Constellation

I wake up in the morning. The sun is out, and the rays hit me through the window like a spotlight. It shines on me as my mind wanders onto a platform where I am standing with a mic in my hand. The audience is full. Every version of me that has ever existed looking back at my present self who is on the stage.

My seven year old self sits in the front row. She has black hair cut to her shoulders with her favorite pink and white polka dotted headband. She glows, a radiance that betrays all of my other older selves who sit around her. She loves to sway her feet that don’t touch the ground. I watch as I notice the ends of her plaid green jumper rippling through the air. I listen to the light clacking of the buckles of her black shoes she would wear to school every day.

My eight year old self has purple bags under her eyes, a bruising only caused by the nights and days, weeks and months, and years, of exhaustion. She likes to hold a bundle of black hair in her hands. She wears a hat to cover her deserted head. She likes to stare blankly through everything. Never really present. Only caught up and brought out by the waves of wondering what another life would be like away from this one.

Of course the versions of myself are not only split by age. I have a ten year old version of myself who has her hands shielding her head. Always alert. Always in a state of protection, just in case the bullies come back and hit her in the school bathroom. A later version of my ten year old self is always giddy after talking to boys who seem to care about her. She grips her phone tight, understanding the purpose in life right now is waiting for a text back. To read that someone actually wants to listen.

There is my sixteen year old self. She is in a constant fluctuation of smiling and dying. She likes to constantly tell everyone about the pain in her heart that she grew so used to after finding someone who loved her. That feeling of love was new and fresh and real. A step away from the usual reminders of failures from her own parents in the past. She liked being cared for and valued. Until she realized the relationship only divided her away from her family. It forced her to do things “out of love” that she never really wanted. She likes to scream that she is a slut in the crowd, hoping other selves will tell her it’s not true. She only screams to a void of silence, no one ever getting up to tell her she’s wrong.

There are happier versions of myself. Like my seventeen year old self, holding her phone in the middle of the Taiwan airport, rereading the message that confirms her acceptance to her dream school. She is perpetually crying. The happy kind. Yet, the tears also leave a lingering sadness marked by the end of a purpose that has finally been completed after many years of her life. Marked by the beginning of a searching for a way to once again please her mother and her family all the way across the seas. Marked by the end of a past that had shielded her sorrows, only driven by the main motivation to satisfy. The satisfaction is now quenched for everyone else. But she is lost, wondering when her searching thirst will finally be relieved from her shoulders.

There is my nineteen year old self who wraps herself in a blanket. No one ever sees her face. Just the jaded brown eyes that she leaves open while rolls of cloth swaddle the rest of her body. She doesn’t say anything. She likes to stay still and get lost in the features of faces who speak to her. She likes to follow the cracks of porcelain skin. She wonders if the deep creases and hollow lines are filled by rivers of tears. She stares at people’s eyes, wondering where they have been, what they have seen, and where they want to go next.

My present self doesn’t say a word to the crowd. She stands there and she feels her face get hot. The beads of sweat start to form on her face and her heart begins to run away from her chest, becoming too far away for her to retrieve. Her vision goes blurry and she falls to the ground. She shakes and loses her breath. She likes the feeling of being on the brink of death. The choice is hers whether or not she fights back for air. Every time she does, she reminds herself that part of her wants to be alive.

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I get up and look at my face in the mirror. Its outline seems to blend in with everything around me the way the edges of purple somehow turn to orange in the sunset sky that is still just that: one sky. I touch my face and watch my hands move in the reflection. I try to pay attention to the way my cold finger lifts bumps from my skin from its harshness. I do it again and again searching for the feeling, but nothing is there.

I watch my reflection again and wonder if this is my body, if this is my hand, if this is my face, if this is me. I watch my reflection and begin to see my body just staring at a mirror with no expression. My soul is oceans away and I try to find the anchor that connects me to this figure but all it does is float further and further and further.

The body walks to eat food, not because it is hungry but because the world has taught it to do so. It knows this is what it has to do. Open the cupboard. Take out cereal. Open and pour into a bowl. Eat. The hand slowly lifts the spoon and captures the almost drowning pieces of wheat, bringing them to safety in the cave of its mouth. Repeat.

It starts its day, walking along the roads and sidewalks and pathways. Through the buildings and rooms and hallways and offices. Things fly by and it is hard to remember where it just was and who it has just seen. But every moment is just that. Forgettable.

At some point my soul finds its way back, briefly. It stays inside, never under specific circumstances. It drifts away and comes back in the same day or days after. It eventually finds a path to connect to the body.

When it seeks haven in the structure of bones and organs, it feels restricted. I think to myself that this is why my soul likes to leave so often. It tries to find somewhere else to go, somewhere else to wander, but it can never stray too far from the confines because that is where it feels the most safe. Escape the dangerous comfort and return to its peaceful limits.

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I return to the stage, taking my time to stare into the eyes of my selves. Myself. My self. I begin to smack my hands into a chorus of applause, congratulating each one that has survived.

I begin to read a speech:

Thank you to each one of you for being here today. You all have impacted me in some way or another. I look at each of you and I know that I will miss you. I have come to say goodbye. And I want you all to come with me. Come follow me. We don’t have to stay here anymore. Maybe something else awaits for us that’s not on this earth or in this lifetime. But maybe we can only find out if we take the risk and leave now.

In some ways, I guess this is my own eulogy. Things I think I have. Excuse me, *we* have, achieved so far is taking up space for no reason, being useless to the world, being useless to our self, and being a burden. I have only come to realize now that we constantly fear being a burden to others.

But maybe the truth has been in front of us all along. The real burden is the one we feel because of our own existence. We are a burden to ourselves and I know we all are tired.

So let’s find another way to survive just like each of you have done before. This is the answer. This is how we can live again. Nothing is holding us back anymore. Let’s be free.

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At night, I lie there and imagine myself being a star. One out of one hundred billion.

It’s funny because a star is bright since it is crushing itself inward, causing reactions to take place, and releasing heat that comes off as light. That is probably a very simplistic way to think about it.

But when we look at the sky, and search for something beyond the darkness and shadows of pure black and nothingness, we find comfort in finding a light. A light is the thing that leads us out.

Isn’t that what’s beautiful? We find hope in something that is destroying itself. Something that is already dead and has been for years. And only now we are seeing the result of its demise light years away.

I want to be a star, I tell myself.

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I like the sound of rain. I like the way it reverberates against the roof of the house, or the metal of my car, or the glass of my bedroom window. My favorite is when it’s heavy rain. The sound engulfs my sense of self.

It is not one drop and then another going pitter patter. It is a constant tune of thousands of mini capsules, plummeting as one. We never say the rains are coming. Rain is an entity by itself. Singular.

I imagine this sound as the song of stars, relinquishing their grips from the sky. Together. The way my selves take their last bows on the stage, their final goodbyes, and let go too.

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Before I fall asleep, I always think of taking mental notes about my day. I have heard that journals are useful, a nice way to look back and relive memories. I tell myself I will use one, sometime soon.

I try to think of the things that are worth remembering. People look like undefined strokes of paint on canvas. The initial layers where the artist does not know what the final production of the piece will look like. The smudges of faces and bodies fill my blank mind, waiting for life to become concrete, real, and finished.

I imagine the voices of my friends. They echo and sound further away the more I try to focus on every nice word they have said about me. The good things always drift away, I tell myself. Their voices begin to meld into one, no longer decipherable as to who is speaking. I can no longer understand the mumbles they say. Instead as their individual voices fade, the singular entity creeps closer to the edge of my ears, whispering the thoughts of self-loathing and emptiness. I wonder if this screaming will ever go away. It just gets louder as the years go by.

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When I think about the future, I cannot picture anything clearly. I see the vague outline of the body that sometimes encases my soul. Every move it makes has no purpose. It does the same things over and over again.

My eyes blink like they should. My smile forms when it is necessary. My dimple grows deeper the more my cheeks clench as my teeth peak and my mouth forms the mechanical stretch. The words that always come out of my mouth: “How are you?...I’m good!” My first thoughts: Do not show weakness. Happiness is the sign of strength. Life is good. The more you say it out loud, the more others will believe it. The more people believe it, hopefully, you will too.

I go through different scenarios in my head. What if I end up behind a desk as my job, clacking on a computer, waiting for the sun to set as the sky turns dark blue and we both say goodbye to the day? What if I end up writing in my house, waiting for the next word, line, sentence, paragraph, something to form into meaning? What if I just stay at home, no partner or family or pet? Just myself. Every situation ends in being alone.

I think about a dream where I have a family. I have always thought about having kids and raising them. I would pick them up after school and a freshly baked chocolate cake would be waiting for them when they come home. I think that I would love to see them fail and succeed in school and sports and arts and life. I’ll be there, I tell myself.

That is only a dream. I cannot even be there for myself. I lie in bed and imagine myself getting up, taking a shower, eating, and going outside. Just a thought. I imagine putting on nice clothes, and makeup, and a smile that is real, as I go out to dinner with a friend or a partner. Just a thought. I think to myself: What is the point of doing any of these things at all?

I stare at the ceiling and count how many times the lights flicker, how many tiles line the walls, how many times I tell myself that there is no point in getting up.

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Sometimes, the only thing I find comfort in is waiting for things to grow. I prepare the soil of my skin, plow the grooves of my wrist with metal, watch the release of red blood, feed the life with tears, and wait. Wait.

That’s all this is. A waiting game.

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When I sleep, my mind can never settle. I tell myself to calm down. Breathe in and breathe out. Count until my mind shuts down. Breathe in and breathe out. Focus on my heart rate. Breathe in and breathe out. Think of a happy place.

That’s where I lose it. My breathing gets shallow as I try to think so hard of a happy place. All I can focus on is how my thoughts race like a constant whirring of a fan, speeding up, in my brain. Try again, I tell myself.

Breathe in and breathe out.

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Repeat.