

Maybe the combination of their desire and the heightened emotions of the music and the physical sensations of singing along and the movement of the car can all add up to a jump start.

Your reliable but budget-friendly car doesn't have an aux jack, just a CD player. So you burned a CD of the most emotional, loud songs could you could fit.

And you head toward the mountains, waiting until you hit the open road before you start the CD. As you hit the outskirts of town you grab another drive-thru sandwich. It's sustenance food; you'll save the major culinary experiences for when you can share them.

You hit play. The first song comes in with its slow buildup. No matter; it's mostly there for the bridge. It arrives. You belt it out, your voice cracking. The last chords fade.

You check in with Red and Green. Not yet.

Track two. Still nothing.

Track three, not enough. You're starting to wonder if you prioritized volume over emotion.

Tracks four, five, and six fail to connect. You press on, because this is going to work.

The Jumpstart

It's a Tuesday night in that liminal space between Thanksgiving and December. You just finished your serving of the frozen casserole you heated up, and you're waiting for the rest to cool down so you can divvy up the leftovers and put them in the fridge.

You feel a sharp, stinging pain in the ball of your foot.

You look down at your foot, a sock and shoe between it and anything that might have poked it. Did a bug get in your shoe?

Green doesn't see anything around them that could have caused the pain.

Red is cursing up a storm.

Wait, Red and Green both felt that? *Felt* that?

Of course Red felt that, it was a nail! Where there should *not* have been a nail!

A pause.

Wait, *you* felt that?

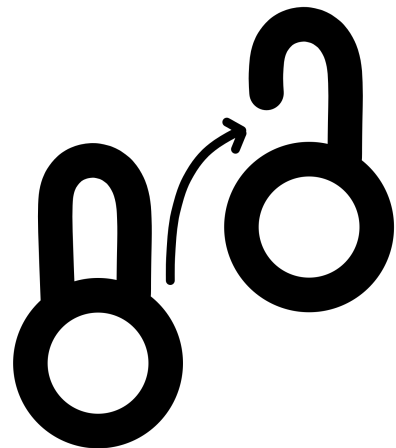
You and Green both say yes.



Series 0

Issue 7

Nowhereverse Tales



Red's first instinct is to step on another nail. Thankfully they don't act on it. They do concentrate on the feeling, though. The pain and the nerve endings and the signals and the sensations and the *physicality* of it!

Green catches on and tries to open themselves up to the feeling.

You hurry to put up your leftovers. It might be a little early, but that's better than forgetting about them. You can't help but share your anticipation with the others.

You're scurrying back to the living room when your foot goes numb. You stumble a bit and end up hopping on the other foot back to the couch. You can tell your brain doesn't know what to do with the new set of signals.

Green points out that brains are very good at processing input, it just might take a little while.

You debate on calling in sick tomorrow if you're going to be dealing with phantom limbs all day.

Red is doing their best to send while also cleaning their wound.

The pain begins to dull, but the foreign sensations in your leg are still there. That's progress!

2 hours away, but that's too much to do on a weekday. Especially since your connections to Red and Green have only just now stabilized.

You briefly considered stepping on a nail. Red and Green instantly shoot that idea down. Hearing voices isn't a good sign in any world, especially if they tell you to hurt yourself. They're not going to play into that trope. And you have to agree.

But that still leaves the question of what to do. You don't have enough time off saved up to devote a ton of time to this, and none of you want to wait the couple of days to the weekend before trying something. You feel unbalanced as it is.

A part of you is still awed by the desire Red and Green have to see what you have to show, to connect with you. The doubts that they are anything but genuine with you don't last long, but they still come.

Red notes that they doubt too. Green points out that it takes the better part of a year for new ideas to make their way that deep into one's mind.

Shaking off that train of thought, you hop back in your car. Your thought is that a week ago, Red tried crawling into your head to hear your music. Maybe now they'll succeed.

There are parallel universes, other worlds, each with their own histories, their own cultures, their own biologies. We feel the walls grow weak, sometimes: when the world seems thinner, when the light is just right, when things seem just a little bit off, and we imagine we can reach out, just a little bit...

In the midst of all this, in a lost corner inside the lost space between spaces, a new place is forming. Born from hidden desires and deep longings. A place to rest, a stop along the way for so many. In the middle of everywhere, this is Nowhere.

Maybe you found yourself here by circumstance. Maybe you got lost and came to find shelter. Maybe you sought us out. Regardless, we have a place for you, no matter where you are in your journey.

The light is always lit, and the door is always open.

Special thanks to the patrons that supported series zero:

- Jacob
- Heddy2217

As well as everyone that left favorites and comments on the rough drafts.

Most importantly, **thank you for reading!**

It's more meat than Red would eat in a day. The thought is sent with no judgement, just awe. You all agree that flying must burn a ridiculous amount of calories.

The crust is flaky and dry. The inside is juicy and tender. Green tries to savor it, but it is over all too quickly.

Your stomach reminds you that it exists. You groan and fish a granola bar out from the Costco box. You go to take a bite—

And you are interrupted by an amazing smell. Notes of dark chocolate and hazelnut with a hint of butterscotch. And the taste does not disappoint.

Screw it, you're getting coffee. You're close enough to the college that you're pretty sure you can walk to the coffee shop on campus. No way in hell are you driving when Green could take off any second and send you into another bout of vert—and there they go.

It's evening. Almost 24 hours since Red started broadcasting their senses, and about 10 since Green pulled a falcon dive on the way to breakfast.

You haven't been able to trigger your own broadcast yet. There's no intense physical stunt you can do on short notice, at least not in your city. There is a theme park about

22

It's about a half-hour later that the sensations spread up to your hip. A minute later it's both legs. You barely have time to process that before it covers your whole body.

Green asks what Red is doing. Red is walking around their room making exaggerated motions.

Well, that explains the strange vertigo you're feeling, where you know you're lying on the couch but it feels like you're moving. A couple of your muscles twitch, trying to make reality line up what you're feeling.

Green is feeling it worse than you. They're trying hard to separate the sensations, trick their subconscious into thinking the foreign sensations are just in their imagination. It's colored by a growing anxiety. You try the same.

One of you suggests moving your own limbs opposite to Red's. You're not sure which at this point. But it does seem to help.

Red quickly tells you to close your eyes.

You do. It's the usual pseudo-darkness. Just as you start to wonder, it starts to shift. Your brain is still confused about the new input; you see the backs of your eyelids shift, like a streaming video that glitched halfway through. Colors start appearing, patterns start forming—

11

Ask the Lighthouse

In this issue

Coda asks the Angle Embedded Digital Assistant series E: xyzzy

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Analysis:
  information at
  https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Xyzzy
  three entries available
  entry "computing" longest entry
  entry "XYZZY Awards" references entry
"computing"
  entry "mnemonic" not full article
  analyzing "computing" entry
  term is a meme related to interactive
  fiction
  bookmarking page for future enrichment
Conclusion: nothing happens
```

Ask at wndfx.link/ask

1. Letter from the editor

2. Morning Questions

Young kitsune tend to have slightly different issues when they wake up.

Rated Teen: brief language, non-sexual nudity, gender dysphoria

3. The Jumpstart

Your bond with Red and Green evolves suddenly—and unevenly—bringing joy and an unwelcome revelation.

Rated Teen: altered perception, foreign thoughts

4. Ask the Lighthouse

Front cover: By Julian Kücklich, CC0 <<https://wndfx.link/GKMgu>>

Back cover: "Maestro" by Blackngold29 <<https://wndfx.link/8yy9A>>

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And Red turns their body to the right. The sense of motion and feeling lines up with the visual change for a moment.

You and Green excitedly tell them to do that again.

A few minutes of calibration later, and it clicks. Kind of. You are lying motionless on your couch, arms folded, eyes closed.

And you are walking with exaggerated motions around a small room. The walls are vine-covered lattice, the ceiling lamp is giving off a warm, steady light, there is a simple bed in the corner, and a full-length mirror is on the wall.

Red turns to the mirror, excited to show you how they look.

Green gives a feeling of bracing for an impact.

You... are just confused. The image is not making any sense to you. It looks like a person, but the head and legs are shifting, like your brain is still trying to make sense of the information.

You open your eyes and try to re-calibrate your own senses. Maybe your brain can make more sense of Red's vision if it knows what your own vision is.

Green is slowly growing more afraid. It's making Red uneasy.

12

holding up a corresponding device. Green can't fill in the technological gaps for you, but as they click together, you're pretty sure you're looking at what a credit card looks like for people without reliably dextrous hands

Green clips their payment... thing back to their harness and picks up their mug, now filled with coffee (or whatever your brain is translating as coffee). They walk to an open low table and sit down.

They look around one more time. This is one of their favorite spots when they have time in the morning. There's always an eclectic crowd, the food is good, and the owners are good people.

Red just *cannot* get over how adorable the griffon is. You and Green heartily agree. It's one of the owners' kids, and he's older than he looks. But he loves working the counter when he can, even if there's always a parent within earshot.

Green screws the cap of their mug off, opting to let the coffee cool off a little bit longer while they eat. The pastry is... You're reminded of an empanada, a meat-filled, deep-fried pastry, though this is bigger than any empanada you've ever eaten.

21

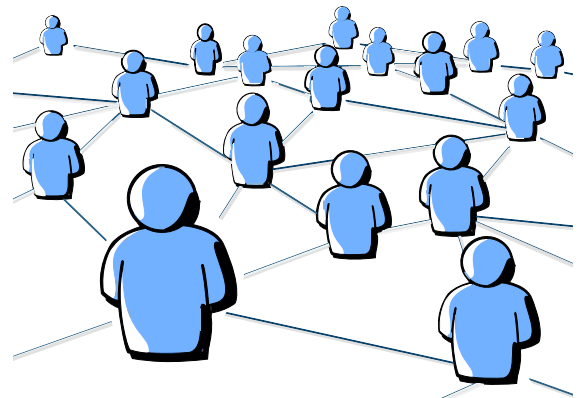
Letter from the editor

Y'all ever been ambushed?

Not in a life-or-death kind of way. More like seeing something you didn't expect. Finding a word, or a sound, or a picture. Something that sticks in your heart in a strange way, makes you think of things you'd never considered.

Anyway, been thinking about that.

—Ronyo



"Social Media 2" by GDJ, CCO
<<https://wndfx.link/OGmCC>>

morning but the sun is still peeking into the valley, so the cafe is still running its lights.

They land and fold their wings in. You feel their posture shift and suppose that the *Jurassic Park* movies got more than a few things right. Green looks around the dining area, populated with all manner of flying creatures. Some look like larger birds, some wyverns like Green, and more than a few six-limbed western dragons of various sizes.

But you can't help but squelch at the obviously young griffon behind the counter. He barks something at Green who answers in the same language. They make small talk for a bit while Green makes their order, and the griffon eventually fetches a wrapped pastry from behind the counter.

Green unclips a pair of things from their chest. You realize now they're wearing a very sparse harness, and their feathered wing ends in a claw. Green confirms it's not the most dextrous appendage a person could have, but it's enough to wield a credit card and a traveler's mug.

You focus again on what they're holding out to the griffon, trying to see past the "credit card" shorthand. It looks like half of a tennis ball, some combination of electronics and mechanics, given the way the griffon is

20

You look out your windshield at the dark, rural side street you've pulled off onto. You turn the cabin light on, flip down the visor, and open the mirror.

"Hey, everyone," you say with a wet smile.

Red hops over to their mirror, and Green rummages around their apartment for some reflective surface. And then you're all looking at yourselves. And each other.

Green gives a shy smile and a wave. They make a quick sound interpreted as a greeting.

You clear your throat and grip the steering wheel. "I should get back," you say. Red and Green both agree: Red wants to see how a car in your world works, and Green wants to know how fast it can go.

Red, Green, and Blue will return

You consciously try not to filter what Red is sending. But it doesn't make sense... they've got... horns?

You're reminded of Mr. Tummnus. You try to send that image in the usual way.

Green doesn't have a frame of reference. Red sees their uncle.

Your heart skips a beat. Red's a faun?

You can see the image clearly. They're a faun that, if their biology is anything like yours, is around your age. They've got a slight tan, rich brown hair and fur, a pair of cute horns peeking through their hair, and they're wearing a loose white shirt.

You're almost giddy. A faun? A real faun?

It's Red's turn to be apprehensive. You see their smile fall as you feel the emotion. You act like you've never seen a faun before.

You haven't. Neither has Green.

Red is confused. But you had that image?

From a story, not real life.

How had we not known this?

Green breaks. They infodump everything you've learned about your shared headspace. How you could only share concepts back and forth. How it depended strongly on how

13

Morning Questions

It had been a couple of weeks since [REDACTED] became a *kitsune*. He'd gotten used to the new fox ears and tails: his balance was back to normal, his hearing was better, and he'd even taken time to modify some of his clothing.

And then life got back to normal. Enough that he started putting off learning about some of the other aspects of being a *kitsune*.

So, naturally, his powers asserted themselves.

He woke up like he normally did: snoozing his alarm twice. Richard had repeatedly told him he could keep his own schedule, but he didn't trust himself to wake up before noon without an alarm.

By the third time, he had rolled farther away from his phone, so he rolled back onto his stomach and shimmied over, ignoring the pain in his chest long enough to grab his phone and actually stop his alarm.

Immediately he rolled back onto his back and sighed in relief.

each of you interpreted them. How people's shapes never needed to be defined, they were just *people*.

You think back to what you know of Green. Back to one of your first interactions. The insistence on the sunrise over the clouds instead of just a sunrise while traveling. Can they fly?

Green affirms with a small pulse of happiness. Red starts to beg them to show you. Green pulls back.

They will you to understand. They return to the image of the three of you as separate but connected ideas.

They put an insurmountable wall between the three of you.

Red turns away from the mirror and closes their eyes. Maybe it's not so bad? There could be flying people somewhere?

Green doesn't know any people that *can't* fly.

You add that your entire world has been explored. No flying people. No fauns.

Green's fear and sadness spills over. To know people as deeply as you know each other. And knowing how deeply you *could* know each other. Could *love* each other.

And you will never touch each other. Hug each other. Hold each others' hands.

14

After ten minutes of phone browsing he rolled back to his side to get out of bed. Or at least he tried—his head was resting on his hair, and it tugged at his scalp as he tried to roll over.

"Since when was it that long?" he muttered to himself as he sat up. He felt his hair brush the tops of his shoulders as it came to rest on either side of his face. He reached up to feel it—no different from normal, aside from the length.

As he put his arms down, he brushed the sides of his chest. It felt smoother, softer... and more sensitive.

Instinctually he grabbed his pecs—and found boobs.

"The fuck?" He scrambled out of bed, ignoring how his boxers were sitting differently on his hips, how his voice had shifted in pitch, and stood in front of the mirror.

It was him, except he was a girl. His hair fell just past his shoulders, his waist and hips curved gently, and two very real breasts hung from his chest.

Out of reflex he crossed his arms in front of his chest, preserving his modesty to... himself?

His heart was pounding in his chest, but he couldn't tell what emotion it was. He kept one arm in front and reached out to touch the mirror with the other and confirmed that yes, his reflection still worked. He looked himself up and

6

You try to move your arms and realize you flung them out when Green snapped their wings open. You gently massage one shoulder while flexing your fingers, suddenly aware of how much flinging them against the floor smarts.

Red is also lying on their floor flapping their arms and laughing.

You feel a shift in the foreign sensations as Green begins to flap their wings and bank to the right. They're headed toward a small vista just above the tree canopy on one of the mountains around the valley.

You move your head back and forth to try to remind your brain whose eyes are whose. You take advantage of Green's relatively steady pace to pick yourself back up and head back into the kitchen to see what you want to have for breakfast.

Green laughs and says something in a series of chirps and growls that translates to "That's exactly what we're here for!"

You lean against the counter and focus back on their perceptions. The vista is decorated with hanging lights over a dining area with a small landing strip outside. Green confirms the lights are a standard architectural pattern to discourage people from flying into a calm space. It's mid-

19

some days it's so much work just being *alive*...

"Nothing is new..."

That "your ancestors slept under the stars" is an excuse to not house people, that you're never completely sure if you'll make enough from week to week, that the attention you have could disappear as soon as you try to use it for something good...

"Looking for a bridge I can't burn down..."

The bridge hits, and you choke on the words. Of looking forward to things that matter, relationships that last, of finally being free of all your faults. The song holds that against the world you are in, stuck in this place, separated from your companions...

And you yell the refrain at the top of your lungs, head back, tears streaming, "Nothing is sound!"

You drop your head against the steering wheel and try to steady yourself for the drive back. Red asks what kind of material could be so soft and yet so hard. Green asks what's poking your hip.

You make a sarcastic observation about plastic before you realize what it means. With a bark of laughter you sit up straight and adjust your seat belt so the buckle isn't poking you.

27

You call in sick the next day. All of you do, settling in for a long day of trying to sort out two new sets of inputs in each of your brains.

You all figure that a strong sensory input will jump-start the connection. While you wrack your brain trying to think of one that isn't painful, Green jumps off a cliff.

You lose your balance and set yourself on the ground as gracefully as you can. You're on stable ground. You're falling. The wind is biting at your arms, pulling at your hairs that seem unusually stiff? You feel the air pressure get higher. You feel all your limbs tucked into yourself, your legs bent with your knees touching your chest and a sharp poke at your butt and the wind is biting harder and you think you see the walls around you moving except you know they aren't

And your wings snap open and catch the wind.

You feel all your downward momentum begin to get pulled sideways. You can see the treetops now, the top of a canopy that covers the valley in a rich green. You're gliding at top speed, feeling the wind under your arms—no, wings.

18

Red and Green try to send encouragement, but you can also feel their frustration. It's not with you, that's obvious. It's with the whole process. This strange bond that you're trying to exploit even though you barely understand it. The fact that the rest of the world won't stop long enough for you to figure it out without having to worry about daily obligations.

You've pulled off on a side road. Car idling, lights off. You rest your head against the steering wheel, feeling tears at the sides of your eyes.

The opening guitar notes of track eleven hit. And a sob escapes.

"Everyone dies," you sing. "Everyone loves a fight." You feel Red recoil even as the feelings resonate in them.

The song continues. Your frustrations all fall into it: the bond that won't do what you want, the job you wish you liked more, the politicians that pretend to listen to you but just *don't care*, the rich and powerful that are literally watching the world burn...

"Happy is a yuppie word..."

The people that won't clean up their work, that think that hooves are impervious to nails, the fact that plants take so long to grow, that the stuff you fix keeps breaking, that

26

You're crying before you realize it. Red too. You're assuming Green is.

That's why Green has been so afraid. They were afraid of this. That the three of you wouldn't just be different people. You'd be in entirely different worlds.

You hear Red steady their breathing. They apologize; they wouldn't have tried so hard to make the connection deeper if they knew...

If they knew it would be this futile.

Your head is in chaos. Green is despairing, Red is lamenting, and you wonder if this is worth it.

It is. You refuse to let that idea take hold. You've only known Red and Green a few months, but it feels like a lifetime already. You've gotten too used to having others in your head, you've gotten too used to the person they've helped you become.

You get flickers of affirmation from the other two, but still sadness.

You dig in. It's another puzzle. A problem. You rotate it. Looking for some angle.

Red lets out a pulse of sadness. There may not be a solution to this one. Not every problem has one.

15

down, curiosity demanding that he take in the shape of his hips, the way his stomach curved out, the way his chest and shoulders sat that definitely set his heart racing.

For a moment, he forgot it was a reflection and just stared at the cute girl in the mirror.

Until he made eye contact with himself and came back to reality.

"Okay, okay," he muttered. He closed his eyes and dropped his arms. "*Kitsune* can shapeshift," he said to himself. "So I just need to shapeshift back."

He took a deep breath, held it, and let it out slowly. "Change back, change back," he chanted. After two breaths, he moved his chest to see if it still bounced.

It did.

He sighed but kept his eyes closed. "Okay," he said. "It's all based on illusions, right? I just need to remember the truth." He took another breath and started chanting, "I'm a guy. I'm a guy..."

After several repetitions, he didn't feel any different. A quick movement of his chest confirmed it.

He squeezed his eyes and ignored the tears forming. In desperation, he tried to remember what he had looked like when he went to bed, if only to prove that he *could*

7

But this one *does*, you insist. You know it. Five minutes ago you didn't *know* that there was even a world where fauns and flying—

Wait, Green, are you a *dragon*? You try to send an image. Green removes the front legs and adds feathers to the wings.

You can't help but squee.

Green and Red laugh a little through that. Your head has calmed down some. Enough to address Red's question:

We know this problem has a solution. You have two pieces of evidence in mind, but you want to get it right. You run over to your bookshelf.

Your first pull is *Mere Christianity*. "Creatures are not born with desires unless the capacity exists to fulfill those desires." The book goes on to list a few: hunger has food, tiredness has sleep, horniness has sex. "If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world."

Red and Green are the strongest desire you can remember feeling. If language existed for you, you would have confessed your love months ago. You can't imagine life without them. You don't want to imagine life without them.

16

remember. The short hair. The lanky frame. The hip bones that stuck out. The flat stomach he got teased about that one time. The way his boxers sat when they weren't bunched up from tossing and turning while sleeping...

He felt something shift, and his eyes shot open.

He was looking at himself in the mirror. His normal, usual, *male* self.

He released the breath he didn't realize he was holding, felt the tension fall away.

"Okay," he said, looking back at himself. "Definitely need to learn more. In case this happens again."

He ignored the part of himself that really hoped it would.

██████████ will return.

8

And you *refuse* to accept defeat.

Green, though hopeful, notes that you all were not *born* with this desire. They've never heard of any link like this forming at all, much less naturally.

And that is where your second piece of evidence steps in.

You try to portray the concept of God. You try to reach through all the cruft in your mind, down to the core of hope and love that keeps you going when everything else is gone.

They understand.

You emphasize one part of that concept: the God you know is not cruel. One verse comes out from deep in your memory: "He will give you the desires of your heart."

One way or another, *you are going to be together*. You swear it.

There is silence in your head for a moment. You start to wonder if you went too far.

Green swears it. You are going to be together.

You can hear Red start crying again, but they flood your heads with love and affection and pride and awe that they got two such incredible companions. You hear a voice say something in a strange language, but Red supplies the meaning: they swear it. You are going to be together.

17

Track seven you have hope for: "Defying Gravity," but the Queen version. It's a powerful song with a powerful arrangement. And between the album art and the subject matter, it reminds you—superficially—of Green.

Green says they can't wait to hear it. But for now... still nothing.

Track eight is a jaunty, kinda self-deprecating song about being in love...

...It was a mistake. It just makes your heart ache more, makes you more frustrated with the process. Red and Green try to send calm and affection to you, and you have to consciously force yourself to accept it.

You're too discouraged to try track nine. You just listen and make a note to play the song again later. After this works. *Because it's going to work*.

Track ten is the halfway point, time-wise. You've fully reached the sadder part of the CD, punctuated by you trying to find a safe way to turn your car around. You crossed the state line a while ago, but you've got to get back.

This was all a mistake. You're trying, but it's not working. It's not good enough. You're not good enough.

25