

JOSIE/JOCELYN DEANE

Black Star

I still have the electrodes on my bedside table. The EMT were very patient; I felt more in control at that point and was succeeding in my head to convey exactly what was happening with no digressions or noticeable breaks in flow. You said afterwards, when I got home at 3, I was talking like someone had spliced audio tracks on top of each other; I was talking casually in the back as the EMT avoided my gaze and asked me about my medical history, and I was thinking I really need hand-sanitiser, touching the metal bed frames. When I had followed them down the stairs, there was a 2 second delay—I could feel it, the spark—between the impulse and my body, my hands stretching for the banister. When I was still ok, I was fighting the impulse to laugh convulsively, for the sake of pride, I said I can feel the feeling: it's not language, I can feel the parts of my brain lighting up and their rough approximation. It was like how people describe music. Then I tried to walk to our bedroom.

In the before-times, 2019 perhaps, I was visiting my parents in Sydney. The house, hedges shorn, walls cream/millennial pink, for real-estate tours. I haven't told you about it, except this moment; I can't remember why I was up at 6 am, but I couldn't sleep. There were frogs in the neighbours' faux-Zen pond, blending into tinnitus. How many frog generations have lived since we moved in? I was reading *Eros the Bittersweet* by Anne Carson and/or *A Voyage to Arcturus* by David Lindsay. The two blend together now: Anne Carson talking about the divine madness of love, the purposefully compromised defences Greek poets raised against it, on an alien planet, a tentacle growing out of her chest, gender indeterminate, impossibly sharp mountains in the distance. I told you before I finished one of the books that night, but I can't remember which, or if it were true. I walked out of my room and flopped onto the small, presentable lawn. The sun entered the earth's field of view, a palm-tree lit up blue and green in the retina, and I thought, this was never my real name, my referent. My real name is Arctura. I'm an alien intelligence beamed down into this brain, a visitation. I was picked up like a frequency, from my star, and the resulting dialogue is me. A kind of language. I mention this all to you because of the green-blue, how it lit up. The pure signification of it, safe on the grass. It would come back, now, in lockdown.

I can tell you what dying—what I thought was dying—is like: the purple feeling. Your body's trying to throw up a stone. Time lengthens, it feels, slower and slower motion. I fall, as you call the ambulance, not scared, you say afterwards, you know better, but terrified, you add. As time lengthens, semantics break down: you remember the natural history museum in London, a promotional VCR of Sir Richard Owen explaining life on earth/deep time to a confused teen, by way of a full diplodocus skeleton in the atrium. Humans occupy less than a millimetre on the tip of the tail, they say. The skeleton is 108 feet long. I can hear you speaking to the emergency hotline, calmly, thinking oh god please faster more urgent, and at the same time it doesn't matter, because I know I'm already dead and

time is filling up like water the spaces between you and the response on the other end of the line. Given enough time, words lose everything. They won't be here for 45 minutes, on account of lockdown. They have many people they need to confirm safe in quarantine. I fall backwards off our bed and I think oh, this is it, just like this. You got a lifetime, nothing more or less. I start to feel things get slower and slower, and you say hello? Yeah, yeah my partner's not doing too well, they seem in a bad way, how far is the ambulance again? Cool, cool, thank you. There are stars in my eyes: I feel better about the whole situation. This is nice, I guess. Heart attack at 26, after spending 2 months in lockdown. But I need to tell you before I go, I need to tell you that I love you and that it's ok, that this stuff happens. I need to get out the essentials of what you need to know, before I definitely die. I get up from the floor, sit on the bed, look you in the eyes, say calmly it's ok I know I'm dying, or already dead, and I need to tell you that I love you and that I'm sorry. It's really sad, but hey. Then, I feel my heart rate calming, something breaks through and I know I'm not going to die. I start howling, ecstatic gulps, like a Greek mourner.

The doctor on hand is tapping a clipboard. They gave me gloves to wear. They have a mask on, but I can see their beard with white flecks. Are those recent? They're straightforward, clipped. What happened next? they ask. I started twitching and ticking, my head rolling back and forth: I didn't recognise anything. Anytime I looked at something, my brain had no language. It was like waking up again and again. I didn't recognise my partner's face. Every time I looked at them in the eyes I was like no this is someone else. I haven't spent 2 months of lockdown with this person, that's not true. I keep shaking, twitching, as I try to reassert myself, I ask are you afraid? Are you worried I've done permanent damage to myself? which makes them more tired and scared. They were wearing one of my dress jumpers, I don't say. In the ambulance, I tell you after, I kept hearing them refer to him and his heart rate, and genuinely didn't know they were referring to me. They really did die, I think. Now I'm someone different. I'm Arctura. One of the drivers was on Twitter and I thought what if I get translated into code, or become a lockdown story? Will it be a dialogue form tweet:

Patient who called the ambulance because they smoked too much weed or something: I feel like my brain is broken forever
Me: terrible...

It would get 11 likes, a retweet. A tiny shard. Tying maybe into trending patterns of hospital staff, EMT, doctors and nurses tweeting about over-working, trauma, lack of funding/wearing bins on your hands/feet, break-down, isolation, I don't know. You remind me, when I get home, trembling, of the Clap For The NHS hashtag in the UK, before/after Boris Johnson got Covid, which ended as soon as NHS workers started posting about their lack of payment and Tory cuts. You said, they would break down in their cars, if they could get away from work. You said, everyone is incredibly online now. We are finally our virtual forms. Think of Elon Musk, unveiling a way to upload your consciousness to the cloud, to control a pig's brain like a video game character, that we should devote ourselves to the transcendence of flesh, so that a murderous AI god doesn't resurrect you in the future to torture you for eternity. This is how he and Grimes hooked up, you say, bonding over Roko's Basilisk, the erotic-horror of a vast intelligence gripping you in its mandibles. When I was younger, after a particularly bad episode, I tell the medical practitioners I imagine splitting my consciousness between an incorporeal, spider-like thing called a memeplex, I feel like I

am an aggregate of its thoughts and mine, such that our thoughts intersect, a certain number of them don't belong to either of us, they recommend me to a psychiatrist, to test if I'm developing schizophrenia. I repeat that this was just a metaphor, but I begin to wonder, I develop tics to help manage stimulus: repetition of phrases connected to the memory of relative health and/or agency, loud intakes of breath through the nose, gesticulation, hands over my lobes balled up, then turned outwards, fingers opening, like antlers. These also allow me to look people in the eyes. A friend says I remind them of the pale man from *Pan's Labyrinth* when I do it and I say yeah, just like an allegory for Fascist horror...

Ok, ok, the doctor says. One thing at a time please. The ward is quiet. No-one is trying to make noise, which is unusual. The EMTs wheel me past a woman with a bloody left arm in a sling; she's rubbing the air around it, to ward off the virus, her mouth undulating in silence, like a squid. My phone is on 1% and I text you from the hospital bed. You ask if there's a charger and I say yes probably. I shouldn't be on Facebook, but its grounding, and lets me focus on the external world, people shitting on Dan Andrews. It's reassuring to know that people of consistency exist, you text, like rocks. I don't know, you reply. There are electrodes on my chest, and my heart rate is normal, says the doctor, checking their phone/patients list. My phone dies the moment they ask me to scan a QR code, to fill out a Covid-survey, and they leave me the charger to wait until it's full again. They need to check on the bloody-armed lady, chanting under her breath now. Everything is blue-green. I am not there, Arctura is. Time is still catching up, filling the holes left by my body. I position myself almost diagonally off the bed, to type on my phone. Language is still possible, it seems. I text you again, I seem to be ok. You seem to be. I love you. I love you too, so much. I'm scared. I'm scared too. I don't want to do this again. What if lockdown makes it more regular? What if the body you are, in lockdown, is easier to hack? God, imagine Elon Musk piloting my body. lol awful I love you. I love you too. Please come home soon. Yah.

I am stumbling out of the emergency ward, looking for the doctor, or someone to discharge me, my phone at 20%. I run into an orderly and they look at me like an alien, like I'm talking in binary or electromagnetic waves. Eventually, someone directs me to the front desk, I'm ordering an uber. Will this be covered by health-insurance? Not like Covid costs or anything? Phone in the morning mate, says one of the interns. I am ordering an uber back to you. I will stumble down our driveway, everything still shaky, by the light of Twitter. I see the light of our doorstep. The stars are black, transmitting.