Have you ever watched that film? I can't remember its name… I guess it's not that important. It's the concept that's stayed with me. Where everyone's consciousness has been digitally uploaded. 'Trapped' supposedly. However in the film, the world comfortingly resembles the real one we currently know, before some sort of apocalyptic event. Eventually the protagonist is offered a choice. Deny the digital world for the harsh reality of the real one or choose ignorance. I've never really understood the dilemma. What really is the difference between a shared digital world and the one we live in? How much difference would it make to you if the space you are in currently didn't physically exist? Honestly for me… it wouldn't make much difference at all. Least not if the people were really there sharing it with me. Now if everyone else were fake, that would be scary. Life would feel meaningless without real people around you. This fear leads me to my next question. Have you ever considered the fact you might already be dead? That time you almost fell, when you nearly crashed your car on the way to work. What if those things actually did happen and the reality you currently exist in is nothing more than your fevered mind refusing to stop living the only life it knows. You don't see your past life flashing before your eyes, you just carry on like nothing happened, never aware that it's already at its end. I've considered this possibility for as long as I can remember and there's always one dark thought that looms over me enough to make my bones shudder. How do you prove you're alive?

I awoke with a jolt, the kind of one that makes you know you had a nightmare about falling whether you remember it or not. Although my eyes had flashed open suddenly, immediately they felt weary again. Settling back into my pillow. The morning had come far too soon. I stroked the mattress in search of my phone. Once found I glanced at the time with half open eyes. The sensation of deja vu settling in under my skin lingered…. Not that it particularly surprised me. I have that same recurring dream all the time. However, I can never quite remember it. Just the falling and the shock that wakes me up. My phone buzzed with the sound of morning texts as I dismissed it back to the mattress, stretching my lethargic body. With a final sigh to build up the energy I haul myself from bed and get ready.

The laptop bathes my face in a light that probably makes me me look sickly pale. Eyes focused from behind glass lenses. Fingers hammering at the keyboard, the sound of the keys rattling the only sound in the flat. I've always loved writing. I'm currently working on a short piece about a man who is immortal. It's another concept that interests me a lot though if I were examine my motives this would inevitably be linked to how much I fear death myself. Probably why the question I asked before bugs me so persistently. I took a sip of lukewarm coffee; the last few gulps, a little too sweet, before saving my work. This is all part of a tried and tested routine. I never really strayed from it and I resent anything that might cause the slightest change. Though this too makes me wonder… is this because it's easier? If all this is in my head than surely repeating the same routine is easier than thinking inventing something new. When was the last time you did something truly new, unlike anything you'd ever done? Is the human mind capable of forming an impression of something it's never experienced? My phone rang out, flashing persistently till I answered, spurring me into getting up and finishing getting ready.
"I'm just leaving now."

My mother tells me of a memory. I can no longer place when the thought first came to me. I was skateboarding outside near the house. The sun that shade of gold you always have in childhood memories. The sound of the wheels on the concrete loud enough to annoy neighbors. I fell again tumbling onto the hard ground. I might have cried, I'm not sure… but I definitely bled. The

warm crimson trickling from my knee. I went inside. My mother coming to me swiftly, eyes filled with concern the way a mother's always do when their child has come to harm.

"What happened?"

"I just fell it's nothing big." I hurt myself like this a lot. It came with the territory of an adventurous nature.

"Are you okay?" She asked.

"Yeah."

"Am I dead?"

Her eyes widened briefly, taken aback by the question. Not one a child often asks. However, the surprise fell away to a warming smile one that found itself on my face too.

"Of course not."

I looked away from my book as he sat down. The swirling steam of a hot coffee rising from my cup between us. The place bustled with others. The sound of their chatter an ambient noise. I folded the page and placed the book down beside me.

"Hey." I offered the first words of greeting. Ben smiled sitting across from me and placing his own mug on the increasingly crowded table. Dumping a few sugars into his cup.

"How's it going?"

"Swimmingly" I replied. A stupid answer I often offer. He smiled.

"Unusual for you to not be writing, you got writer's block again?"

"You know my stories always fall apart in the middle."

"Maybe I'll read it, let you know what should happen."

I laughed.

"You say that but how far through the last one are you? Still the first paragraph?"

I could already see the jest forming on his face.

"I'm savouring it. Gotta ration myself to one word a day."

I scowled with playful anger.

"Sure…"

"What you writing about at the moment then?"

"Just something for a writing competition. I've been mulling over a concept but I'm not sure how to write it up…"

He took a gulp of his coffee. Replying with it still in hand.

"Oh yeah?"

"It's about thinking you might already be dead."

He laughed running his hand through the back of his hair sheepishly.

"What?"

"Have you never thought about it?"

He looked at me with eyes that doubted my sanity, a smile still on his lips.

"Not really…"

"Like if you or I were dead now, how would you tell?"

"Cause I'd be sitting here with a corpse."

It was my turn to smile.

"No not like that. Rather all this." I gesture round the cafe with my hand. "Everything. Right now it's nothing but a fever dream had in our final moments. To see our dreams to their conclusion."

He didn't say anything.

"What would you do? Could you tell? Would it even really matter?"

"Well it's better than nothing i suppose. Enjoy it."

"Yeah…"
"But there's no way it could be you that's dead. How would you come up with someone as funny as me?"

"It feels like this shift is going so slowly."
I smiled, shifts always go slowly, especially quiet ones like this. Hadn't had more than a couple of customers all night. I polished a glass with a cloth while we spoke. The low light of the place catching in her eyes. Reflecting the filament of vintage bulbs.
"Well we might get to finish early."
This turned her sour expression sweet.
"You think?"
I laughed unsure I should have encouraged the amount of hope that now filled her features. How long had she worked here now? I didn't really remember, only that I was taken back by how pretty she was. Understated in just the way I liked. Hair tied back. She continued her smile, her conversation getting me through the hours.
"Maybe… wanna go for a drink after?"
"Yeah sure. Let's ask the others."
I felt a heat rush to my cheeks.
"No I mean just me and you…"
"Oh..."
You might see this as the undoing of my original point. If this whole thing weren't real. If it was all in my dying mind. Wouldn't I wish to be happy? I guess there's a realism I believe my mind would try to create. That and my pessimism. She didn't say anything else. Her eyes moving away from me shyly, but I knew she was going to say no.

I stood with my toes skirting the edge. Just one step, that's all it would take. The darkness of night setting over the city like a blanket. The twinkle of the building's lights shining like earthbound stars. How would I ever be able to tell if this was real? Did it even matter? I wanted to tell myself it didn't. Yet if that was true why did I even ask the question at all? The street below lay empty. All the other people hiding from the night. I stepped forward, beginning my brief flight. Tumbling downwards; the ground an impending end. If this wasn't real what would happen now? It was the only way to tell. The concrete growing ever closer. The wind roaring past my ears. If after this there was nothing then I'd know for sure.

I awoke with a start. That same recurring dream of falling echoing through my mind accompanied by a familiar sensation of deja vu.

Have you ever watched that film?