

## The Decoherence

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Like a message in a bottle, the memory of a dream now unmanned is slowly drifting from shore aimlessly out to sea. He vaguely remembers seeing his own face in the mirror, looking gaunt and pale with the faint smell of alcohol like a sickening draft from his breath, which remains, its scent drifting into his nostrils like a freshly opened flask. He rises out of bed and ambles over to the bathroom. Upon seeing his face not gaunt, not pale, but healthy, he issues a sigh, *What a relief.*

Around dinner time he is standing in his mother's kitchen. His mother is at the stove, stirring spaghetti sauce in a huge steel pan. The smell brings back childhood memories, as his mother's cooking often does. His father is in the garden, tending the tomato plants out back. This is the old house he grew up in and much of it remains the same. His father walks in carrying a big pail of bright red tomatoes. A big grin sweeps across his face. He greets his son in that old warm familiar voice and he says to him

“We have way too many tomatoes,” and asks, “Do you want any to take home with you?”

He answers “I would be glad to.” Moments later they all three sit around the table eating spaghetti.

Breaking the silence of eating his mother asks him, “Do you remember that time when you were helping your father in the garden? After the rainfall and all those worms came up out of the earth. Their bodies squirmed in the mud looking like severed animated fingers. Then you gathered them up like a bountiful harvest. Then your father grabbed two fishing poles out of the garage and took you fishing for the first time. You managed to snag a large catfish. Your father had to reel it in for you, because it was too big for you. You brought the fish home and you watched your father flay the fish. Upon seeing this you started to cry and we asked you 'What is the matter?' You told us, 'I feel bad for the fish.' Your father then asked, 'What about the worms?' and we all laughed.”

He said “I do.” They laugh together.

That was the day that he learned about death. He remembers his father explaining, 'All fish die, all worms too and all the animals on the earth.' He then said, 'Even me and your mother will pass from this world and into the next,' He remembered getting scared at hearing this news. His father assured him, 'That is a long time off, it is nothing to worry about now, we have plenty of time to spend together.' After these reminiscences he thanks his parents for dinner and leaves for home.

The shadows crawl across the ground while taking on the forms of sickly, emaciated and arthritic elderly. He lies in bed thinking about the day. His smile fades away as his face muscles relax. The sleep of reason embarks.

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The memory of a dream drifting away. He vaguely remembers seeing his own face in the mirror, looking healthy with the faint smell of spaghetti sauce like an aromatic draft from his breath, which remains, it's scent drifting into his nostrils like out of the open doors of an Italian restaurant. He peers over to his window with icicles hanging like prison bars. He moves to get up and feels a hint of pain pinching his liver. He hangs his winter clothes on his bony body. They fit him like they would fit a coat rack. He grabs the snow shovel because he promised that he would shovel his parent's sidewalk and drive, because his father was too sick and weak to do it.

He pulled up to the house, got out of the truck and grabbed the snow shovel out of the back of the truck. He began shoveling the drive. His mother comes out of the front door in a worn knit navy blue sweater and brown scarf wrapped around her neck. She stands on the old sunken porch. Her white flower print dress pressing against her shins. Her arms folded around her frail shivering body searching for some sort of warmth. She calls out to him, her voice barely escapes her throat, in this restrictive cold. As he approaches he could see the tears that have frozen onto her cheeks and he says, "You're shivering. Please mother, get inside." As he tries to guide her back into the house.

She says, "Your father has passed away this morning." She explains to him that she tried to call him, but he must have already left the house.

He asks "Is his body still inside?"

She answers "Yes, he must have passed away last night in his sleep." He drapes his arms over his mother's shoulders in embrace and their bodies quake in tears.

When he sees the body of his father lying on the old metal frame bed he can see his body is shrunken down to the size of a child. The cancer has eaten him away almost entirely, like a scavenger, leaving nothing but bones. He and his mother sit at the kitchen table as they wait for the coroner to arrive. He tells his mother "I had a dream, that I vaguely remember, but father was healthy in it. There was something about fish too, because when I woke up I was craving fish." His mother rises from her chair and walks over to the freezer and pulls out some frozen fish and hands it to him. He says, "Thanks".

She says, "Don't let anyone tell you that dreams don't come true." They break out into tears and she comforts her son by standing next to his seated figure, drawing his head to her torso as if drawing it back into her womb. With his head buried in her pillow like abdomen she speaks, "Do you recall how you first learned about death?"

He answers, "I don't."

She recounts the story, "There was a stray cat that hung around the house and you would leave food and milk outside for it. You would pet it and you became attached to it. Then it went missing and you were worried about it. Then one day in the garden during summertime, you discovered the cat and its half decayed body, curled up with its tail in its mouth, like a serpent eating itself. You crouched over it with your tears christening the ground, drawing the worms from the earth and they began crawling out of the ground and through the orbital of its skull. Your father had to explain to you that all living things die but they don't come to an end and that we all die, but also don't come to an end. That death was just a part of life. That we all returned to the ground that we all become soil and that we all come back as a part of nature, that our bodies merge with the grass, the trees and the sunflowers."

"There are no sunflowers out there today, mother."

“It is winter,” is her response, “but it will pass and spring will come.”

Later, as evening's blue shadows encroach on the sunbathing snows. He and his mother are standing in the bedroom. “I don't have anything suitable to wear at a funeral.” He mentions. His mother walks over to his father's closet and pulls out from the rack a black suit and hands it to him. He remembers his father wearing the suit. The suit itself had the cast of a ghostly apparition of his father. When someone is gone, anything, even the most insignificant object that reminds you of them is given a haunting quality. “Thanks” he says after taking the suit off his mother's hands looking like two albino axolotl salamanders bathing in moonlight as they held the suit tightly, as if it was his father, as if she didn't want to let go of it.

“Will you be okay for the evening?” He asks.

“I'll be fine.” She says, stoically.

At home, he hangs the suit at the foot of his bed. The night is pressing in on him like a compress squeezing the breath from him as if his life were being dispelled from his body. Sleep weighs on him like a thick blanket as his body becomes heavy like osmium sinking into his bed. Again the sleep of reason embarks.

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As the darkness dispels he rises from slumber and walks over to his window. The warm sun floods through the dusty window. The dust dances in the sunbeams that create that odd quadrilateral highlight on the bedroom floor. He thought *in my dream last night the window was barred by icicles, snow covered the ground and most troubling of all my father had passed away*. Inside him a dread blooms like rapidly rising flood waters and he feels the need to call his father. *Maybe something is wrong?* So he leaves his bedroom and heads straight into the living room and picks up the phone. He quickly with agitated fingers dials his father's number. The muted ringing starts on the other end. The ringing continues, ring after ring, again and again as the anxiety rises. The ringing continues but then finally someone picks up.

On the other end that old warm familiar voice answers, “Who is it?”

With a sigh of relief, he answers “It is your son.” he hesitates and then continues, “I had a bad dream. I wanted to see if you were okay.”

His father said “I’m okay.”

He said “I want to see you. I’d like to come over to visit if you aren’t too busy.”

His father said “That will be okay. I just put on some coffee.” So they agree.

Later that morning in the kitchen of his parent’s house, they sit and drink coffee as he recounts his dream to his father. His father jokingly says “I hope it isn’t a premonition.” They both laugh and agree. Before departing, he makes sure to say goodbye and tells his father that he loves him.

In the evening Nyx spreads her wings so large and dark that it blots out the sun, bringing a little anxiety with her. He repeats to himself while drifting off to sleep, “No bad dreams, no bad dreams.”

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The light of day frames his face in a cool blue light, his eyes still closed, his lips moving in his sleep, repeating the words “no bad dreams, no bad dreams.” Upon waking he looks down at the foot of his bed. He sees his father standing there. He rises to hug him, but winds up holding in his shaking arms nothing, but an old black suit. He buries his face in the suit like a handkerchief and sobs like when he was a child. Today was the day of the funeral. After laying the suit on the radiator to dry the tears, he put it on in front of the mirror. In the mirror he sees his father only twenty years younger, like he saw him as a child and more recently in family photos.

At the funeral as he walks past his father's open coffin, he reaches in and places into his jacket pocket an old faded Polaroid of sunflowers. When it was time for his father to go into the ground it was so cold the spade could barely pierce the pile of earth that was meant to cover him.

After the funeral, once everyone says their goodbye's to his father and to each other, he goes home and lies down in bed drifting off to sleep repeating to himself, “I need good dreams, I need good dreams.”

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The light of day frames his face in a warm yellow light, his eyes still closed, his lips moving in his sleep, repeating the words, “I need good dreams, I need good dreams.” A shadow stands at the foot of his bed, fading away as he awakes.

Later in the day, him and his father go fishing. While sitting by the lake catching nothing, he tells his father, “I had a troubling dream again. In it I put you in the ground.”

His father looks at him with a mischievous boy-like smile and says, “It seems you have buried me alive.” They burst out in laughter that echoes like ripples radiating out on the placid surface of the lake.

He then retorts, “Or, you’re a zombie. I mean, that dream was so real.” Reclining in the grass by the lake, they talk until the day fades to evening. They pack up all their fishing gear, he drives his father home and they say their goodbyes, and see you tomorrows.

As he lies down to sleep that night and closes his eyes he repeats to himself. “No bad dreams, no bad dreams.”

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The light of day frames his face in cool blue light, his eyes still closed, his lips moving in his sleep, repeating the words, “No bad dreams, no bad dreams.” he awakes, looking at the foot of his bed and seeing the dark suit hanging there from yesterday’s funeral, a little dirt on the sleeves and the bottom of the pant leg, looking like his father has dug himself out of the grave. He groggily gets to his feet, the pain gripping at his heart rising from his sternum up into his aching head. Out of the window he could see a blanket of snow on the lawn, and the withered old dead tree next door. *When will this winter end?* He decides to go over to his mother’s house.

He rings the rusty doorbell. She answers the door and invites him in. They discuss the passing and he tells her about the dream he had of him and his father fishing together by the lake.

She says, “It was your father’s spirit visiting you in your sleep.”

He says, "I wish that were true."

She says that, "It is true, he visited me too." She recounts the same dream, that he came over and him and his father went fishing for the day. They both agree that it was strange. He still felt that it was merely wish-fulfillment and she that it was the spirit of her husband letting them know that he was okay. Later at home, while reflecting on this, he drifts into sleep.

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He was on an undisclosed street. Everything was gray like a black and white movie. There were identical looking lamp posts in a perfectly straight line going down a perfectly straight street, not a single curve, not a single incline or decline in the terrain. The houses along the street also look identical the same yards, the same drives, the same garages. He begins walking, but he doesn't know why. He feels he is heading somewhere important, but he doesn't know where. He sees the shadowy figure of a stranger in the distance walking towards him, seemingly mimicking his gait and pace exactly. As they pass each other under the light of the street lamp, he hesitantly looks up and he sees his own face and he halts as the stranger passes him. He says aloud "Hey, wait a minute!" as he turns and reaches for the stranger's elbow. The stranger stops suddenly and turns toward him slowly, again he peers into his own face. It looks less aged and a little imbued with life. He says, "Excuse me, but where are we going?"

*We? Why did I say we?*

The stranger says to him, "Why, I'm late to a funeral and you, you are going to a reunion."

"Oh, okay, okay." and he asks the stranger. "How far do we have to go?"

The stranger says to him, "Just keep walking, it is right down there." pointing down the street.

He nods his head and again says, "Oh, okay, okay." He lets the stranger go, still befuddled, he turns away and begins walking again. The stranger, he assumes continued walking too because, once he glances back the stranger is no longer there.

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Lying supine in bed, lungs filled with clinging dew from morning air. The tears in his eyes

making his sockets into wishing wells. *Father was gone. Just the other day he had shoveled earth over his casket. His mother was all alone in that house, that just a week before housed two souls.* He looked down at the foot of his bed, just beyond the horizon of his feet. His father isn't there. His father's dirty suit isn't there. He thinks *It might have slipped off the hanger and onto the floor.* but when he gets up and looks on the floor nothing is there. The light from the window is warm and he approaches it to look outside. All the snow has melted. *So soon, how?* The lawn is green and the neighbor's dead tree has leaves growing on it. *How long have I been asleep? Was I in some kind of coma?* He goes to the kitchen to make some coffee. A pail of tomatoes sits on the kitchen counter. He thinks *Maybe I drank too much alcohol at the reception after the funeral last night, because, I don't remember going to the store and getting any tomatoes.* He scratches his head, shrugs and starts the coffee. After he puts the coffee on, he decides to call mother to see if she is holding up. He picks up the phone and dials the number. The muted ringing starts on the other end. The ringing continues, ring after ring, again and again as the anxiety rises. The ringing continues but then finally someone picks up and on the other end he hears that old warm familiar voice of his dead father.

“How are the tomatoes?”