



## *A Small Kind of Death*

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The road to loss begins the moment the thought occurs to you to build something. You notice a space, an absence. There's nothing there, and you begin to imagine what might fill its vacant plot, the lines and contours that might emerge from the backdrop and take form. You imagine yourself sketching a foundation, laying a brick or two. From there, the vision blossoms into full view, near perfect in its complex of apparent

completion, of anticipated wholeness. It's pure *fantasy*, you have *imagined* it, but how clearly it presents itself!

Is it a rampant flight of vanity that strives to materialize such a vision? Can space essentially be empty in the first place? Or is the err instead attributed to the original de facto condition during the moment of fantasy and throughout the phases of construction (of project or relationship) that never pause to contemplate the possibility and reality of loss, the return to absence after substance? Why the unshakable belief that what is once filled remains full, which denies both the natural state of the universe as paradox and the supreme law of constant chaos and change? Does this then lead to a certain disrespect throughout the process of creation of and interaction with the subject, the assumption in the subject's eternal presence, thus the denial of the subject's basic right to freedom and eventual death? Is that what it is? Did you see the space around you as empty because you felt empty--was there ever anything to fill to begin with?

At your gut-most level, you may suspect there is no mistake to be avoided that prevents a natural chain of events from occurring as it will. Perhaps reluctantly, you might conclude that another force is at play, a larger law of the universe, that of destruction, as predictable as the night after the daylight hours; in the moment it is experienced as Loss, followed up by Lack.

A closed social environment is a small kind of death. When no air is let, no fresh perspective, the human dynamic teems, then begins to stagnate and stench. This exemplifies the interdependency of human behavior, but might also be regarded as something to guard against: when a group of people are huddled too close to one another, with no influence from the outside world to serve as contrast or the necessary antithesis to bring about the next synthesis, the integrity of the identity of the individual may at this point be put at risk. And if the constitution is weak, one being can then infect another and block its vital flow of energy.

Someone here will say that ‘no one can *make* you feel anything’ – true, if you can detect an intruder coming, but when weak - you may miss out on the *warning signs*, and feeling can, in fact, be forced onto, or perhaps into, a being by an outside source. Psychic vampires exist, and psychic vampirism happens quite often between so-called lovers and confidants and family members; soul-stealing occurs, identity can be erased, and the psyche can collapse.

This might also be called *merging*? After hurrying east, scuttling toward home, head bowed, tension in the jaw and between the eyes, I tried to outrun the shadow of a presence I sensed just behind me; overcome with the exhaustion of resistance, I stopped and stood on the edge of Cooper Square, clenched my jaw, and silently allowed the force pursuing me to come in and do its bidding. There were slight tears of frustration and I shuddered as it entered through the back of my neck and needled through my body. A high pitch of raw pain sounded in the hollows of my bones and joints. I could feel the

presence of a psychic vampire - my lover and Master - he was in me and around me and I knew he would never leave, that he was infused at the cellular level beneath my skin and fingernails. My consciousness would be weighed down and provoked by his residence in my flesh and blood for all eternity, as I was no longer alone in my body; from now on, he would share it with me.

The absolute dissolution of individual identity – that is what it *feels* like. Like viruses, vampires attack the spinal cord and dull the senses. “I could feel him around me and in me--” these are the same words devotees use to praise God, to describe the sensation of the presence of Jesus in their lives. *Merging* is a common experience not only for those who have been subject to abuse, but also for religious fanatics—the necessary act of dismantling the self in order to surrender to a higher power. In the religious, sexual or creative experience, the sensations are often those of euphoria, but the loss of core self occurs on either end of the emotional tonal scale.

Luckily, mind and body are resilient, and at this point,

the word *living* should have a double meaning. To put it crudely and in the language of an inspirational greeting card, there's existing - surviving? - and then there's living, which denotes a state or sense of wakefulness, mindfulness, awareness. Existentialism puts 'existing' on the wakeful end and 'being' on the brute one, but no matter; when well-trained, one can spot the oncoming slaughter of an episode or intruder, and often carefully sidestep it, or at least assess a course of action to address it. When one is at risk, the opposite is true, and infestation or possession becomes possible. One being can encompass the other, or else an equally dynamic mesh occurs, and the two each begin the process of decay.

Closed systems may include: monogamous relationships, nuclear family units, familial ties, social cliques, office environments, church families, cults. It seems simple enough; when relationships become symbiotic, the beings appear to draw from a shared store of resources, and without replenishment, the store dwindles, until,

like a starved body that begins to burn muscle to survive, the relationship bonds start to eat themselves, sending the same energy through the same cycles, thus depleting the hosts. At this point, one or both parties shut down, or one or both parties escape, and begin the process of healing, and, often, move on to seek another source on which to feed.

How to protect yourself, how to watch out? How does one know what happens on the abstract planes of the soul? One of the maxims of the yoga sutra makes it clear: "only a part of what happens in the subtle body and in the energy channels is manifested on the physical plane." Listening to instinct isn't tangible, but it produces tangible results. When deep in the thick of the possession, I searched for proof that something was wrong: I studied my face in the mirror and saw dark circles under my eyes. I held out my arms and tried to fill up the space of my skin, but remained unconvinced there was actually a connection between

consciousness and flesh. When I sat to try to relax, I slouched, my face screwed into a scowl, and I sucked on cigarettes until my throat was raw. There was a churning in the head, the toil of fixation. “Think about something else,” a friend commanded, but it wasn’t possible – the body had begun to shut down, and would continue on its trajectory until it exhausted itself.

Buddhist nun and writer Pema Chodron suggests tonglen practice to open up. “Flash opening” is the first step, to merely drop the Big Heavy Storyline in an instant – to see a bright light or an open sky, to feel a lungful of clean air or the sensation of expansion in the body when it stops struggling and allows itself to relax. But the outbreath strangled in its escape from my throat, the chest constricted, and the mind withered in helplessness to change the course of the episode. I remember waking in the middle of the night with a tight throat, filled with wine and food, warmed from the fire. There were no stars and all was velvet black,

the fire downstairs having dwindled to embers. Beside me, the Master slept, calm, self-contained, determined in his peace. He was a closed system unto himself, and would not address me unless I acted out and demanded his attention through a display of urgent behavior such as tears, barbed comments, or direct confrontation. I struggled to prevent this from happening; his disapproval heightened the effects of an attack. My hamstrings tightened and twitched – the darkness was oppressive and I fought to squelch the rising force within me – but then, because he knew, because his inquisitive senses let nothing pass unnoticed, his eyes slid open, his arms extended, and he reached for me, pulled me into him – ‘slow down your breathing,’ he said, but my systems were on red-flash alert; ‘oh, what the fuck,’ he mumbled in irritation, studying my face, flexing his arm and chest muscles to exert force into the embrace, ‘are your eyes all dilated again?’ A short sharp breath of resignation, then he lifted his warm heavy body and rolled onto me, clenched his thigh

muscles into mine, and pushed his shoulders into my chest and his biceps against my forearms, as if his force alone could stop me from heaving. My mind looked on, detached, devoid of emotion – no fear, no shame, no guilt, no reaction – I had left, but wasn't free, was tied to a body that suffered in its stew of alienation, a body that acted out on its own accord now that its guiding force had withered in impotence, a body that the Master no longer wanted to fuck nor sleep next to, and whose fits and tremors he sought to quiet through force as soon as possible in order to maintain his particular and cherished version of domestic peace.

What is soul-stealing? When vulnerable chunks of a being's essential energy field are unhinged, loosed and mined in the process of symbiotic union, mesh or merge with another being. At its worst, the "victim" can no longer live without close interaction with the one who now possesses a vital part of him or herself. If kept away too long, the sense of incompleteness, or Lack,

can be terrifying, provoking rapid heart rates, sweaty palms, shortness of breath, chest pains, numbness in the limbs, and a perpetual sense of aggravation and restlessness, driving the "victim" to extremes to reunite with himself through union with another. If this exchange happens simultaneously, the two will possess acute and physiological need for each other. However, when the distribution of power is unbalanced, and a stronger party mines from a weaker party, the master-slave dynamic is established. The physical sensation of mild psychological invasion is a creepy annoyance, provoking a slight crawl across the skin, perhaps a ringing behind the temples or an agitated tremor deep in the bloodstream. When someone mines a chunk of your soul, however, the sensation is as though an internal organ has been removed; you experience the sear of opening up. The opposite of an amputee's delusion of feeling limbs where there are none, the perception is, as you would imagine, as though space exists where the body used to be, and the body, which

knows that it's losing the focused unified energy current necessary to sustain it, screams for the psyche's attention. The psyche, distracted in the effort of doing damage control with the central nervous system, tries to push the body forward through its daily functions, until a head-on collision between body and psyche forces either or both into crisis, mania or catatonia.

Once dislodged, soul pieces may remain suspended outside the body and hang in the air for a period of time. Naturally, it is at this point that the piece is most vulnerable to theft. The "victim" might feel a slight physical discomfort, the vague sense of being "off," but there is no physical pain at this early stage in the process. Some, having rejected and exiled a part of themselves which they may have unconsciously found to be baffling and incomprehensible, may experience a sense of lightness in their newfound freedom.

But not for long. It soon becomes apparent to the "victim" that there's a Lack. She begins to feel

incomplete without her Master to define and provide the boundaries of her identity. Yet she may be aware that she's lost control, and thus come to resent her Master, even as she can't begin to imagine survival without him. A mutual antagonism develops; an exchange of torture commences. Hence multiple phone calls and text messages, inopportune chance encounters, and, in extreme cases, stalking and espionage. Why do beaten women stay, or worse, return after briefly fleeing? Why do cowed men submit with weakness and grace? We believe it takes more than psychoanalysis to explain the dynamic at work here. The soul, while abstract, may be likened to a puzzle, its fragile pieces held together with the delicate glue of energy bonds that are by no means and in no manner guaranteed or infallible – on the contrary, the cohesive material must be constantly and consistently strengthened and maintained through mindful practice; one must strike and maintain the correct balance of exertion of will, intuitive reception and adaptive flexibility, and tread the path of the

Middle Way, as excess in any direction weakens the bonds and thereby damages the physical organism. We believe that early on in physical maturity we begin to neglect our individual coherence; our will slackens, however slightly, and our bodies begin the process of decay. In short, we allow ourselves to slide toward death, through negligence and a base lack of desire to be whole, the result of a dearth of Will necessary to continue our existence. In laziness, in ignorance, in fear, the “victim” farms out parts of herself to others and then trembles in the agony of incompleteness. To quote de Beauvoir, “there then blazes forth the absurdity of a life which has sought outside of itself the justification which it alone could give itself” (*Ethics of Ambiguity*, 52). When she wants to run, to escape, to start over, she finds herself physically unable to do so, as the body is the instrument of the soul, and the soul has already completed its slow dissolve into disparate fragments.

The cell phone kept ringing; she was late, for their

planned museum trip, pinned to the bed with the paralysis of sorrow, her head so full of it that she was shocked to see that the clock indicated she had kept him waiting for three hours. Her body unwilling to proceed, her knees gave out as soon as she tried to stand, and she clumsily toppled forward onto all fours, and struggled to fend off waves of nausea. She knew it would be the last day she would see him, or else she would lose her nerve again and it wouldn't be, and he would continue to possess her, and either way she gasped at the catharsis of emotion and physical sensation, infused with the recurring premonition that her body would be blown apart in the process of separation – that she could not endure it, and would not, in fact, survive it.

Can the soul piece be retrieved, can the being return to wholeness unto herself? We maintain that the answer is yes, but only through a comprehensive baptism of pain, a process similar to an exorcism, in a direct confrontation with the vampire in which the condition

is acknowledged, and the “victim” acknowledges his or her status as a slave. But the problem is, of course, that the slave has no agency; he or she cannot “do” anything, much less undertake a massive task like retrieving a captive part of her own soul. No, the piece must be returned, handed over to the slave, willingly, by the vampire. For the slave, this means finding a way to convince the vampire that it is no longer in his interest to possess the soul piece. Hence, the “victim” must find her own passive ways to torture and agonize the vampire and thereby drive him away.

This is no quick or easy process, and hours must be put aside for the task, as the “victim” will need a sheer glut of time to wear down the will of her captor. The way I did it was to lie on the floor, sobbing, for seven hours straight. When he tried to leave the apartment, I clung to him and screamed, and begged him not to go. He’d seen the act before, but not so intensely or for such a prolonged a period of time. He nurtured primarily from compassion, but also out of guilt, the

urge to control, and the desire to be liked, tingeing his love with resentment. All of this meant that he wouldn’t throw me out; I’d have to leave willingly, but some instinct in me rebelled at the idea. This would be the last time I would throw myself at his feet--I’d *make* him reject me and everything about me, and then I’d be free.

In the morning, and in the days that followed, there was quiet, and light and air poured in; space breathed and peace returned, and I was restored to unity and wholeness unto myself. In this essay the word “victim” appears in quotation marks to indicate sarcasm and irony, for as we’ve seen, victimhood can also be an active state in which the individual may disguise the fact that she has burdened her “captor” with a mass of polluted psychic energy; that her shrieks, yearnings, and prostrations have worked to ensnare all parties in the same prison. Although it may be possible to redeem one’s self through passive means, it is worth repeating that many find themselves possessed after

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prolonged lapses of protection, for neglecting to stop the gaps during periods of preoccupation and over-indulgence. In short, it proves vital to hold the four elements of being – body, heart, mind, and soul - together with the Will, the Guiding Force, for only the Will can work to contain, guide, fuse and protect the pieces which Nature seeks to pull apart.

