

Awake in Desire

LAMENTATIONS OF A BODY SNATCHER

Valyn VB



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Max for your boundless love and support, Marie-France for lending a special ear, Luke for opening the floodgates as well as Assur and Peyton for keeping me accountable.

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valyn.neocities.org

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creatio ex nihilo

I would have loved to one day have taken form
out of shapeless sea foam into a Greek deity.

But the truth is:

I simply did not.

I, as with everyone else, awoke into a context
whose variables were far out of control
and which kept me--
the **real** me--
asleep.

In this sleep I was many things:

I was the recluse woodsman's daughter,

child and grandchild of adored community
members

and sibling to one,

but there was one thing I wasn't:

myself.

I began to awaken almost seven years ago

carrying seventeen years of memories

and a face which others recognized as someone

I simply was not.

I wear her face and I'm in her body

others see her in my stead;

And as I stare at the figure in the mirror,

I wonder:

am I, despite my struggles, *still her* ?



PART I: THE OLD MUST END

I don't know how it started or why,
but this alienation which permeated every
fiber of all I did
followed me for a long time.

And when I moved out at seventeen for college,

I figured I'd had enough of all that--

I changed my name and started a new life.

Little did I know that the parts we leave behind

can never be truly erased or forgotten,

nor placed into the dustbin of history

and thrown away as trash,

never to be thought of ever again.

Three weeks into September,

one call changed everything

Luc had a heart attack at the age of 27.

after a month of travelling

from Ottawa to Quebec City and back,

he drew his last breath.

This was only the cloud cover.

A truly torrential downpour would follow.

The storm really began that March

When Marie-Pier, struggling through a vicious cancer,

was finally laid to rest

two weeks before she turned 20.

And life really let loose after that--
too many funerals
too many condolences
too much alcohol
a terrible mental health.

What was the point in ever confiding in
anyone

if chances were that they would die ?

I mean, we'll all eventually die, but

Luc, Marie-Pier, Miriam, mononc' Serge,
uncle Bobby, aunt Anne, grand-père, Ma--

the list goes on and it's too much

at some point the dead become numbered
bullet points

robbed of their identities

reduced to nothing but ash and memories.

What's the point ?

Why care for others ?

We're all predestined to perish,
so why bother making connections at all ?

My throat closes in on itself

people are but cogs in some cosmic
machine

which I can't even arse myself to
understand

why would I ?

We're all going to die anyways

there's no point in leaving a trace

if nothing will remember us.

The line

The difference between disappearing
and dying

comes and goes and comes and goes;

same as the tides:

all in the intentions.

In the end,

there was always a single constant:

a death in the ocean would be

beautiful.

...but what I didn't know
is that I wouldn't be the one swallowed
up by the sea.

The scale

When I die,

I wish for my heavy heart

to be pitted against my writing quill

on the cosmic weighing scale.

When I die,

I wish for my regrets to evaporate into the
wind;

for them to catch onto the leviathan coiled
around the world,

to be eaten whole and forgotten

remembered only in my memory.

When I die,

I want my quill to weigh

as much as the ink I've written with it,

for all my words to have meant something to
someone;

at least, myself.


When I die,

I hope that whichever way the scales tip,

that I've finally found happiness

in whichever small shape it comes in.

PART II: LIMINAL RITUAL



A few years after Marie-Pier's untimely demise,
I found myself actively chasing the rush:
engaging in various misanthropic relationships,
trading my body for hallucinogens,
flirting with the idea of a death in the
ocean...
just for fun, just to feel something
just for the pain to maybe disappear.

Me and my "dark past" chased so many friends
away
from those afraid I'd compare traumas
to those who thought I wouldn't listen
I found myself alone
drinking too much rotted my teeth
my moods swung high
about as fast as they swung low
of course, the bipolar disorder
whose diagnosis I was too young
and far too functional for
led to a rejection from the Royal Mental Health
hospital
triple admissions to the ward, three pats on the
back before I went home
so traumatized I couldn't even have fun anymore.

And then:

the end of the world.

Somehow, Covid didn't claim me
so mentally sick that my immune system was
suppressed
one meal a day
one conversation a week
physical touch once a month
the rest of the time spent by myself
away from everyone else
stuck alone in the storm
which had become global;
master of a prison
which I'd been convinced
was of my own design.

Brought to my knees,
my life begging to end
everything falling apart globally
And unable to go home for a final rest
I found myself asking:
where do I go from here ?

An echo

Someone once told me that VHS and vinyl are the worst forms of recording media; that every time you play a tape or spin a disc, the plastic wears and you get a little bit less fidelity. A little less every time, an echo of an echo of an echo-- never the real thing again.

I didn't mention that our memories work the exact same.

When my grandfather passed, I took it upon myself to collect all the memories we had of him, including the family's 8 mm film reels from the 70s. In search of a man who no longer was, I found a lot more than I bargained for.

Through birthday parties, trips to Florida and Halloween, I watched-- pretty detached-- as my family lived out the middle class American dream. My mother's 6th or 7th birthday, Disney World, Miami in the 70s and homemade Halloween costumes all rolled before me: a picturesque family I did not know.

What we consciously or unconsciously decide to remember has its own narrative, just like what we do or don't capture on film. I never saw the extent of the abuse my grandfather inflicted on his family and himself, but I can hear its echo down the lineage back to me.

It's in the way my mother didn't remember that trip to Disney World, in the way she and her sisters don't talk about their childhood; it's in the stalled development, the immaturity and the shame; it's in how we're a "family who's been through some stuff, but not enough for therapy;" it's in the small lies used to cover up reputations and in the row of headstones at the local cemetery.

I hear of what happened not in a clear recollection, but in the bits and pieces whispered with cigarette in hand and after too many sangrias.

I hear of it as a warning, as a cautionary tale told in shame. I hear of it in being told my origins at the age of seventeen, in the way I had to piece together what happened to me like reordering stills from a broken, overplayed videotape into something that narratively makes sense.

And that's where it really hurts: the fading of memories from being overplayed and given to a glassy-eyed child; a broken videotape passed as an heirloom, robbed of context. An echo of an echo of an echo, never the real thing again.

PART III:
PALINGENESIS



On names: confessions of a former

craven

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For a long time, I've struggled with names. It feels so final to refer to oneself as a certain Thing, as though you are that Thing now and forevermore and you will never change at all.

This is, of course, refers to my chosen name as opposed to the one given to me by my mother. I have many names, nicknames and things people tend to call me-- but the more pressing question is how do I refer to myself? I feel it's an oft-waived one, considering people tend to accept the name their parents give them-- and the possibility that it could be something else tends to elude.

And what if someone decided to be seen differently, and the possibility of going by a name of your choosing was opened up for you? Why wouldn't you take this chance to define yourself in a way that is yours and yours alone?

I wish it worked like that for me.

In truth, the way I have come up with the name people refer to me as (Val) isn't so cut-and-dry-- I spent a lot of time on the Internet in my teenage years, and the relationships I built there and the personas I invented to conceal and protect myself brought forth a strange revelation: I had been masking my whole life, and the person I made up to protect myself was actually who I was, completely unfettered. Away from prying eyes, I chose to be someone else.

This person is named Val, sometimes short for Valérie, sometimes other things. All variations are welcome, but the one that is truly accurate to how I coined the term is Valjean-- based off the main

character of Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables*. It's a long story, but one which particularly resonated with me for reasons unknown until much later.

Jean Valjean is a man who was convicted for stealing bread, and who spends the next 19 years in prison for it. While with its 1000+ odd pages the book provides ample commentary on French life in the 19th century-- much of which was far too dense for a teenager in a social milieu with inadequate media literacy to understand-- the part that resonates with me most is Valjean's personal history. The effects of being a prisoner (read: legal slave) for so long and through such a formative part of his life (he is in his 40s when he is released, and as such was imprisoned during his early twenties) struck an important chord in me... although I'll admit, I didn't know why back then. Looking back, the incredibly queer-autistic experience of masking for so long that you don't remember who you are anymore was what subconsciously drew me in-- consciously, it was the post-release dynamic of becoming the monster you were told you were so many years ago (in my case, being told that I was lonely as a child because I wanted to be alone, and not because of a lack of peers similar to me... and believing it myself, and spreading that lie) vs having a real chance at freedom (the prison release, my time on the Internet) and changing because of it.

I was 17 when I finally filled out my college applications and a dialogue box opened up that would change my life forever:

Preferred Name.

Without thinking, I put in Val.

I hadn't seen *The Matrix* yet, but I think this was my white rabbit. My mother, looking over my shoulder, was surprised-- and when asked why, I just shrugged and quickly moved on. She lit a cigarette, and it calmed my oncoming panic attack.

I didn't think much of that event until I actually got to that college, and at my first class the professor called me by Val. The transformation had begun.

There was no going back from here.

And like a post-release Valjean, I had no idea how to act as myself. I'll be the first to admit that I was a real bitch in my first few years as Val-- part of that was the trauma of having multiple relatives die soon after than first class (a heart attack, a vicious cancer... among others), but part of that was also not knowing who I was, only who I wasn't. Knowing only that and no longer having my moral guide by my side-- she quite literally died, and I was also in a city with no other friends or relatives because I wanted to get away-- of course I fell back into the abusive patterns that had defined much of my childhood. The cycle complete.

As I write this, 6 years and 7 weeks after the day where the professor first called me by my name, I'm glad to say I've finally reached the point in the story where the bishop forgives Valjean for his crime of stealing silverware. I have done many things I regret, things I shouldn't have done-- things which have hardened and changed me, crawled under my skin and turned me into the monster I swore I'd never become-- all without my notice.

It's easy to point fingers and blame this person or that system, and I won't be doing this here-- the important part is that I let myself down immensely. I watched someone else's body do things under a name not original to it from the comfort of my inner world-- my own little TV show, perpetuating violence because it was good writing, watching myself evolve from the inside-out. A zombie in front of a TV that never turned off.

Meanwhile on the outside I felt like a dreamer, sleepwalking through life; nothing is real, least of all myself.

Both metaphors are the truth, of a sort. The emptiness my body feels, the inner television with the daytime soap opera that never shut off, and the tired person watching and waiting-- dreaming of something which only they could put into being.

I was once a body and nothing more. I was then the show of a person-- a caricature, a bad representation of reality. I am now the watcher, and a few weeks ago I found the remote control.

I'm turning it off now. The bishop has forgiven Valjean. He is learning, and so am I.

The craven within has died

he awaits his brother,

the belief in the Self

to join him in his tomb

but he will never come.

I thirst for a craven famine

I thirst for an abundance of belief

I drink my fill and everything more,

one sip at a time.

