

My friend phoned me, and when I picked up they asked

Friend: *how was last night?*

I ran my tongue over my teeth, I needed to brush them, they felt cacky. I went to sip the coffee I'd made myself earlier but it'd gone cold while I'd napped, and when I tasted it it was stale and my mouth was stale and my room was stale and the towel I'd wrapped my hair in two nights ago was next to my head and it smelt like mildew so I opened the window a bit. I replied:

Me: *yeah it was interesting. I dunno. Something weird happened.*

Friend: *Yeah?*

Me: *So after the pub closed everyone left, which is about what I'd expected. But I just wasn't feeling going home, I dunno.*

Me: *So yeah, someone who'd been at the pub recommended this club thing so I trekked across town, and it seemed like a standard club, I dunno, nothing special. But yeah, I got in the queue, and I was waiting there, in an unmoving line, for fucking ages.*

The air outside the club was light and crisp, and metallic grinding sounds came from the dark.

Friend: *Yeah*

Me: *And I was sobering up at this point and desperate for a piss. Like literally I thought I was going to pee myself,*

Me: and then this group of girls came and joined the queue behind me. Well women not girls, but, yeah. And obviously they were just minding their own business, talking together,

I could hear them talking behind me but couldn't quite make out the words, they talked with a singing inflection, words bouncing up and down, nails clacking.

Me: but I really wanted to go pee and I really didn't want to go by myself. I was just feeling on edge. Like a bit scared to go off alone. And I had jeans on so it would've been a proper exposing pee. So I turned 'round and tapped one of them on the shoulder.

Friend: yeah?

Me: Yeah, and she turned 'round and honestly she was the most beautiful person I've seen in my life!

Me: Like, then I looked at all of them properly and I was like, fuck they're all stunning! And I was like eek but at this point it was too late, so I went to the woman, hi. And she said hi back, with this big grin, how are you. And I said, sorry to bother you, but not great actually. I'm out alone and I really need to pee, and I've been queuing for this club for half an hour and I don't know when I'll get in, and I'm not even wearing a skirt.

Me: Immediately, the whole group opened up, and I was suddenly in the centre, and the girl I was just talking to was explaining to the group that we had to go find somewhere to pee.

Me: And they all just like, I dunno, started talking all at once, and the one I'd tapped on the shoulder put her hand on my arm.

And her fingertips seemed to give way to my skin, like they were trying to push themselves through the membrane of my body and into the fat on my arm. The slight pulpy bit at the tip of her finger was cold and damp like slime.

It reminded me of something I'd read, about the philosophy of friendship. Some of the philosophers seemed preoccupied with an attempt at finding the boundary between oneself and the other through an exploration of friendship. Friends, someone logiced, are important because we see them as an extension of ourselves, like an extra limb. Something good happening to a friend is self evidently good :) in the same way something bad happening to us is self evidently bad :(It reminded me of a maths proof, trying to build on an indisputable fact.

Me: On the street and I wasn't sure where they were taking me, but we turned off pretty quick into a small car park, with a few cars still there, maybe overnighthing or maybe abandoned.

Me: They chatted to me, the girls, they asked my name, what I did. It was nice, they were nice, and comfortable. Like I felt comfortable right away, some soft floral scent coming from one mixing with a sharp musk of another, voices with that singing lilt you hear on the telly a lot, and they pointed at one car and said that was a good spot and they all kind of formed this loose circle, around the silver Citroen, all facing away from me. Kind of witch vibes. So I squatted down out of sight and peed.

I read an article on divine ascension which made me re-reflect on the philosophy of friendship. The article talked about the aesthetics of that moment of transcending the body and going to heaven, or wherever you're going. Like floating off into space. Like at the end of the movie Grease. It's not an exclusive Christian thing but it's in Christianity a lot. And the interesting thing, one of the interesting things, was what the article said about the relationship between the personal ascension and the grand, societal ascension which will come at judgement day.

Friend: Okay, this is such an interesting story.

The girls were city girls, tech girls, shiny girls with shiny minds. Does that make sense?

Me: No listen I'm building atmosphere okay, something's going to happen. So I was still squatting down like doing a little shake you know

Friend: *Mmm hmmm*

So, the article said, Jesus will come back down to earth and then the judgement day will happen, and the righteous will ascend and the non righteous will burn in hell : (And according to this one article; originally, the disciples - who were left after Jesus died then came back then died again - thought this moment would happen in their lifetime, like he was coming back in a year or two so everyone needed to sort themselves out NOW, communally, so that society would be able to go to heaven. But, slowly...the idea shifted as Jesus didn't return, and the idea of a personal ascension came into existence. Individually, when you die, you would be judged worthy or not, and ascend or not, while on a larger scale, societally, we will all get judged on mass at some undisclosed later date. But the personal became much more important than the societal, as the big revolution of Jesus returning never happened.

Then I think about friendship, the philosophy of it, the one that's quite concerned with finding this _____

personal boundary|

^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^^, seems kind of similar to the divine *ascension thing*.

Kind of small scale, granular. Kind of, bitty. Maybe personal, maybe an abandonment of the collective in pursuit of the personal. But maybe it's the opposite. It's probably both.

I guess, for context, these thoughts are based on some personal experience with friendship and care. Watching people I know (and watching myself) struggle with doing more care based labour for money (teaching, care work, etc.) because it's tiring, it's exhausting emotionally at times, and it's like, doing that societal care can feel like it limits the care you can give your friends. But if I do a boring office job, I have that energy to care for other people, in a way. But isn't that a switch between a broader societal movement and an individual one. I don't want to moralise it because, to be clear, I want to do the office work. I want time for my friends. But I don't like the way they've been separated, my family and my friends existing in a different circle to other people's family and other people's friends, and that being reinforced on some level by different forms of work for money and the energy they afford you.



Me: *So I did a little shake, and stood up. And the main girl, I forget her name but she's saved on my phone so I can check later, she's like, wanna come in with us, and I was like, yeah sure, and we went and got back in the queue for the club, but this time I just, was one of the group now.*

As we walked back to the club, the friends moved together in a close formation, so close and fluid in their movements that it seemed like they *passed through each other*.

There was a moment when the main girl came towards me. Between us was another person. The Main Girl walked towards me with force, the sliver of her rings winking in the dim light, pulsing in and out like a dying star as her figure came in and out of my line of sight. She was on a collision course and it became clearer as I watched her that she was going to run into her friend, I could see her staring at her friend in full knowledge of her trajectory, completely unbothered by it. And then, just at the point of collision, the Main Girl kept going, she walked straight through the other being. For a moment it was like the two were occupying the same space, clipping like a video game, their facial features blurred together to become a vague outline of some human like form, their bodies becoming a more general size, their outfit fading.

I read the book *Hyperion* when I was younger, it was like a scene from that. A catholic priest was stranded on the planet Hyperion, and he stayed with a group of humanoid figures, who had become sac-like in their generalness. When one of the beings died, they would go into a cave to have their flesh reforged, each time losing specificity and becoming smoother. For him it was a horror, each death should have granted access to more, to heaven, but their never ending death was taking away something. It was in direct opposition to the notion of divine ascension, both personally and societally.

And then the Main Girl was out the other side and holding my arm, and no one seemed to have noticed. Her skin was soft, she didn't have any bones, it didn't feel like she had any bones, she was completely porous and malleable, and her hand left no space around my arm, her hand didn't move like a hand with fingers and finger bones that limited and aided movement, her hands moved like they were boneless and boundaryless. I think even my atoms were being encroached upon, I think her hand went into everything, into the slight scar I had whose skin sat a few millimetres lower than the surrounding skin like a little carved valley, over a mole so the mole wasn't being pressed into my skin but instead encased, she was fluid, a fluid woman. I think, then, I decided the girls weren't human. Humanoid, sure. But they seemed to all be one giant organism. Some energy or tension or maybe some underground root system linked them all together. That would explain the way they seemed to fuse and diffuse, moving their bodies like the shape of them was incidental.

Me: *It was nice, they were all so lovely, really sweet. Like not super overbearing but just kind of effortlessly inclusive, like me being there was just natural, no need to constantly talk to me, but also they asked my opinion, always included me in rounds once we got inside, you know.*

We danced together, compacted together like some totaled car after it had been crushed into a cube by a screaming machine. We were a dense ball of mass on the stage, and there was magic in the heat, the rhythm of techno, strobe lights, synced movements. I'd read this book called *The Second Body*, and in the book the author talked to a microbiologist. The whole book was about seconding, second bodies, duplications. And the author talked to the microbiologist about the symbiotic relationship formed between certain cells. The microbiologist said, from what I remember but maybe my memory isn't that good, that it was interesting how cells would act when working with other cells. If one cell was good at X, and one cell was good at Y, the cells would just focus on what they were good at, and the cells would get more and more specialised, and therefore more and more bad at thriving or even functioning individually. Like, the cells sacrifice their individuality for the collective. And the scientist said that watching these cells do this had fundamentally informed how he navigated relationships.

I couldn't smell any mould or mushroom tang as I danced. I couldn't see anything that would give credence to the assumption that they were one giant microorganism.

Me: And we went out for a few times to the smoking area, everyone went together. And we stood out there and some of the women were smoking. So this guy comes up and he goes 'can I have a lighter'

She'd held her acrylic tipped fingers out like fangs, and she bit down on the outstretched, lighterless hand.

Me: and I swear down one of them grabs his wrist so hard it draws blood!

The stuff she drew was hardly discernible as red. It was an underwater red; colour saturation leaking out through the night till the blood was a muted grey.

Friend: Did the guy do anything to provoke that?

Me: Not really.

Friend: That's so weird.

Me: yeah, I know. I was debating leaving then, but she got me a diet coke from the off licence.

Was it tiring, having so many forms? How did they hold all those conversations all at once?

Maybe they'd existed at this perfect and seamless group of friends, so in sync, inline but separate, each having their own specialities, and as they spent more time together they got worse at the things others could do and better at what they could do, until none of them could function alone anymore. Truly an extension of each other, and they'd kept going, superimposing over each other. Could it spread, like the beings in Hyperion? They spread by embedding crosses in people's stomachs, the author deploying this paranoid symbol which spread little feelers into your heart and lungs until you couldn't remove it.

I looked around to see their faces but I couldn't fix my eyes on anything in them that made them individuals. They all seemed to be everywhere at the same time. But the main girl, she was always there in parts or in wholes, in every form I saw, in every body that I felt next to my own.

Friend: *fuck sake*

Me: *hehe*

She'd done it with a wrist flick, she made all her fingernails touch like a string back, in which she carried my diet coke.

Me: *And we went in and out of the club. And at one point, later into the night, me and the main girl, I dunno we just started having this chemistry dancing. And she was holding my hand and then her hand would be kind of on my leg or my butt and I'd be copying her, yeah and then she was kissing me.*

Splitting and combining again into new configurations

Friend: *FUCK! Why didn't you lead with that?! That's the most important part, why did you tell me that whole peeing story*

Me: *Well it's context*

Friend: *Okay I don't care about context I want to hear about you getting with someone!*

And when she kissed me I could feel our lips fusing, and then I could feel her fingers, feel through them, feel both her fingers and mine like shaking my own hand, and I could feel her body and mine, and then I couldn't feel anything of my own, every part of me was joined and maybe I stopped being there, maybe we were superimposed in the world like she had been earlier when she moved through her friend.

Me: Thanks... Anyway, so yeah we started getting off, and we were still like in this circle of the other girls. Like everyone was all crowded together and we were in the middle. And part of me started to get really anxious, suddenly. So, I pulled away

Friend: Fuck off that's so stupid

Me: Don't be mean. So I pulled away and said I needed to pee but then obviously everyone came with me to the bathroom, and this group of like, maybe 7 girls but I couldn't tell it was like the numbers kept changing all the time, they all crowded into the bathroom.

Me: I dunno, I was just feeling really panicked all of a sudden.

Friend: Why?

Me: I... I dunno

It was this general sense of compression and loss and maybe some other stuff as well. It was confusing, and I know at that point I'd shut down again. Like I'd been operating on this level of openness that I couldn't sustain any longer. No more ascension, no more transcending from my own existence and joining with others.

Friend: Okay. That's okay. So, what did you do

Me: I just kinda said I wanted to leave. And then left. So they took me outside and one ordered me an Uber. And yeah. I left. They all waved as I left.

Friend: And that's it?

Me: *Yeah?*

Me: *Nah, not really. They played a Carly Rae Jepsen remix that was pretty good.*

Friend: *That's fun!*

