

Penumbra

Day 1:

I am our greatest magical achievement.

Our greatest expression of love.

Togetherness and rebirth combined into one complex, elegant working.

As our skin gained wrinkles and our hairs grew gray, we did as all practitioners do, we searched for a path to usurp mortality, and as all lovers do, we wished for a way to be together forever.

In our work we found both.

A perfect solution.

It started as discussions of theory. In the dim candlelight of our domicile, we talked.

Hypotheticals, ideas, debates.

Discussion that soon turned to flipping through the endless piles of books in our study. Considering and planning. Taking note of anything that caught our eye, anything useful or interesting. Only to focus on that which fascinated us the most.

Our research found that with enough coaxing, the metaphysical mass of the soul could be convinced to become material, to become flesh and bone. Despite the relative simplicity of the ritual, it was a path few seeking eternal life took, as immortality itself requires a powerful soul to maintain it, and for a single soul to provide both material and life-force would be unsustainable.

Creating a sustainable body would require roughly twice the amount of soul-stuff any single soul could provide. With that knowledge, the ritual was regarded as only useful in the space of thought and conjecture.

But in our brilliance, we found a workaround. Something that most wouldn't even consider, that the lonesome, mad, lifestyle of the average wizard or mage would not even allow as a possibility.

A fusion of Souls. The becoming of a single being with a soul large enough to form a perfect immortal body. The merging of two great minds into one. Two hearts that know each other intimately forever bound and joined, to become each other, to become one with each other. Eternally.

Such a beautiful dream. A dream too beautiful to not make reality.

It was a project to which we dedicated years, weeks and months to truly perfecting. Experiments failed. Knowledge was tested. Entire disciplines of magic were found lacking only to be rewritten in our pursuit.

A magnum opus. A spell likely never to be remade.

And the process of casting it, of being torn apart, mind, body, and soul. Broken down until only shuddering essence remains and weaved together, threaded and pulled. A million wounds stitched closed with needles of magic.

An agony and ecstasy impossible to envision, a sensation felt in every aspect of the self.

It could not be described.

But finally it was done.

We had managed to combine ourselves into a single existence.

I had managed to combine myself into a single existence.

My first few steps were wobbly, conflicting habits expecting legs that were both longer and shorter than the ones I now controlled. As I walked I quickly grew steady, just as I'd known I would, neither of me ever questioned their compatibility.

I made my way to the mirror, examining my form with a critical eye.

My body was young, the peak of youth and health. Perfectly as planned.

Feminine as both my former bodies were.

Dark hair, like I had always had and yet so different than the blonde I had worn my entire life. My eyes were a blue that I remembered meeting my gaze so many times before, both in the mirror and during animated discussions of my craft.

Searching my mind, I found lifetimes of memories that spiraled out and into each other, two childhoods, two schooling, two perspectives at first parallel before eventually congealing into one in my most recent experiences.

But what was truly fascinating was all the things I remembered twice. the first meeting, dates, the wedding, sex, romance. Recollections of my life together now came in pairs.

It truly was magnificent, all the experiences that had once only been shared through the filter and limits of words and understanding suddenly being wholly felt and known, it was intimacy beyond what could be had between individuals.

It was as if I had always been rent into two splintered, cracked pieces and only now had I found a way to put them back together.

I nearly cried from the sheer joy of it.

It felt natural to be as I was, even this soon it was almost hard to believe I had ever had two bodies, two minds, two souls.

Two names

Mona and Aelia

Both were my name, both were me.

I was not someone new. No more than you could be considered distinct from a memory or an altered state of mind.

I was Mona with my talent in rune-arts and hopeless romance. My beautiful figure, and adorable inability to tell when I was being teased. My soothing way of speaking, and my love of novels well below my reading level as a scholar in her 60s.

I was Aelia with my easy wit and almost obsessive fascination with spell-craft, my skill at cooking, and my stylish sense of fashion, my love of games, and my obnoxiously ticklish ribs that produced the cutest sounds when poked.

I was both Aelia and Mona and yet to use either name would be to deny the wholeness of myself.

I had of course considered what I would call myself after the ritual, playfully bickered at the table during dinner, suggested options during breaks but ultimately had never come up with an answer.

Now was the time to choose.

What I wanted was a moniker that represented my totality.

Something that aligned with the beautiful complexities and contradictions of who I was, something as myriad as I was now singular.

It came to me in that moment, in the new light of my combined perspective, a name that fit like a crown.

Eclipse.

I would be Eclipse.

As the name settled upon my head, I brought my attention back into my surroundings.

My laboratory was in disarray.

The ink of the ritual circle had been dried and cracked by the powerful flows of energy that had coursed through it just minutes ago. The runes, each one a glyph I had spent days meticulously penning, were faded, eroded by the force of magic, some entirely missing.

Expensive reagents and components, many considered Priceless by the community of practitioners at large, had burnt, broken, or boiled until all that was left was a film of noxious sludge across the ground where the convergence points of the ritual had once been.

Fine ash that had once been my previous bodies had scattered itself across the room as the sheer metaphysical weight of my formation tossed and disturbed the air.

My eyes wandered to the piles of dust, somehow expecting to be able to tell the grains apart, to identify the bodies I had worn for so long, that I had loved for so long.

But all I saw was ash indistinct and inseparable, collected by the wind and blent into homogeneity. Settling across the floor it was all the same.

A bittersweet taste on my tongue.

“ these feelings can come later, now is the time to celebrate... and to clean ” I admonished and felt myself mentally stumble as I both began to reply and expected a reply from elsewhere.

I chuckled at the strange incongruity, letting it lighten my mood as I agreed with myself.

It was the work of simple cantrip to collect the dust into a large pile in the corner, but the ink and other remnants of the ritual were intentionally selected to be themselves magic resistant, and while some of that resistance had been used up in the process of the ritual itself, removing them would still require the use of the bucket and brushes I kept in the closet.

My mood dropped again as I realized that the process of scrubbing would take twice as long as I was currently calculating, an expected side effect, but I could still feel a wave of laziness attempt to bubble to the surface before it was shoved down by my perfectionism.

I could never be bothered to clean my lab, usually leaving a mess in the wake of my experiments, luckily I'd been there to keep that in check as, I enjoyed cleaning, and I couldn't stand a messy workspace.

Once the lab was as clean as I could manage, I stretched feeling my spine bend painlessly in a way that it hadn't in a very long time, before exiting the laboratory and heading to bed, uncaring of the time.

In truth, I no longer required to sleep as my soul sustained my new body in peak condition, but the effort of the ritual had still left me feeling exhausted and mentally drained,

So I would allow myself the luxury of rest.

My bed, much like my bedroom was large, my mattress a paradise for a single body. I found all the room necessary to stretch out in any way I liked. As my head rested upon the pillow familiar scents tickled my nose, my own scents, my love's scents, still fresh from this morning, it washed over my mind and soothed any tension. The enchantments sewn into the sheets warming them to the perfect temperature.

As my mind began to drift an idea struck me and I jolted back to alertness, I freed myself from the covers and made my way down the hall to my study. Where I began to write the very

Journal you are likely reading now. I've determined that my experiences should be recorded for future research and replication. And as such will continue making journal entries at regular intervals. Though this particular entry will end here.

Goodnight. – Eclipse

Day 2:

I have realized that I do not have any clothes that fit properly.

As to how it didn't realize this issue yesterday I leave as an exercise to the reader.

All of my clothes are either uncomfortably short, or awkwardly long, and none of them sit right on my build as it is now.

As much as I, as Aelia, always enjoy looking my best, the thought of preparing clothes for myself after the ritual had never crossed my mind as I usually left those kinds of preparations to Mona, and I as Mona have never had a thought about fashion in my life.

Ultimately, what this meant was that I would need to go shopping.

I cheered and groaned in a single sound, remembering that this had been my plan from the beginning, sneaky as I was.

I of course considered simply altering my clothes with magic, but the amount of effort was clearly incongruous with the goal, as getting out and about for the first time in weeks wouldn't kill me.

It was, however, worthwhile to do so for a single outfit, as my first introduction to the world as an individual would not be done looking like a fool.

I picked up the outfit that best balanced comfort and style, and after a few hours and a simple working I was dressed and ready to leave my home for the first time as Eclipse.

I have never been one (or two) for unnecessary outings. Much preferring my own company over that of The Strangers that made up the inhabitants of Muskboro, the nearest town to my estate and thus the easiest to teleport to.

But as I appeared upon the street the awe filled stares of the people around me felt much more bearable than they had before, I almost welcomed them knowing I admired myself just as much as they did.

As I'd appeared in the shopping district, it was only a short walk until I had entered the bounds of my favorite tailor's shop, the one I had been dragged to so many times and forced to try on clothes because I was 'too pretty to dress like a pauper.' A spark of recognition crossed the proprietor eyes as I entered but it was quickly replaced by uncertainty, her face returned to a professional smile in an instant but the light of curiosity still flickered behind her eyes

She said something along the lines of "welcome to Softlight's cloth and clothing, I'm Dolly Softlight, what can I do for a lovely young lady like yourself"

I couldn't help but snicker, it had been a long time since I had been called young by anyone, excluding my rare interactions with old Immortal practitioners, but their view of things was obviously skewed.

"I would like as many outfits as you can spare. Tailored to my size and as stylish as you can manage while still allowing for comfort. Dresses, skirts, tops, robes, pants, everything." I smiled as I pulled a coin purse from my pocket space, a small bag containing enough to coin buy this shop outright. It was a drop in the bucket compared to my recent expenses.

Dolly's eyes widened as she took the purse and looked inside, the glimmer of gold reflecting in her gaze.

“I- I- of course miss! I will need some time, and I'll have to take some measurements, but I mean, I” she hesitated, “I'm not sure I will be able to make enough clothing to cover all of this. Not in any reasonable amount of time” she's stumbled over her words, but I only nodded

“I'd be happy to receive the product in installments. Perhaps monthly,” I offered “provided you're able to sell me an outfit or two now, I can wait for the rest”

This way I could build up my wardrobe easily and be set for clothing for the foreseeable future.

Dolly agreed, though with some trepidation. We wrote out our agreement in simple terms on paper, and from there it was a flurry of measuring tapes and stitches. Dolly worked for the next several hours, the seamstress turning away several other customers in an effort to complete our days bargain.

By the time she was done I was left with three completed outfits and she was left with stiff and sore fingers, something I remedied with a simple healing spell.

“Thank you miss...” Dolly trailed off “I suppose I haven't gotten your name, if you're going to be coming around regularly I should likely know it.”

“Al-Uh Mo...” my tongue tied itself, the strange sensation of trying to say two different things at once like choking on words. I hid my slip up with a cough and cleared my throat “Ehem, I apologize. My name is Eclipse, Eclipse Dawn” Luckily, My surname hadn't need to change, I was married to myself after all.

“Dawn? Sounds familiar. Have we met? I could swear that I've seen you before, but I can't quite place it.”

“It depends on what you consider us meeting, I suppose” I said scooping up my clothes and leaving before she could ask for clarification and with a flicker of magic, I had returned home to my study.

That was enough socializing for a few weeks.

– Eclipse

Day 5:

I made dinner for two again.

It's odd, I'd expected that I would stop making these kinds of mistakes by now, I suppose decades old habits are harder to break than I expected. It seems I'll be eating leftovers tomorrow. Not the worst fate. I don't mean to brag, but ~~Aelia's food~~ my cooking is delicious and doesn't suffer from a bit from reheating.

On another note, my research is going... well. It seems that the fusion of my soul has had further effects on my magical capabilities. For reference **the amount of magical energy a practitioner can safely use is known as their capacity, measured in units equivalent to the amount required to cast the most basic mage light spell.**

Generally a practitioner's magical capacity can be estimated by their age multiplied by 3.5, as the soul's strength grows with time, it's far from a perfect measurement but on average accurate. I assumed that my capacity would simply be added resulting in an expected value of 381.5mcu.

But after some testing I found that my magical capacity measures closer to 667.6mcu.

There's no easy explanation for this in theory it's a boon but as a scholar it is extremely frustrating.

I have hypotheses as to why this is happening, but I'm finding organizing my thoughts tricky, I've gotten so used to having someone to discuss theory with that It's tricky to formulate an idea

without talking to someone, I guess that's just another old habit I need to break. Either way, I'll figure this out eventually.

Further testing is required.

– Eclipse

Day 7:

During one of my tests, I found myself noting my observations aloud. What's strange is this isn't a habit that either of me had before my fusion. In fact, working in comfortable silence when needed was part of the reason why we worked so well together in the first place. Nothing should have changed that, but I just felt compelled to speak...

The silence can be surprisingly discomfoting.

As Mona, I would sometimes hum while I worked.. Maybe this is an extension of that?

I think expanding on the experience might help me find a solution.

Let's see...

I'd hum under my breath carrying a melody to the rhythm of whatever task I was completing, I would think it was quiet, but the song would grow louder and louder as I grew more focused and enraptured, until it finally reached my ears on the other side of the study. Almost like a performance for me alone, that lovely voice would fill my ears and my mind. I would be enthralled by its sound.

Always a bit off key, always beautiful, always Mona.

I'd pretend to keep reading, but the text would be the furthest thing from my mind as I would listen, often until the song stopped and-

I hadn't known Aelia was listening, I mean *I* had known, but I never realized my humming got that loud I

Am i blushing!?

I'm smiling?

I don't know how to feel!?

Why am I crying?

Day 12:

I've been in a down mood today.

As childish as it is, I finished the final book of a novel series I enjoyed, and found the ending less than satisfying, that along with my insomnia, has left me in a particularly melancholic state, as even if I no longer need sleep being unable to rest while I wish to is unfortunate. (I suppose my bed is simply too big to be comfortable, but that is neither here nor there)

Getting out of this gloom has proved challenging. I am uninterested in starting a new book series at this time and eating one's feelings is not healthy even in an immortal form.

I've resorted to talking through my emotions as I often did during my worst days before, and while the self-reflection was somewhat helpful, it was not the solution I hoped it was.

I am after all talking to only myself. Reexamining perspectives I already have. It's not the same as talking to another person. Just like how wrapping your arms around yourself isn't the same as a hug.

I could really use a hug.

– Eclipse

Day 25:

It's been a while since I've written, hasn't it?

I apologize for that, though it doesn't much affect you, dear reader.

I haven't been feeling the best lately. Physically, I'm fine, and I suppose that will be true for the rest of my immortal life, but i feel...

It's hard to put into words.

I've spent most of my days lately simply drifting around my home. From room to room. As if looking for something I can't seem to find.

Occasionally, I try to work, but I simply feel no interest. A notion that should be absurd. I've spent two lifetimes fascinated by magic, I dedicated my life to perfecting every skill associated with the craft, and I just don't care.

I don't even eat anymore. I have no need to, and cooking makes me feel ill. Whether any of this is a side effect of my nature is something that should be researched, but at the moment, I cannot be the one to do it.

I don't want to do it.

I'll tell you what I want.

I want this awful feeling to go away.

I want someone to hold me and tell me that it'll be okay.

I want Aelia to tell me a joke so bad it makes me laugh.

I want Mona to distract me with her ideas for a new project.

I want to hold ~~her~~, them, either of them, both of them.

They're right here.

I can touch them at any time.

What am I even asking for?

Day 75:

There's no way to undo the ritual. Anything I could try is more likely to rip my soul into irrecoverable shreds than to unfuse me. The original spell was too thorough. Too perfect. It would be like trying to separate purple paint into blue and red.

So I can't undo the ritual.

I don't know if I want to undo the ritual.

Day 100:

It's my birthday. Or one of them, I suppose I have two now, maybe three if you consider my fusion a birth of sorts.

It's Mona's birthday.

I baked a cake.

I'd buy a gift too, but it's not like I can surprise myself with it. And In truth the best gift I can give myself right now might be writing this down.

Putting these feelings out so I can't bottle it back up and go on pretending like I don't know what I've been so afraid to admit.

Even now my hands shake trying to write these simple words:

I miss Mona.

And Aelia.

I miss them both so much.

It's funny, I wasn't lying when I said I am them, that hasn't changed. I am Mona, it is my birthday, and somehow I miss her.

Aelia misses Mona

Mona misses Aelia.

And I miss myself.

Its almost comical.

It really would be funny if it didn't hurt so damn much.

I am exactly what I set out to be when I started working on that ritual. What was it I wrote? *A fusion of Souls. The becoming of a single being.*

The merging of two great minds into one. Two hearts that know each other intimately forever bound and joined, to become each other, to become one with each other. Eternally.

I guess ~~I~~ ~~They~~ we were too busy being pretentious to think it through. We didn't consider that all that would mean was that I'd never get to see another of Aelia's goofy grins or get to listen to Mona explain a book in excruciating detail or watch Aelia make a mess of our workspace in an excited fervor or end up pinned down with my ribs poked at in that way i hate so much but miss because you can't tickle yourself. (the number of times I've tried in the past few weeks is proof enough of that.)

I miss everything, they're quirks, their flaws, their bodies.

Gods, I miss their bodies.

I don't care if it's crass, I miss Mona's chest, and the fact that I can just look down to see it doesn't make me miss it any less.

It's like that with everything.

It's all right there, but it's mine, my body, my quirks, my flaws.

I hate my flaws. I love my flaws. I miss my flaws. It's so confusing.

It's terrifying.

It's isolating.

And even now I still feel that feeling. That specific type of dread, the one that comes when you know someone you love is hurting. The knowledge that every ache of my heart is the woman I love aching, it breaks my heart even more.

So much for our brilliance.

– Eclipse

Day 115

I'm feeling better.

I still miss them. I don't know if I'll ever stop missing them.

My other halves.

My whole.

But I am feeling better.

I asked Dolly to make me a body pillow. It helps with the bed feeling so empty. I sewed some heating enchantments into it so it's just a little warmer than my body temperature.

I've also been cooking again, just a bit. Trying out some of Aelia's old recipes, I've made them all a thousand times and yet it feels so very different doing it now. Maybe not worse.

Cooking was never something Mona was particularly good at, I like to think I'm teaching her.

By the way, I've put aside my research for now. I'm not giving up on it. Nothing could make me give up on Magic, but I'm tabling it in pursuit of other things for a bit, I've spent decades mostly holed up in this manor, and I'll have centuries to spend in the pursuit of magic. I've

decided to get out more, which is crazy hearing myself say. I can't decide if Mona or Aelia would be more shocked, they both are, but it feels like 40 percent Mona, 60 Aelia right now.

(I'm just kidding, it doesn't work like that.)

On that note I've noticed I've been joking more lately, not that I'm funny, but I'm trying.

Maybe it'll serve me well tonight.

It's been years since I took myself out on a date.

Thinking of a joke is not the same as being told a joke. It's harder to laugh out loud at a joke I thought of myself. Being the only audience for my dumb puns and dry humor feelsnumb.

Maybe it would be worthwhile to try some non-academic writing, maybe a joke book or something