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The Search for Yvonne

During the six years following writing my novel I had encountered the retroactive inspiration for most of the major characters in the story but a couple were notably missing. The story needed a character with an eidetic or photographic memory who was also a good artist, so I conceived a woman who normally worked as a fashion designer but actually mostly copied designs developed by other designers using her eidetic ability. Apart from these essential characteristics I gave her the name Yvonne for no particular reason and equally for no reason felt that she had black hair and that there was something somehow dark about her which deterred me from rounding out her character much more. I didn't even give her a surname as I had with most of my other characters. Her black hair and darkish aspect suggested to me that perhaps she was Anglo-Caribbean but I never specifically mentioned this in the novel as it was only conjecture and irrelevant to the story. In the years that followed I never encountered the name Yvonne or anyone who might have inspired this character in my mind, which was strange given that I had been able to make such connections with my other characters. However, as I considered my rigorous research into my experiences and novel to have ended in 2017 I then felt that it was in order for me to try to resolve this omission actively whereas I had previously always allowed my experiences to occur unprompted as far as possible to minimise any possible bias.

The missing inspiration for Yvonne brought into mind an important aspect of the future influencing the present. In *A Christmas Carol* by Charles Dickens Scrooge asks the ghost of Christmas yet to come "Are these the shadows of the things that will be, or are they shadows of the things that may be only?" Could my perception of a black-haired woman named Yvonne have been a "shadow" from a future that had not come about? Scrooge wanted to know whether he still had the free will to change his ways or was already the inevitable victim of his fate. The whole idea of the future influencing the present highlights our need to believe in free will despite the cold scientific view that it may just be an illusion anyway, our brains simply being highly complex biological computers obeying the inescapable laws of nature. As I mentioned previously I have never directly foreseen the future so have not faced this dilemma head on even though in 2017 I felt for a while that I was doing just that and challenging fate. Perhaps the answer is that the free will exists at the point in the future where the influence may arise. Certainly in 2017 I had no desire to pass back to 2011 a clear omen that that much loved company founder would die six years later and hence no omen arose. Returning to the matter of Yvonne, in 2019 I had the apparent free will to search for a real person who had influenced me to think of that black-haired woman or alternatively to leave open the possibility that I only encountered her in another version of my reality. As it was I decided to search assuming that I was unlikely to find a suitable candidate anyway. I was so wrong about that.

Despite needing to initiate the search I didn't want to guide it unduly, so employed a very unfocussed search on Google. To narrow the search to people named Yvonne I had to include that name in the criteria but wanted to add as little more criteria as possible, so chose just one other word. I held back from mentioning black hair as that would be useful as confirmation that I had found the right person and I also refrained from mentioning 2011 as that would also help enormously in confirming synchronicity with my writing. Although her eidetic memory was a key characteristic of the fictional Yvonne that was only because it was essential to the story rather than a free thought on my part, so I didn't expect that to be characteristic of the real person. However, for some reason I felt that the story was really about myself rather than the characters portrayed in it and I happen to have entirely the opposite condition to an eidetic memory, i.e. aphantasia, the inability to visualise anything in my mind's eye. Apparently this condition is more common in people such as myself whose minds are centred on abstract and conceptual subjects like mathematics and science rather than visual imagery. Hence for whatever reason, logical or not, I searched Google using solely the two words "Yvonne aphantasia" and then looked at just the first reference returned at the top of the list.

With the tight restrictions that I had applied I shouldn't have found an acceptable candidate within that single reference but astonishingly I did. In fact the result was so remarkable that I repeated the search using measures to do so anonymously to be sure that Google hadn't also taken into account any criteria that I had used in my previous searches, but the same reference was always top of the list. Having found my candidate real Yvonne I researched her more fully. In her pictures on the Internet she was white-skinned but had long raven black hair, something that hadn't occurred to me when I was speculating about the fictional Yvonne being Anglo-Caribbean, which was clearly not the case with the real Yvonne. Evidently part of the influence from the future had been to deter me from ever mentioning that incorrect characteristic in the novel even though I had thought about it. The unresolvable darkness that I had sensed may have arisen from the real Yvonne being a pagan, a Wiccan and, as she put it "gender queer", preferring to be referred to by gender non-specific pronouns to dispel any suggestion of gender bias, so I will respect that preference in the remainder of this document as the subject of gender is particularly relevant later. I hadn't contemplated these types of traits while creating my character but by omitting any to the contrary I had left the possibilities wide open. So the first confirmation test had been pretty successful.

The next test was whether 2011 was significant in real Yvonne's life in any way. I searched for any reference to that year in that connection and discovered that in 2015 Yvonne had written about how 2011 had been a significant turning point in their life. They had been involved in a car crash that was not their fault in 2010 and 2011 was awful for them in a number of ways. They had problems with their manager and were thinking of leaving their job, but were having difficulty changing the course of their life. They wrote "I now realise that all those options closing down was actually the Universe trying to tell me that I was headed in the wrong direction, but it was painful at the time." In addition their personal relationship was getting shaky and towards the end of the year their beloved cat died. My aphantasia results in my perceiving everything in conceptual terms rather than visual ones, so the darkness that I had sensed in Yvonne could equally have been despondency. Clearly 2011 had been very significant in the real Yvonne's life then, so there had been synchronicity.

Other factors made evident their clear candidacy as an influence during my novel writing. Their breaking up with their partner and subsequently finding a far more suitable life partner seemed to be reflected in that rewritten first chapter of my novel where Lucine, the girl in the future, decides to break up with her boyfriend and find a new one, who turns out to be Graham, the young man living six years in her past. The fact that the fictional Yvonne wasn't involved in this life change is irrelevant because that is how fiction writers work, taking fragmented ideas from real life and combining them in new ways to create their fiction. In direct contrast to the darkness that I had sensed in my character Yvonne the name Lucine itself means "light". Lucine was the other character who hadn't so far matched anyone that I had encountered. I will cover the development of Lucine's character separately later although Yvonne seems to have been its main influence.

The real Yvonne being a pagan was itself relevant to the novel. Apart from being called *Mens Temporum* in it the strange phenomenon was also referred to as the "Hermes culture" to imply both that it was a trait that a person could acquire and also that some spiritual entity almost appeared to be involved. Graham certainly treated it as such notionally and even openly spoke to Hermes in at least one scene. Also his acquisition of the culture while nobody else had may have been the result of him regularly walking around the circular passage on the engineering level of the building surrounding the cusp, the apparent centre of the phenomenon's power, during his inspection tours. This possibility was explicitly mentioned in a draft chapter for a planned subsequent novel and it was reminiscent of similar pagan rituals involving circling around a known centre of spiritual power.

Regarding probabilities one might have expected my search on the word "aphantasia" most likely to have found either a person with the condition or one researching it but instead it found a pagan concerned about inclusivity in Wiccan covens who was neither of those types but probably far more relevant to the novel. In fact one character in the story was an autistic young man named George, about whom I will mention more later, and the fictional Yvonne took personal responsibility for ensuring that he could deal with all the unusual situations that the group faced.

I also noticed that the real Yvonne used the word “preternatural” in their writing. This uncommon word had become a favourite of mine years earlier as I felt that it described my experiences better than the seemingly more critical word “paranormal” which implies that what is considered normal has already been well established. In their correspondence with me Yvonne confirmed that it was also a favourite word of theirs. This was another key factor regarding them being the inspiration for my fictional character, the fact that they took such a genuine interest in my tale about the parallels between my writing and their life and their willingness to correspond with me about it. Regarding what is considered normal, in fact the type of phenomenon that I have experienced is evidently believed by many who study psychical matters to be commonplace in many people’s everyday lives but, usually being a completely unconscious process, its consequences are seen as totally natural if it is not examined carefully as I have done. Only then does its seemingly preternatural nature come to light.

While I was reading Yvonne’s writings on the Internet I saw that they had an ongoing key issue with Wiccan practices. The central rituals in Wicca apparently involve “polarity”, i.e. maintaining a balance between the sexes, so circles of participants contain alternate men and women, a man initiates a woman and vice versa. Yvonne felt that, amongst other discriminatory criteria involved, gender should be disregarded as a key factor in these practices. During early 2012 after I had finished the first draft of my novel I carried on writing draft chapters of the subsequent story that continued to develop in my mind. Had I chosen to I could have written an entire trilogy of novels to cover all of it, but my enthusiasm for fiction writing was waning. In one such draft chapter two women are in bed together, possibly just because they live together in a small cottage with little room and the arrangement is convenient for them. In the original novel the *Mens Temporum* power to create apparent realities outside of time can be invoked by a man and woman in close physical and mental union and a man can pass on the ability to a woman and vice versa, processes which seem to parallel Wiccan rituals. The two women in that chapter have been trying to emulate the same process between themselves, feeling that a man’s involvement should be unnecessary. Towards the end of the scene one of the women falls asleep thinking fondly about her past work colleague Yvonne. It astounded me that this scene should have mirrored the real Yvonne’s concern about Wiccan practices so closely and that I had even mentioned the name Yvonne in passing in that context.

I felt I had clearly found the source of the name Yvonne that I had used in my novel but the success was bitter-sweet as I had also eliminated the possibility of the influence having come from an alternative future, so I still didn’t know whether I had ever really had a free will choice about doing this or had been driven to it by fate.