

Infinite Azure

Who are you?

On March 1st, 2077

you were Macbeth, palms blood-stained

eyes pooling with guilt and grief.

Even though I didn't know you yet, and

even though I had the absolute worst seats in the house

Louis, I wanted to weep for you.

“Most people wait until the third date before exposing their poetry,” Louis whispered. Every cell in my body wished for the sushi restaurant we were in to collapse on me immediately.

“Haha yeah, but obviously I wrote this poem as a joke, you know.” I also wished I had thought of a less obvious lie.

“I really liked it. If you write any more poems, could you show them to me?”

“Ah...actually, I have some other ones if you...I mean since you asked I could—”

I went on to write exactly two and a half poems about that date; the half being a quick haiku I scribbled about how I love conveyor belt sushi. I would have never imagined that he would become my muse. Louis, the archetypal theater kid. I saw him from time to time around campus. His shaggy, brown hair was always mangled around his headphones; the cheap wired kind. Always humming the big numbers of well-known musicals. I listened to the soundtracks of

Broadway's greatest hits so that during our first date, I could throw in the occasional Hamilton reference (god knows I wasn't going to throw away my shot).

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{ "Upload began as a convenient way for families to immortalize dying loved ones, but soon the merits of digital embodiment proved themselves all too enticing. Uploaded Intelligences (UIs) enjoyed thinking speeds that were orders of magnitude beyond human. Any ninety-year-old grandmothers uploaded soon found themselves fashioning entire digital worlds, solving field medalist-baffling mathematical mysteries, while still finding time to visit their grandchildren in the physical world through perfect humanoid 'dolls.' These enabled them to hold their flesh and blood loved ones, should they ever desire a break from godhood. Within a generation, UIs defeated every thorn that had plagued mankind for generations. Cancer cured, infinite green energy attained, poverty eradicated, and through the compute the UIs casually spared to operate the machines that automated almost all labor, the concept of 'work' soon disintegrated as well. By the turn of the century, the ban on children uploading was lifted worldwide. Most Thanksgiving celebrations moved to the cloud." }
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After graduation, we moved to New York together. Louis was a genius actor-playwright, and I was his peppy househusband. Production after production, audiences shrank as theater lovers abandoned banal, “traditional” plays for the ultra-immersive, “hyper-digi-sensual” works of UI theatre. I sometimes worried that he would have a harder time adjusting to the new world than I would. Besides Louis, I actually preferred that my poems be read instead of listened in a live performance.

Friends and family visited me in their doll forms to inquire about what insanity prevented me from uploading along with the rest of rational humanity: everyone who wasn't a religious extremist, a conspiricist nutjob, or “some such other variety of wacko luddite” as my grandma so eloquently put it. I could see how exasperated my refusal made them. By that time, UIs hardly ever bothered to load into dolls to peer into the “Old World.” Their only interaction with laggards like us was when their shadows powered our houses and produced any other good or service of particular worth. All the real fun happened in the digital realms in which their consciousnesses roamed at full processing capacity. They told me stories about these worlds, but none of them promised even half of the overwhelming joy I felt being with Louis. And he loved acting in plays so much that he had never even considered upload.

We cycled to every big theater in New York for our 35th wedding anniversary. No other vehicles in sight, so of course Louis rode with both arms off the handlebars. Clapping and chanting, snapping selfies of the two of us as we rode. Our last stop was the (once famous) Richard Rodgers Theatre. Naturally, there was no one to be found there, so Louis flicked the lights on and dusted off a front row seat for me. Then, he performed *Much Ado About Nothing*.

“How on Earth does he have the range to play Beatrice, Benedict, Don Pedro, and the rest of the play’s colorful cast all on his own,” I wondered in awe. Not much had changed.

The city was empty, but with each other side by side, our world felt infinitely full. In this way, we both spent our fleshy days happy...

Until my 98th birthday. Louis performed a reimagining of the first time we met, the first original play he’d written in a very long time. Despite the aches and pains in my body, I rose to give him a standing ovation. I shuffled to the stage to hand him a bouquet of flowers I had tasked one of our robotic aides with picking for me the day before. Louis held them tight in his shaking hands, beginning to shed a tear.

“I just realized something absolutely amazing,” he murmured warmly.

“I have had you in my life for about as long as I’ve had theatre.”

“Yeah, I think so.” Even I, a poet like myself, must acknowledge that some truths don’t require drawn-out verse to convey.

Later that night, Louis and I joined hands tightly across adjacent surgical beds. Our heads were enclosed by shiny silver bulbs that prevented us from turning to see each other. I could only hope he was smiling.

{“Upload is a remarkably painless procedure. A consortium of the greatest **technologists** of their time managed to refine a protocol to create a one-to-one, **perfect** mapping of the consciousness housed in any human brain. All of it: eighty-six billion neurons, one hundred trillion synapses, and all the endless memories that you need to capture to create a **soul**. But for migration to work, there **cannot** be any duplicates.

Researchers recognized that having individuals whose sense of self was fragmented between a **somatic** and a **digital** container would induce irresolvable identity crises that would collapse even the most well-adjusted thinkers. Because of that, upload also had to be a perfectly **destructive** process. After all neural components were copied over, a singular, infinitesimal pulse of light destroyed any copy of a person’s consciousness housed in their erstwhile **biological** brain.”}

That night, two fleshy husks that resembled Louis and me were thrown into the compost. The next night, I was giving Louis another standing ovation.