

## *Spiral*

The flash of light from the wagging of her foot near a reflection on the floor gave the lowlit barroom a secret peripheral ambience of the unsynced flicker of an old movie on film. Elisabeth was able to keep dual rhythm between her pedal foot doing instinctive 16ths and the loose roll of the flannel of Sam's cuff between her thumb and index. She would grab his eyes with hers then let them go again, their magnetic field alternating up down up down on off on off, taking turns to admire his reflection between their drinks and hands on the black marble two-top. Eventually he cottons on and meets her eyes made spectacled by some water rings. The reflection of the projection from the screen filters all light slightly red and its pulsating feedback motion bathes the bar and its scant patrons in this part of the room in the slow hypnotic of a whirlpool of molasses.

"I don't think you should dooo ittt," she flirts upwardly, tilting her opinion with sweet fragrances.

"Heh, I reaaaally thinnk I should," he's locked to the symmetric melodic response, before switching mechanically into his regular tone, "It's just I really derive no joy from it and I'm apprehensive about the way it changes me. The things it shows me, the way it has me interacting with my environment. The way it is my environment."

He lightly and dismissively tosses his smartphone to the table where its rubber case wrangles its fall into tame; it sits abidingly. The marbling of his thumbprints written with the grease of bar snacks on the smooth dark rectangle catches the light of the projection; two tone black and red vie for space in the history of their own dichotomy with insectile rote on the sides of the microscopic ravines of each groove.

"It's just a tool. You need to figure out how to use the tool right," she's speaking pragmatically and regularly, too, no more sing-song. Though she still fondles his cuff, her foot has stopped tapping.

"Yeah well it's beyond the level of any tool I'll need. I'll still have a phone, it just doesn't need to be hyper overlordishly intelligent. Something that performs its function in perfect simplicity," he beckons half-tipsily-emphatically at the screen that holds the projection, large against the back of the stage at the focal point of their chairs' angles as they sit askance at the table, simply in order to be closer as there's no show tonight.

The screen stares endlessly and gravely back at them, recording itself with the repetition of each former moment in time, there being a Sony Video8 camera mounted atop the mixing booth directly behind them. It's canted and pointed straight at the screen, inputting its output one pitch from reality, per the angle of the camera. It sits quizzically with its head cocked but a touch, as though anticipating something happen. Any object motion that occurs in the path of the feedback registers immediately on the screen and its registration registers and so on and before you can remember what you were just looking at there's a new remodelling of the constantly moving black shape on the red screen, sometimes liquid, sometimes rigid and sharp, other times still, perpendicularly generative, rendering and rerendering VCR arabesques, the combined shape of many a thousand

quick iterations of whatever slight angle couching the camera.

Of course there's more at play than just the camera and the screen. The owner of the bar, Hugo Banne, has found several obsolete pieces of amateur - professional video mixing equipment. Small effects panels; a mixer, and a colour grader. The screen often changes its configuration, the bartenders here at *BAR NAME* playing around with the setup when it's slow and there's not much more to do than polish gleam into the surfaces. Sometimes not much happens at all on the screen; the blinding glare of a neon green revelation or the dark tiling of an empty room. Tonight the feedback is energetic and endless, some perfect angle and arrangement twiddled minutely to paradigm, the rare and shaky-balance apex of primo aesthetic before the steepness of reflexivity pulls it all away. The colour has been changing throughout the night, at the urge of the bartender Buds on one of the dvd-player sized machines, and at its own evolution.

"Is there not a perfect simplicity to a jungle? A jungle of potential," Elisabeth wags her own phone from her finger grip near its port the same frequency as her foot. "The world's a jumble of a place these days and I may need to relay important information to you on a dime on any particular platform, not call you on the phone when the networks crash after an incident."

"Like your roaming would be any better. I still don't know,,, so you can send me reels of cute dogs performing or ubermensches contorting more like."

[[ "I can send other sorts of media t<sup>ooo</sup>oo," she whistles suggestively, rippling her eyebrows. He chuckles and looks down, as though ashamed of the sinful times they live in, though he loves receiving and sending photos of that caliber. Loves making himself look bigger on the tiny screen. Making himself look good. Finds the right angle. He loves her blown

out pics, her lines extended for the camera. The new horniness of sexiness on screen. Auto-pornography. ]]

"Yeah but you can send that media over text. You can email me that media. But I will miss, yeah, curating my own representation. Having an avatar that represents only the me I want to be, only the good pics, yknow, and the sharpest quips. I guess it's part of the new community that I hate. A world where everything is necessarily linguistic, by dint of all taking part in representation and depiction, digitally, is bound to be skeletal. Everything on my phone is as it wants me to see it. It all presupposes an infinity of things hidden from me," he taps the nail of his index finger against the rim of his low-ball glass frenetically, the static energy of Elisabeth's foot before manifesting anew here, having perhaps occupied a drip from a faucet or the scurrying of a mouse for the last four minutes. The unsqueezed lime wedge perched on the rim near his tapping is edged with the creeping brown of age that is exactly the thing chopped and excluded from the web, the death of life that doesn't really compute digitally. 'When all existence is defined between a 0 and a 1, what will describe inexistence?', he thinks, but doesn't know what he thinks.

Elisabeth stops the roll of the flannel and squeezes his forearm, "That's what reality's like as well. What of when we're in different rooms? We're deprived of the visual then, my being divorced from you in the flesh, our time apart explained linguistically. Is that not also skeletal? Does sending photos and FaceTiming not flesh out those periods?"

"It fleshes them out skeletally, when in fact the blanket of unknowability is as full and flesh as reality gets," he drinks from his empty drink, the ice sparkles and pounces to his lips and quickly is dropped back to the glass, he replaces the glass on the table and stands up. "I gotta pee. Think fleshy thoughts of me as I'm gone."

As he steps away, around the front of the table, Sam extends his arm out longingly to Elisabeth, like reaching for someone gripped to a cliff, and exaggerates his face into one of lover's anguish, though the comfort of the joke gleams from a smile in his eyes. His goofy face is captured on screen by the throw of the frame of the camera, moves with him, but diagonally, because of the angle of the camera, at the bottom right hand corner of the screen. His features are slightly obscured but still there, themselves now grainy degrees between black and red, thrust into the soft wet orange of the background. As he's gone, walking away to the toilet, his image immediately repeats itself on the screen, slightly higher along the right hand side, slightly more obscure, two pips of light still evoking the little laugh in his eyes. Again it repeats itself, fluidly, his head has become a wave of image, slowly working its way around the screen. The surrounding curtains and walls peripherally radiate green, some bizarre chrominance trick of the eye that suggests colour by contrast.

Elisabeth looks down to the table and pulls the surface tension of a water-ring on the tabletop into a complete circle at first, then into artistic shapes with her fingertip. The shapes glimmer with the orange movement of Sam's head on the screen. Elisabeth prolongs it around the circle by running it with her finger, ensuring the thickness of the water drop the whole way around. It's meditative drawing a circle with one's finger, over and over, she thinks. It speaks to something in her. The water ring looks like a ring of hot lava on the black table, the way it holds the reflection of the screen.

Her reverie is shattered away by the sharp crackling of a loud smash swiftly displacing the calm of the bar, its low hung miasma of soft jazz is compressed into the corner of the room in front of her, then pops out the other side of the glittered shards of sound as immediately as vapour filling a void. Elisabeth twists her body around, gripping the side of

the table like it's the big steering wheel of an eighteen wheeler and she's frantically backing up a rush freight. Buds is already careening around the bar for the bathrooms, slipping inconsequentially in the splayed slick of a spill. Elisabeth knocks her chair over as she bolts.

Turning down the dark hallway that houses the restrooms she notices its black walls speckled with dashes of light. She feels herself tiny in the tighknit cage of a massive microphone, her entire function becomes to hear herself outside the microphone and her massive teeth utter his name, "Sam." But instead, as she rounds the corner to the open door, she yells it, her hands coming up splayed to her jaw shaking as reeds in the wind but resembling a splash of fingers from her head being dropped into a flesh puddle of hands.

Sam is on the floor of the restroom, unmoving, crushed under a heavy metal frame that once held a mirror. The sink has come away from the wall and in its unnatural bow it deferentially leaks water onto the floor. Mirrored lacerations glimmer like a kaleidoscope of butterflies feeding on a carcass, blood pours out as though to balance the image of sharp and bright with goopy and maroon, it takes pieces of mirror and tints their images a clinical red as though being viewed in a dark room. It's difficult to process the scene for the array of reflections arranged over Sam and the floor, but it's clear the mirror struck his head and the central bar of the frame has impacted his ribs. Strangely, Sam seems peaceful. Elisabeth catches minute aspects of her horror and Buds's knelt in urgency in the explosion of vision around Sam's calm but clearly altered face.

Buds carefully lifts the frame from on top of Sam and leans it against the wall, making sure that it won't fall again. He tries to brush away some of the shards but human instinct prevents you from willfully slicing the back of your hand. His

loud talk into Sam's face doesn't yield any response. He removes a large shard from atop Sam's chest and attempts CPR, the rhythm reminds Elisabeth of the rotational pulse of the screen. As he positions Sam's head to supply airflow, blood bubbles like a sorrowful tulip from hell out of his mouth, the singular glint of an eyeball on its surface, tempting reality like it should a bee. Buds's hands tense impotently around his friend's body. He snaps back and pulls his phone out to call an ambulance, turning to look helplessly back at Elisabeth. She sees what he sees reflected in thousands of bits. The pool of water sprung by the leak has spread shinily over the tiled floor, advancing slowly and stilly, seeming like clear resin from a youtube video pooling to trap the room in this tableau forever, fashion of it one huge paperweight to weigh down all the reams of life.

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The immediacy of the situation made the night thereafter feel like the removal of a long knife from Elisabeth's gut, where in pain and distance she was constantly trying to catch up with memory, every moment a constant drift from him from before and her fight to retroactively remember these things. Their evenings at bars spent so much like filler between the bigger memories, the trips, the elucidations, but ultimately quaint Sunday nights like this constituted a meaty tendon in the fibre of their relationship. She couldn't stop from hearing blood pump in her ears, feeling blood pump around her body, seeing disgusting sacks of blood walk around the hospital built for grey plastic machines, the muted colours of its walls, seats and desks all ultimately tending towards grey irreality inhumanity.

The EMTs on the way here had not acted as such, but seemed as though they knew he would die. She saw it in the

measured clarity of their movements and shy looks passed between them, in the bright loud box they used to traverse Elisabeth and Sam's usually quiet world. She didn't understand what she believed at the time. She didn't understand what she understood. She simply sat there, listening to the echo in her head of defeat. Loss. Empt. Buds held an imaginary gang sign tight to his face as he leant forward elbows to knees, contorting his eyebrows and his nose and his lips. He stayed quite still, just swaying with the hard turns of the ambulance. Sam's eyes looked straight up in absence, still wet though. As he too rocked with the movement of driving his eyes would flash bright with the fluorescence of the vehicle's ceiling lights, like hot radioactive breaths were escaping from his inside. She blinked this memory hard from her vision, bringing the febrile waiting room into focus. Utter defeat and fatigue cloaked all of her future in unimportance, she felt like a pinprick of existence, ready to simply disappear. Buds was there, and perhaps had been, but for how long, to corral her home as there was nothing more to do here.

"I need to get you home. You've had quite enough tonight."

"Tonight? Yes. Let's. I've left my bag at the bar, though. And Sam's things. His phone. My keys are in it."

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It began to rain while they were in the cab back to *BAR NAME*, refractive pearls slung themselves down the window in mimicry of the lace of a funerary carriage. Elisabeth watched the inert lights of society race through the minuscule fisheye windows. Imagined herself massive against them. Imagined wiping them away with her hand, drawing lines through them to rewrite how the universe ought to hold reality. The matte reflectivity of the leather seat next to her



was safer to focus on. Its softer pronunciation of the business lights and amber or blue streetlights imagined less to be destroyed. The cushioned skin closer to home than glass and beads. Ultimately she just felt sick, caught between the sickening rock of the taxi and the self-propagating emptiness within her giving her vertigo.

As the driver pulled to a sudden stop, the car splashed a fan of puddle water up high, and far into the middle of the pavement in front of *BAR NAME*. As it caught the light of the neon adorning the bar a column of blue shimmered down to where the tire was, the centre of the splash. It looked to Elisabeth like a massive DVD careening out from under them, to be slotted into a tray to play a massive movie. Inevitably it flopped to the sidewalk, dispersing itself away, no-one there to be shattered upon, thankfully.

"This works out, as I need to do some stuff to properly close down the bar as well," Buds, not knowing how to be, unlocked the shutter before the door and lifted it up with a heave. It clattered piercingly with an angry metallic applause, shaking Elisabeth. All the lights were on beyond the glass door in front of them. The bar seemed as they'd left it, under the protective light of the steadily spiralling projection. Buds pulled the door to and invited Elisabeth to go in first. It was quiet inside but Elisabeth thought she could still hear the faint echoing of the smash. It unsettled her and made her strain her head forward, to peer further into the room with her ear and capture the sound again. There was no way the bar would open tomorrow. People had to come to clean up the bathroom. Who even did that? And yet Buds had taken off his jacket and started to collect glasses from tables and run them through the dishwasher. As Elisabeth slowly walked towards her former table Buds came over as though to helpfully grab her bag and Sam's jacket.

"WAAAaiiitt wait wait wait," Elisabeth had stretched

forward suddenly, feet planted, and grabbed his arm with both hands. He looked down at her confused, but stock still, as she hung almost from him, her feet pointed back to a point about three feet back, her body shaped with the shell-like (convex) curve of an ornate nouveau shelf bracket, her face of urgency and despair pale and blue and red all at once, moist and dry at the same time. "Come back this way please quickly," her feet planted a bit more, stepping back, pulling him.

"What is it?" Buds obliges, looking down at the belongings on the table to see what's concerning her so much. Once he's back far enough Elisabeth loosens her grip on his arm and points a quivering finger towards the projection. Two small pips are constantly emerging, turning towards them both, in an elegant tumble down the spiral, full of anguish, but also saying hello. Elisabeth shudders and slumps to a chair, seemingly both defeated and rapt at the same time, holding her hands softly rigidly in front of her like a singer.

"I'll turn it off for the night then, if you don't like it so much."

"No! Nonono, can't you see? That's Sam there. It's Sam's last moments. They're still going. That's still Sam there. You almost stepped into the picture. That would've been the end."

Buds leans forwards, squints and moves as though to step forward, not without Elisabeth, though, who has bolted next to him, both arms around his arm this time, tensing him awaywards.

"Don't step so close, please be careful, please," through clench jaw.

"I suppose I see him, yes. His head there, moving 'round. How interesting. Very poignant." Buds seems truly touched, and bounces his head in a thoughtful nod.

"I'll stay here for a while, while you do your things, the closing the bar. Okay?" Her eyes aren't moving from the

screen much, and her fingertips pick lightly at one another as though conspiring against the rest of the body.

"Sssure. I'll make you a cup of tea. You should sit down." Buds motions helping Elisabeth into her chair but then realises that her slowness and hunchedness is not grief-based but moreso trancelike, her eyes methodically winding around into the sticky goop of the projection.

The bartender goes to wiping down tables and sweeping the floor and moving money around from cup to cup from till to cup. The jingle of the change back and forth and the stacking of glasswares dirty and clean were all like younger siblings of the massive crash from earlier which still may be lingering in the room.

Buds was a good worker and after a diligent fifteen minutes basically everything needing doing had been done, apart from the bussing of the tables on the other side of the conical throw of the camera, Buds having made a tacit agreement with the back of Elisabeth's head as she peered obsessively into the vision and shed silent tears to reflect it and make a torn mask of it on her face. He had been texting Hugo all night since the crash to keep him up to date on the situation and had slyly informed him of this most recent development: that Sam existed on in his bar. Hugo being a sympathetic bar owner and therefore largely concerned with the well-being of his community, replied to, "let it ride and we'll see. Offer her a key when you leave and lock up, but I don't expect she'll use it. I'll be there early. Thanks Buds. Tough night."

"Much obliged."

"Okay Lis," he says softly as he pads her shoulder, "I've got to go home now, I'm sorry. Would you like to leave with me and I can run you home or would you like to stay?"

"I'll stay I think, just for a little while longer. It means a lot to look in his eyes. Is that okay?"

"Yes of course," Buds also looks to the screen. The head is still crawling around the spiral. It seems calmer than before and as though it's nodding thoughtfully, the colour on screen brightens and blues somewhat, as dawn whispers light through the windows and the moody dust particulate in the air of the bar begins to glow an eerie miasma, "Here's a key for the front door in case you'd like to leave. Don't worry about the shutters." He distends to hug her and a glob of tear slick from her chin wets his shoulder. As he pulls away her eyes hold the spiral perfectly in their gleam and they imitate a great depth like two fairytale wishing wells in an early disney animation, "I'm sorry Elisabeth."

"Yes yes, goodbye now." Elisabeth was done speaking to Buds, everything other than Sam in the screen was a horrifying distraction.

As soon as the sound of the door locking was in as much the past as it would take Buds to walk three paces away from the door Elisabeth wrung the words "Hello again" from features that all were at their saddest and most expressive, drenched in sorrow and red with use, moulded to release. Sam nodded sadly, his eyes sinking and reappearing, sinking and reappearing. He still reached his arm out in theatrical longing. Elisabeth reached hers out as well, "I've still got you."

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Hugo was young to own a whole bar in this city, he was cool and this was how he had elected to spend some inherited wealth from the huge sale his father had made of his invention, Club Penguin. He ran the bar well mainly by having staff he could trust, affording him plenty of leisure time to travel and hobby and party and study and whatnot. He had perma tan somehow maybe from the travel, and showed up early this morning from the house he owned out

back of the bar, which was also rare in this city, wearing a white tee tucked into linen pants and black slip on vans with no socks. Funny how rich people literally like radiate wealth even when they're not all that decked out. He came in through the back door, which opened next to the screen on the other side from where Elisabeth sat now. She jolted up with both arms extended out and ran to the other side of the screen from him, the illuminated throw of the projector between them, a truncated cone from the ceiling, in her pert posture and intentional stepping she was careful not to interfere with this cone or the invisible one splaying itself from the lens of the camera.

"Hugo hear me out wait right there."

"Elisabeth I'm so sorry for your loss I'm astonished and devastated and just so sorry."

He makes to come hug her with arms extended.

"Stop! Please! Wait Hugo. I'm sorry come come this way." She ushers him towards where the camera stands on its tripod, to the front wall of the mixing booth, past even the table where she and Sam were sitting last night. Hugo obliges but as he's walking up he looks past her to the table she was sat at. She seems to have gone home and packed a bag to bring. Yes, there is a wheelie bag open on the floor, she has her laptop on the table and has clearly been taking notes in a notebook. Her shoes sit neatly by the foot of her table and her feet sport felted slippers, "I'll come to you," she says with arms still extended, keeping Hugo in his place. In a practiced move she puts her back against the wall of the wooden mixing booth and squats down so her head is without a shadow of a doubt below the lens of the camera, she then shuffles to the other side, making eye contact with Hugo the whole time, as if out of demonstration. She rises and they hug.

"Sit please, we have to talk." She seemed collected and

professional, not what you'd expect of someone who'd lost a loved one not eight hours prior. Although Hugo definitely tasted mania on the air in the room, as he looked back to the hypnotic spiral that wound stoically on. The two tones of the spiral were now dark grey and light yellow, but the eyes still shone there for Elisabeth, ever blinking awake at the arrival of another person to the room.

"What's the thinking here Elisabeth? You should head home and get some sleep."

"No no I'm fine I'm great I'm invigorated."

"But Lis."

"No 'buts,' Hugo, I don't want to hear any 'buts'. I need you to hear me out and we can figure something out together," she points at Sam's head, "That's Sam there," the registration of the immediate doubt manifest on Hugo's face, "I know. I know what it sounds like, but," hand to sternum, "that's Sam there and I need your help to keep him alive and going. It is his last existent moment and I needed to preserve it. Once it's disappeared into the spiral, that's that I suppose, although I should like to speak to some experts. Until that point though, nothing can interfere with the video feedback, or that's the end, *that* would be Sam's death. I need your help."

"Elisabeth," he already sounds defeated, which was good, "I don't know how we can do that."

"We'll just cordon off this portion of the bar. For now.. until I can figure something out, some sort of transportation. I've thought about it some and jotted some notions. I'll pay whatever amount; a portion of the rent; power bills; for the equipment; lost revenue for patrons who would otherwise be in this part of the bar, shows that would take place on stage, I'll take out a loan, please Hugo, I've already added up some projected costs and am figuring out a payment plan, we can do this together! We can keep him alive together! I have some

drawings as well, maybe we can move the camera and screen closer together, or elsewhere. Maybe fashion a container. But the workers must be incredibly careful!"

"I'll need to think Elisabeth, I don't know that this is good. Like good for you or for Sam or anyone. It might not be healthy. With like the mourning process. Processing grief."

"Why, there's no reason to process grief if I'm allowed to keep Sam. There'll be no need for grief."

"Give me a little bit to think about it, okay? We won't open today, of course, and tomorrow even may be a write off. That's okay though. Maybe if you want to have a memorial for Sam it would be nice to do it Wednesday or Thursday? Could be a nice day to honour the image on the screen, and let it go? I'll think on it though. Maybe there's something that can be done. You're grief-stricken right now, and it's nice that you find comfort in this," that there stretch of Hugo's demonstrative arm almost into the tract of the camera pulled Elisabeth's eyes open and her guard way up in the bodily preparations needed to potentially tackle him in the coming seconds, noticing this, he swiftly brings his arm by his side and then his hands up in apology. "I'll go have a look at the bathroom. Is there anything else you need for today? Obviously you should help yourself to water and pop and there's a coffee machine. Are you hungry?" He was in the process of getting down on all fours to crawl underneath Sam's throw, making sure that Elisabeth was approving of his progress the entire time.

As he rose on the other side, and patted himself down, while Elisabeth followed him in his method over here, he noticed a group of glasses together on the seat of a chair by the table she was clearly occupying to watch the show. Wine glasses, lowballs and highballs all, they, and the remaining liquids and ice they held as well, glistened like a huge bunch of grapes fashioned of glass for the decoration of a mid-to-

low-range Italian restaurant. Hugo inadvertently furrowed his brow in bartender mathematics, not registering Elisabeth as being drunk, yet the units clearly displayed themselves in front of him.

"Ah, Buds ought to have bussed these last night, I'm sorry."

"No, no. Buds did great," she is standing and rearranging her cardigan, "That was me, I'll put them away. I still have my card down, I made a note to add them to my tab."

"Ah, okay."

"Here, take a look at some of this, while you think. Some of my financial math. Let me know if it lines up," Elisabeth extends her notebook to Hugo and he apprehensively takes it, it being proffered too much like homework to a teacher.

Elisabeth almost mechanically returns to her seat and returns her eyes to the screen. A calm, satisfied smile graces her face, off-setting the fatigue of her eyes and the arrhythmic drumming of her finger against the tabletop. This energy compounds Hugo's unease about the situation as a whole, sensing a deep unhealthiness and general bad news about it. He slinks away to check the damage in the bathroom. The light has been left on. He can't blame Buds for not having wanted to come back in here while cleaning the bar. It was a scene made gorier by the old-timey sterility of the white tile bathroom floor, and the vast wetness from the leak sprung by the sink. Thankfully it seems somebody after the fact, perhaps Buds or one of the EMTs turned off the water at a tap at the foot of the sink. The blood spread about the room seemed to have assumed a skin, as though willing itself to become human again, shirking the sheen of its liquidity for still matteness. At least it seemed that way juxtaposed against the striking reflectivity of the thousands of shards of mirror that sprinkled the room like a new years celebration. Someone would need to be called, he couldn't make any of his



bartenders clean up this mess. He couldn't do it himself. He knew Sam and considered him a friend and the thought of mopping his blood into a bucket, drawing endless fluid fractals of him on the bathroom floor until away made him shudder and the remembrance of his friend's death brought tears encroach to his eyes and forced him to fully exhale all the breath deeply from within him.

He looked down at the notebook in his hands and rifled through some of the pages. There were diagrams mapping the projection of Sam, complex rhomboids cast over one another. Quadrants of slapdash floor plans with big red lines patterned through them. Ratios taken of space and their capacities for patrons and averages of what people likely spend in a night and multiplications and local rent price research and the cost of BC Hydro for the wattage of a projector and camera left on constantly. The philosophical implications of moving Sam from one camera to another, from one projector to another, the actual potential of doing so notwithstanding. Hugo could understand Elisabeth's sorrow and urgency. He wants to help her and he wants to honour Sam, who did perish at the failure of a piece of Hugo's property. He briefly thought relief at Lis' not bringing up insurance or the law. He'd known Lis and Sam for years by this point, and a ruthless switching off of the projector, so sealing Sam's fate in the eyes of his partner just felt impossible and too mean. Hopefully, he thinks, after a few days the realization will dawn on Elisabeth that Sam is truly gone, the mourning process will take place, and she'll lose the notion that he still lives in the projection.

Hugo flicked the switch off the light off, from his vantage point outside of the room, the mess of shards immediately losing their lustre and becoming dark windows to the speckled abysses of a crumpled mosaic. He wondered in his head about the equation of that act to the interfering with the

projector. Was Sam lost in the depths of each sliver of reflection? His final moment of fear trapped in perpetual image like the flattening of a flower between the pages of a thick book. Did Hugo just extinguish them with his deprivation of light? Light must find an end somewhere, be it the visual inexistence of a vantablack wall, or in the interpretive soul of one's eye, which captures reflected light and makes of it 'reality', in its magnificent detail, converting its energy into reckoning. It couldn't possibly distend forever into its own space, making of time a plosion both im and ex, inwards and outwards. He thought of the last time he saw Sam, they both waved over their respective shoulders as the friend/patron hybrid left his bar, this mirrored nicety strung up with the wide front window of the bar in between. The memory moved with the bizarre pulsation of an acid trip or an AI (re)generative, [the stultifying pulsation that birthed Sam on the screen every second] before he let it deliquesce and dissolve softly and seamlessly back into the undulations of his mind, whose currents were mysteriously and murkily driven likewise by Hugo's will, his psychology/brain chemistry, and the circumstances of time and space. The narrow bathroom hallway held him in the same plane as Sam's in the notebook.

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The day passed with the slumped hollowness of a hangover, little movement occurred beyond the lifelike wobble of Sam's head. Elisabeth sat almost unmoving, excreting all the liquid she consumed efficiently and without abandoning her post by weeping hyperdense hyperwet tears at the interval of the slow waves of her emotions, which must have been communicated to her by the winding focus of the spiral. Hugo had crawled back under the projection to his house to unpack his thoughts, call off the bartender who was due to

show up at 2, and give Elisabeth her space with Sam. The barroom rang tinnily with the emptiness of a cowbell without its tongue.

Elisabeth ordered food in and ate slowly and uninterestedly. She hunched over to more effectively shovel food into her mouth as her eyes angled up in a delicate tight roll. She had never lost anybody and so had not learned what needed to be done. The arrangements for Sam's body, the funeral, and her own considerations, none had occupied her attention much. That Sam wasn't dead negated the need to concern herself with these things. She had called her boss at the (brokerage(?? ought maybe be a job more centered around phones/screens/image)) to tell her the news about Sam, that she'd need some time off, but mainly to ask for the number of the company's A/V team. She had some questions. Her boss expressed condolences and that anything she might need.. the regular expressions. They weren't that close and the depth of engagement that Elisabeth felt was commensurate with their relationship, and also honestly, with her own level of grief, itself now assuaged by Sam's sticking about.

She would laugh with him, reclaiming their iterative state before the crash that made of Sam this ponderous art piece. They would seemingly joke together; her quiet chuckles and whispered replies rhythmically antithetical to small whips of his head out of sequence with themselves and the auroras of colour his ever rearing protuberance gasped out into the feedback. gaseous images of his impact, pulsatingly turning the entire swirl the soft red of goat's blood mixed with milk seen on Survivor one time, she remembers; the dangerously dark charcoal, threatening to dissolve Sam's new shape into the close up of a rooftile of an old English church, split by a crack having fallen onto a patch of verdant grass; or the patterned rendering of a rainbow splayed out like an oil slick on a constantly blooming cloud. These colours and more

radiated out of Sam's image as he moved. Hugo, more adept at tuning the video feedback set-up into interesting, self-sufficient, feedback loops than anybody else, had been surprised at how much longevity Sam's motion had, and the adaptation and vibrancy that also maintained in the screen, it having a totally different look to how it did the night Sam was caught in it, a totally different look than even two hours prior. The only recurrent was Sam's head and eyes bobbing around, it could be interpreted as shaking his head or nodding, dependent on the slight motions each prior recurring moment performed. Hugo even had to admit to himself how much mood and attitude the pomelo sized shape on the screen displayed, seemingly speaking up for its own existence.

Elisabeth felt Sam looked at her as she looked at him. She would motion for him, wave, slap her knees, beckon towards the bathroom before she did eventually go, cheers her half-full glasses towards him, step slowly side to side in a thoughtful waltz catching him in her eye with a flowing parallax, giving him stretch and bend. Every now and then throughout the day she would bolt up to the side of the screen in gut wrench paroxysms, her middle finger lightly tracing the edge of the projection, her forearm straight down, careful not to interfere. Her other hand and cheek both flattened against the wall, feeling hopelessly for a heartbeat to emanate from Sam's new medium, urging herself into it, her eyes bathed in blue and orange alternating with haptic curve.

