

Human Chimera

If you see life as an intricate set of crossroads, each path with its own unique end, then how does that change the equation of the self? If I had left two years ago when I could have, how many possibilities are there for how I would have changed? I am fighting to believe that there is an essence in me that transcends my environment, but I can't help guessing at all the variables. All the people I could have become. The different rolls of the dice.

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I often confuse dream for reality. Dull memories of things that could have happened but didn't. "Didn't I?" I say. "Last week sometime?" No, only in my sleep.

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I dream of running away to the drippy coast in search of my two black haired boys. One in San Francisco, the one I've never met, and one in Portland, the old friend. When I find them, I'll shake them 'til they scream, make them explain to me why I always go for lost souls.

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Portland is often in my dreams. They're unspectacular. He's just there, the version that I knew best. Sometimes we touch in little ways. Hands, shoulder blades, nothing romantic. We ask each

other all the unasked questions and get straight answers. We are young and our edges are still soft. In those dreams we are always smiling.

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When I wake from dreams in the middle of the night, I curl up at the very edge of the bed, as alone as I can be. I want to hold on to whatever world I was pulled from. The world that existed only in my mind, the place completely mine. No one expects you to justify your dreams.

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I had coffee with an ex once. We hadn't spoken in a long time, but we had both changed a lot for the better and could finally talk comfortably. We talked about plans. He: moving away from Albuquerque, writing a novel, hitchhiking across Europe. Me: getting out of high school, getting an apartment, becoming a real person. I was in a long term relationship, and told him I was worried about stagnation. I wanted change, I wanted momentum. He said "Make it happen. Push the 'on' button." Now the ex is gone, the coffee shop is gone. Moved away, transformed. I'm still here.

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I dyed my hair pink out of boredom. Something new to look at in the mirror. A me that is not me.

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In my dream, I am in a vast painted desert. Something that could be out of a Dali vision. Some of my friends are there and we can sense invisible boundaries that fill us with dread. One after another, they try to leave, and when they cross the line, they disintegrate into clouds of dust. They vaporize. And I know I will be trapped there forever.

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Escapism and existentialism are my two favorite isms.

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I've got a boyfriend here in Albuquerque who I live with and see every day. I can reach out and touch him. There's no thrill of loving someone that I shouldn't love. There's no wall up that keeps us from becoming an "us", so I have to build one.

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I never have human babies in my dreams. They're animal or insect. Strange larvae. I want to love them but they always roll off the bed and break.

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I am everything in extremes, and the people I attach to are always on opposite ends of the spectrum. Either they're happy, stable, good at coping with life, or they're worse off than I am. I use everyone else to keep me in balance.

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I spent some time in France at one point. Every night for the first month I had terrible nightmares. Every night I would watch people die, people I love, strangers, soldiers. Bodies floating bloated under the bridge in town. Young men blown up by land mines. My family members shot in the head. Scenes too graphic and so real that they would never be in any movie. In the morning I would wake up tired, stunned by all the death I had seen, had made, start the day, have to smile. I began to worry about myself, about the mind that was inventing those images. How could all of that come from me? Did it come from me? Who was I letting go of in those dreams?

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Portland is next to me in my living room. We are both awake this time, and this may be the first one-on-one conversation we have ever had. We sit as far from each other as possible, on the farthest edges of the couch. He: sitting up straight, looking ahead. Me: with my knees drawn up in the corner. My nerves are giving me trouble, little tremors in all my muscles. That, and it is cold, cold, cold in my apartment. Gas too high to afford. I keep asking him about it: “Is it cold? Is it cold? Is it cold in here?” A tiny space heater points at us, blaring in our silences.

When we do speak, our conversation runs in little, tangential circles. Non-sequiturs. Run on sentences. It's always been this way, for the last fifteen years. I think we understand each other, I do, but we have problems with connection. We're like two magnets, pushing against each other when we try to go head on. We can only touch if we're parallel, on two non-intersecting paths. There's a lot of nervous laughter bouncing back and forth, but the topics are dark. Questions of sanity, seizures, insomnia, detachment, the possibilities of medication. “I feel old” he says. “Not mature. Just...tired.”

Like he had taken the words right out of my mouth. When he's gone, I curl up on his side of the couch, wishing I had given him a hug goodbye.

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Living in this country hardens you. Living in the world hardens you. That's why I dream of running away, sloughing off the past like so much dead skin.

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My boyfriend and I are across from each other in some seedy, generic diner. We're talking about people we used to know and I am bitter. Feeling alone, left behind. The lights are yellow and turn us sepia. "Well, it's a good thing we lost *him*," I say, talking about someone who pointedly lost *us*. "He was a prick anyway."

"You've got quite a mouth on you," my boyfriend says. "You didn't when I met you."

I have nothing to say. I stare at my plate, all of my nerves buzzing, wanting to escape my body. I think of walking away but I have nowhere to go. It strikes me how little you can know anyone but yourself.

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I've been considering a tattoo for some time now, but it's permanence terrifies me. Like it will trap me forever in the day that it's drawn. I will be *that* girl with *that* tattoo. So what if I'm that girl with pink hair now? Tomorrow I can be anyone I choose.

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Frisco sent me a book of his poetry. It was made on a type writer, bound with cardboard and electrical tape. With it, a Polaroid of the city, a mix of songs, some of his own songs recorded in a subway, and a hand written note, squiggly, honest cursive. Over a course of years of correspondence, I have fallen in love with his words, and in an abstract way, the person behind them. It's a hopeless romantic act. The secret celebrity crush on the non-celebrity.

There was something about the handwriting of a stranger that made me feel connected, like the world wasn't full of strangers at all, but sincere, real people who make things out of cardboard and tape and write sloppy, humble letters. I haven't written back yet. I'm still trying to find the balance between safe distance and genuine communication.

This is something I wanted to keep personal, keep hidden. Something I could keep in a box in the closet and look at when I was feeling whimsical. But I feel guilty when I'm private. Here I am, telling the whole world.

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My dreams about college: Everyone sits in a big circle smiling and talking in a beautiful brick classroom. Stylish, intellectual people. It wouldn't matter that I lost all of my friends from high school because I would make better ones. I would connect, find my niche.

Instead, in classes, people stare straight ahead. Fiddle with their cell phones. No one looks at one another and no one makes conversation. People complain about the books they're being forced to read and the hangovers from their cheap cases of beer. I feel old and apart, forced to take refuge in the quiet, empty places. People tell me separation is a choice. Distance is a choice. People tell me I'm not trying hard enough.

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Getting Frisco's book filled me with dreams of becoming the poor bohemian in a rich city. I imagined all the people I could become if I followed in the footsteps of the maker of that book. Those often destructive steps. There's always that invitation from the universe to let go, let yourself corrode into something else. Part of human nature is to want to destroy yourself. Frisco's only a few years older than I am. He's struggling with sobriety and depression. He sees the world in ways most people don't. That question of madness. Though, it's been shown again and again, it takes some form of madness to create.

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I have the personality of a smoker. I have a nervous laugh. My hands shake. My humor is dark and sarcastic. I like sitting in outside corners and taking deep breaths to ease anxiety. In my dreams I'm always a smoker. But something about it is too much for me. "Because I want to" isn't enough for me. Because I want to what? Because I want to destroy myself to prove some kind of volition? Maybe I do want that. Maybe that's why I don't. Because what next?

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When I hear a beautiful instrument, I want to play it. When I see art that moves me, I want to make it. When I visit a city, I want to live there. I am sponge-like for desires.

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Frisco wrote a poem. It goes: “what's a four letter word for falling in love with everyone you meet.” I would like to know, too. There's the boy in English class who takes his shoes off and walks around the classroom barefoot. The guy at work with the dry wit. The one with the scar. The drummer, the guitarist, all the stereotypical characters of my story. The need to be close in a fragmented world where personal space is always an arms length away.

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I read something about souls once. That there are young ones, adolescents, and old ones. The young souls are happy because they're still children. But they're reckless and ignorant, too. You have to be patient with young souls. Adolescent souls are the angry ones. They see all that's wrong in the world and want to fix it. They're the ones that get things done, good and bad. Old souls know enough to be happy again. They understand that everything is working the way it's meant to. I try to apply this to people sometimes. It gives me compassion that I don't otherwise have.

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Sometimes there is so much anger in me. I feel it burning deep behind my eyes so hot I tear up. Those hopeless flames. You can move and move and move but you cannot escape yourself.