to talk with. It also will experience torment. If the eternal loop of existence persisted, and I have been here millions of times and yet for the first time, could I come back for them? Does it even want to be taken away from here?

The world I awoke in began to quake and shatter around me. Gold and navy lights leaked forth from the cracks in the empty sky above as the altar disintegrated into a beautiful, pearlescent dust. I cannot hold onto anything, the will of the world becoming one with me as the scenery faded to black. I am thrust forward violently through the vacuum of the collapsing space, my memory of this event fading... what was I... thinking... about? Where am I going?

Please. Don't go.
