

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. Kicking alive in the corner, the music joined the boisterous soundscape already populated by the shouting of the other patrons. It only took about two handfuls of people to pack the tiny 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 deep well of introversion and warm lagers. 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 both 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 and simultaneously occurring realities, I would never be as happy as I could here-- 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 to glimpse her weaving through a crowd. The small group had somehow doubled in size while I was lost in a

fold of eternity. For just a moment I wondered how the seams of this pub, set below street level and swelling with street urchins, hadn't burst like my brain after being flooded with cosmic truth. My eyes snapped back to find her graceful frame fleeing the scene. 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 had no choice. I had to act. I had to approach her, to try and explain to her that existence had opened itself up and shown its 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 charted a path for us, like destiny 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 that never really mattered behind, I rushed to the door. I rushed to the edge of the universe. Years of stage fright and countless supplementary literary lessons had proved I was ineloquent and highly incapable of speaking without rambling. Despite this, I had all but mastered the speech I'd prepared in the three seconds since I'd tripped over the barstool getting up. I was ready for my big moment. My biggest moment. I lightly touched her arm as she made to follow her friend out the door, then spoke in a voice I didn't recognize but was sure must be 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, grandiose plea to beg for her love, she opened her mouth and loosed another drop of sweet honey.

“Can I help you?”

The wild sea of anxious potentiality calmed and pushed everything into place within me. I smiled, suddenly free of fear and anxiety over ruining my life before it began and stammered, “O-oh! I’m sorry, you just look a lot like someone I know.”