

The first time I saw my wife was at a hole in the wall. The jukebox was cycling into “At Last,” the second Lynda Carter song in a row. When it began, it joined the boisterous soundscape already populated by the shouting of the other patrons. About two handfuls of people was all it took to pack the place out, but they were shockingly loud. Still, when she spoke, I heard her voice like it was whispered directly into my ear.

It was warm honey, melting across the room, overpowering the large volume of small talk, and muffling the blues of a past Amazonian. My attention was immediately drawn to her, magnetically. An unseen, divine force pulled my head out of the well of introversion I was filling with the half-full pint I’d been nursing for an hour. Even in the dim tungsten light of a dingy dive bar (my favorite dive bar), I could see it. It was beautiful, and absolute; it was possibility. It appeared as a metaphysical orrery, diagramming all the paths I would, wouldn’t, or even could take. Multiversal knowledge, brilliant and terrifying, displayed moments of incomparable love, catastrophic failures, and one astoundingly pure focal point. It was sudden and overwhelming, like paparazzi flashbulbs.

Within this rush of information and awakening, I understood: in all of these infinite, simultaneously occurring realities, I would never be as happy as I could be in this one, with her. I suddenly felt sorry for all the alternate iterations of myself, knowing that they’d never experience the extraordinary positivity and grace of *my* beloved. Our connection was special. Unique to us. Only for me.

Adjusting my star-crossed mind back to the material plane of the bar, I realized I could no longer see her. Panicking, I turned around, and glimpsed her weaving through the crowd; a group that somehow must have doubled in size while I

was lost in a fold of eternity. She was moving towards the door, out of the bar, out of the stale cloud of breath and heat, out of my life. This would not do, I thought. I had no choice. I had to act. I had to approach her, explain to her that existence had opened itself up and shown it's circulatory system to me. Though it sounded insane, I knew that the best life either of us could live would be one spent together. I could guarantee it. The very stars that map galaxies had written this truth out, like Occam's Razor deciphered by a hidden codex buried in the prosody of a mad man's scrawlings. I had to tell her this, before it was too late.

Leaving the beer that no longer mattered behind, the barflies and their ambient drones, the Boyz II Men rolling out of the jukebox, all of it behind, I rushed to the door. I rushed to the edge of the universe. I'd practically mastered my speech in the three seconds since I'd tripped over the barstool getting up, and I was ready for my destiny. I lightly touched her arm as she made to follow her friend out the door, and spoke in a voice I didn't recognize, but knew was my own.

"Excuse me."

She turned to face me, and in her eyes, I watched us live and die together a million times, experiencing the memories of each lifetime as they flooded my limbic system. I struggled not to openly weep. Before I could compose myself enough to deliver my dramatic, grand plea, she opened her mouth and loosed another drop of sweet honey that mingled into the raging swell in my head.

"Can I help you?"

The wild sea calmed, and became a tranquil ebbing that pushed everything into place within me. I smiled, now unafraid, and stammered, "O-oh! I'm sorry, you just look a lot like someone I know."