

THE HALF SILVERED MIRROR

When I first saw him I immediately felt that he was destined to end his days as a blurred CCTV image with the caption "last known sighting..." and I was right about that, but I hadn't expected the formulaic words of concern from ... "his closest friend".. with my name writ large on the poster.

We need really to begin at the middle. That, of course, sounds strange. But I always see things as happening not in a linear fashion, but like a stone dropped into a pond. The impacts ripple out from the middle to touch all parts of the pond. It was Lewis who taught me that that linear vision wasn't right. Where had the starting event come from? What even is a starting event? Lewis demonstrated it so well, we are always in the middle of events, any illusion of beginning or ending is just that, an illusion.

So, which middle should I start with?

I think it must be the way I lost my wallet. I do not lose things, ever, full stop. Be they physical objects or metaphysical ideas, my beginning and my end is the idea of a place for everything and everything very firmly in its place. So when my wallet disappeared, I knew it had been taken. Equally it was apparent that that could not be the case.

My flat is on the third floor of an apartment building. Through two sets of number-controlled doors. Then a lift to my apartment, card key-controlled. Then the front door, which, when I woke and checked it the morning the wallet vanished, was still latched from the inside. The bolts were still thrown.

My wallet's place at the end of each day is on the left hand side of the top drawer of the bedside cabinet to the left of the bed. It rests against the box which holds my Hermes watch, and in front of the black box holding 8 sets of cufflinks for use on semi important social occasions. I do not lose things, I do not forget and leave my wallet in my jacket pocket, or on the kitchen table. I have never been known to casually put anything down anywhere.

So, when I woke that morning and found that my wallet was not in the top drawer, I knew my world had been turned upside down. I cannot stress this sufficiently. Unless you can accept my certainty, nothing else in this story makes sense. Not that much of it will.

So. When you wake and can't find an object, you swim through what to me are uncharted waters. You think back and ask yourself: "When did I last have that item? When did I last use it". But I don't lose items, so such heuristics are beyond me. I know the answer, I know where I last used it. Unless something very spooky is happening in the universe, I don't even need to consider such questions, irrespective even of Sherlock Holmes's theories.

So. I had to think differently. I had to think about how my wallet could vanish. Though, after a few moments' reflection any reasonably logical mind will appreciate that **how** is not the issue, why is the issue. Why had my wallet vanished? That was the question. It would lead me to truth, and to the banality of how.

The wallet was a simple faux leather affair, inscribed with the a line drawing vaguely resembling a man on horseback, some reference to the leather I think. My scant knowledge of early north American frontiersman clothing suggested to me that the riding chaps outlined would never have been worn with the type of saddle sketched on the too big horse. But enough of the wallet. Logic made it highly unlikely that the wallet would vanish because, of itself, it was of no value. So I turned my thoughts to the contents. It was almost certain that it vanished because someone had need of the contents or the wallet itself.

Inside there had been three ten pound notes and two twenty pound notes. All withdrawn together at, 3.45pm from the National Westminster South Parade Leeds branch. There were also two credit cards, whose details I will not add here on the grounds of security. Also, a blood donor card and two train tickets for my upcoming trips to Manchester and Bradford, I like to have two sets of tickets always available, removing time pressures.

And the photograph.

The photograph. I had found it lying on a coffee table in the Red House cafe. It shouldn't have been there. Random photographs should never be left anywhere, though arguably only a truly random photograph could ever be left anywhere. A non-random photograph would always be left somewhere where it was not random. Think about it; you'll see what I mean, usually.

The image was of a man of indeterminate age, between 25 and 35. Launched on life but not stuck on a course. Dressed in what looked like professional chameleon clothing. It would blend in almost most anywhere. Dark thigh length coat, just smart enough for the city without looking too bold for the suburbs. Dark sweater, clean from what I could tell. He was crossing the road. I noticed instantly something wrong with the way he crossed, his glance was not in the direction the traffic was coming. He seemed oriented the wrong way- caught in mid spin perhaps?- but also he was unconcerned. He radiated a gravity that I find hard even now to describe.

I had picked the photo up and thought to myself that he was destined to end his days as a blurred CCTV image with a caption "last known sighting.."

I'm not usually taken to such flights of apparent fantasy, but I am an astute reader of people's futures. I can also see their pasts. You doubt that? Imagine you were are with me on a train. We have never met, you are across from me, random strangers. But course we are not random. We both have a reason to be on this train at this time. We will probably have far more in common than separates us. Think about it; you'll understand, usually.

In this example of seeing the past, you are an old woman. Your grey but coiffured hair is thinning but not badly so. Your thin Marks and Spencer jumper is clean but not new. Aside from your wedding and engagement rings, your jewellery is modern and unimpressive, chosen to express a sense of fashion based on matching accessories, rather than intrinsic interest. Your grey skin is lined, but not over marked; you wear little make up. Your past then is a small one; there is nothing in you that speaks of size. You show no scars in your eyes or in the quiet words shared with your equally small and blue husband. In my mind I can rewind the clock and see your face rewind with it. High cheek bones and deep set eyes, with a narrow but not tight face; the high cheek bones betray your beauty. It is just a tiny step back towards the centre from this point to see you and your husband at the altar. Altar, no surprise that getting married changes so much.

You think this is digression; you feel from your point of view as an observer that I have deviated from my story. If I have, in all sincerity I must tell you that is your fault- it is always the fault of the observer.

But, back to my history . It was clearly the photograph that was the target of the theft. I needed to think on this and doing so would lead me to a why. I had said that the photograph was randomly left at the cafe. But randomness is such a difficult thing. Scientists toil every day desperately trying to generate random numbers.. They do this because when you collide subatomic particles together, events happen. These events might be random or they might not be, but the difference is hard to see. So they spend lots of time creating random numbers so that they'll recognise an event which isn't. This too is an important digression. If in our day- to- day lives we cannot separate random from non-random, how can we separate cause and effect from pure chance?

So, I thought more deeply. The cafe doesn't have many more than 150 covers on a typical Wednesday, the day I found the photo. The cafe has 10 tables, so you might think there was a 1 in 15 or so chance that the photo would be left at my table. But I usually sit quite near the back of the cafe, and I've previously noticed that the three seats at the back are half as likely as those at the front to be sat at. That means that on any 150 visits to the cafe only 1 in 30 are likely to involve my table. And another thing. I go to the cafe at 10 o'clock in the morning, the cafe is busiest between 11.00 and 13.00. Only 10 percent of visits are likely to happen between 8.45 when the cafe opens and 10.00 when I found the photo, that makes the chances of a photo being on that table something like 1 in 300. Numbers are tricky. This doesn't mean that one in every 300 visits I can expect to find a photo. It means that if a photo were to get lost there, there is a 1 in 300 chance it would both be found by me at that table.

I asked James who runs the cafe what gets left behind. Books, pens, gloves, purses and wallets are the most likely. In the 10 years he had been open only 2 photographs had been left behind that he could recall, and one of those had been ripped in half. That means that I should have to visit the cafe for 3000 years in order to find a photograph! And I'd been going there for 6 months, only since the accident. Taking all these factors into account there is only around a 0.18% chance of me finding the photo. Now don't misjudge this. It could still happen randomly, and that's why long shots win horse races and people get hit by meteorites, but it doesn't happen often.

And there are three other factors. One of little overall significance was that the person in the picture looked a lot like me, I didn't own the coat he had, but age and gender wise, very similar. Then there was the site of the photo, which was a car park 40 miles away, where I had had my accident 6 months ago, and finally, there was the name written on the back, Lewis. Why was that unlikely? Because my name is... Louis.

When you take those factors into account, including the number of British boys' names which are homophones, which is very small, coupled with the (lack of) popularity of the name Lewis/Louis, the chances of me finding that photo with those details drops to a 0.000001% chance.

That is known as a 6 sigma measurement. The scientists who study quantum theory look for there to be a 0.000001% chance that an event was a random one before they accept that it isn't. If it's good enough for the smart boys at CERN, it's good enough for me!

So, the photograph had been left for me to find, which still left: why and why was it taken?

I could have worried about who originally captured the image in the photograph, or how they left it for me. But whilst interesting, those did not seem like fundamental questions. They seemed the same as asking: "where do birds fly to in winter?" when what you want to know is how to build an aircraft.

So. The picture was where I had my accident. This photo at the very least showed a connection between me and Lewis and the site of the accident, Malham Tarn.

Malham Tarn, North Yorkshire, a lovely area. High in the hills, a stream runs off from the tarn, which itself is nestled in the crook of three large cliffs. Just over 6 months ago I'd been up walking in the hills above the tarn. The sky had been overcast, but thin clouds. The light was such that you could look down into the tarn, see the water, even make out a few small fish darting left and right, but also you could see the clouds reflected back. Like a half silvered mirror. I was there with no more intent than to get some relaxation. Around the Tarn, across the water, and by the car park, crowds populated the area, but I walked alone. Right up to the accident.

I recall, I'd stopped to look over the cliff edge down to the tarn. The water looked cold and distant, its depth uncertain. Clouds raced below the water, undisturbed. Then a genuinely random event, something that has happened 25 or more times in the life of the Tarn, a piece of the cliff gave way, and I tumbled headfirst toward the water. I checked later I am the 4th person in 15 years that this has happened to. The decay had been noted and signs had been put up, blown down in a storm the day before. This was an accident waiting to happen, a slim chance of "would happen to me" but certainly not a six Sigma measurement.

I fell. I tumbled as if describing a perfect arc in the sky. I twisted, head first, seeing the water below. I watched as a dot appeared in the water then raced to join me. In the half silvered mirror of the lake's surface I saw myself rush to join myself, while below that, I could dimly make out the fish swimming in the water.

I crashed into the surface madly rushing upwards me. I hit the surface (like rushing into concrete at that speed), and swear I nearly bounced! Then, everything went black - about time too in my view. The next thing I recall was a large man with bad breath blowing into my mouth, whilst pinching my nose.

For an instant I was too confused to resist or understand, then I followed the history of the action back to my fall, and knew he'd just brought me back to life. What followed was, I imagine, a well-planned response. Paramedics turned up, all yellow reflective jackets and repeated questions, mainly

about my drug intake before the fall (nil), allergies to medication (penicillin) and pains (many and growing worse).

I spent a week in Leeds General Infirmary, long enough to know it was both as bad as they said, and way better.

That week was mainly about getting to the point I could walk again, though nothing had been broken, much had been strained. Because of that, after I left, I got the taxi to drop me off at the far end of the road, I could start practising walking immediately. It was on that walk, as I tired half way down the street, that I decided to stop off at the cafe. I suppose it must have been there before (for 10 years!) but I had never really seen it before.

It was almost as if that by noticing it, I had confirmed its existence. And, now I think about it, I was drawn to the place as if we shared a connection.

LEWIS

So where to start is the question? Not where did it all start, but where to start my story, which as always will be a middle. I will begin as I walk down a street. In my mind, with each step I see ripples extending out from me into the world. Some are big strong waves, buffeting those they strike, others hardly more than the merest pond skater bend in the surface of the water.

Seen from above it is like a lake with a storm crashing down on reality. Silver circles of rain drop like energy echo from every strike and pattern the water with a million tiny tsunamis. These interact and sometimes magnify and sometimes cancel. When I imagine the world like this I wonder how anything can ever happen, or why it is that everything even vaguely possible isn't happening at every instant. And those confused interactions, that storm, has been going on from the moment of the big bang, each colliding wave of energy striking all others. Again I think, in that maelstrom, how does anything ever happen? Or not happen?

My route is along a busy street, in my mind I see great balloons of influence expanding from each person. A newspaper boy late because his phone alarm failed because the battery ran down because he spent too much time on Facebook, rushes from the shop, causing a man with a dog to swerve in front of me, and I stall for a moment. Where did that start? How far back do you go? And why will it matter?

Big ripples or little wave? Even as it strikes we don't know.

I stall, slowed. The man with the dog reminds me of the bully at school who terrorised me because his dad was an alcoholic after suffering PTSD from the Korean war. I hurry on; a woman, oblivious of me, watching the boy who is a student of hers and will be late for school, collides with me,

... She is attractive, dark skin, green eyes, full lips - a dream woman from a broken romance. The near collision is her fault, traditionally at least, but I apologise, we laugh and she moves on, small what-if ripples trailing behind her.

... She sets off a thought of a broken romance. Already deep in reflection, I ignore her eyes and skin, and think only of the pain in my leg. I swear, she swears back, we separate.

In the outcome little difference, but how will our paths now diverge during our day? In the first she would have forgotten me, but her day will have started well. In the second she might or might not carry the memory to her class. Then what ripples would ebb and flow.

I have learned over a long time to think like this. I can sometimes conjure up a true vision of these energies. A true vision? Well no, it is merely in my mind.

There is some value in thinking like this. Shakespeare, when talking of a in the affairs of man, which if taken at the flood, understood. Most of us most of the time do not see the waves, do not look to understand them. A few bring their energy to crash through the stream and push other waves away. But even the energy they bring is just absorbed or flowing from some other event, where did that come from?

Enough of this metaphysical stuff, otherwise I drift into discussing free will, which doesn't really exist, so today I choose not to talk about it.

I was discussing the world as a pond and a storm. In such a storm, energy ripples and flows across the water and then, every now and then, something strange will happen on the pond. The waves will align, the rain and gusts of wind will fall in harmony, and a spot will appear which has no movement. Or so it seems to me. These spots are really just quiet places, but I fit what I find to my own world vision -as do we all- only most of us don't recognise the filter for what it is.

One such place where I can find that sort of peace is in Malham Tarn. A favourite spot of mine. I often used to travel out there. It has a beauty and grand tranquillity which is ever-changing, but predictably always the same. Also of course, it was where I became entangled with Louis, and I will try to explain that strange event, which I concede may indeed be a starting point, for it was such a singular happening.

Imagine me on that day, a few pages back in the histories of the world.

I stand at the far side of the tarn. There is little movement for me to see. There is a path along the other side. Evidence of work being done. I sense small pulsings of possibilities. Cars carefully weave around each other in the car park. People walk along the pathway, feet echoing into the fragile cliff path through minute fractions of possibilities. I see the balances set and replay. When did each person set off for their walk? Today, yesterday, a thousand years ago when their forbears rode in long ships across the water?

I see Louis climbing the pathway. He pauses and continues, the distant echoes grow stronger. He reaches the cliff face, I see the possibilities in the cliff; of course they are not possibilities as such. The tarn water is a cloud reflected, a mirror showing the sky deep in its depth and the tarn bottom with fish skitting in small dark shadows.

Then, it happened. A single eye of possibility opened in the lake, and in the air and the cliff face above. The cliff crumbled not by chance but by certainty. Louis tipped, shot, fired through the air.

My first thought was shock, to see him, anyone, shift so suddenly from the mundane was literally incredible, I did not believe I was seeing him arc through the sky. Ridiculously I reached out for him, wanted somehow to pluck him from his path. My arms, and even my mind extended across the air to try to save him. Of course it was useless. I watched him prescribe his path, a small dark fragile particle of life, waving frantically. I followed every moment of that fall, practically lived it with him. I could almost see the tumbling land around him, the twisting sky, feel the air rush and a sickening sense of incredulity and resignation, never had I felt so close, so in touch, so in sympathy, as I did with Louis as he crashed down upon the water.

He struck, so did I. As he hit the water I was there with him in something more than my imagination. The cold water concrete hard shock of the impact seemed to rise up and strike me too. His pain reached out to me, and in shock I fainted. As I did I felt and saw myself sinking in the water, even as he was being lifted out in rescue. My imagined path carried me, it seemed, into the depths of the tarn. Cinematic light beams pierced the imagined dark. In my faint I saw the boat silhouette of his rescue, and even saw the impossibly illuminated bubbles of breath escaping my lungs.

I'm not sure how long I was out for, by the time I recovered the excitement was nearly over. I lay on the damp earth with the lapping tarn water 50 yards or so ahead of me. No one had even seen my faint. I saw the redundant ambulance carrying Louis away as I climbed to my feet, I felt a sense of warmth and relief at the sight of the vehicle pulling away. Strange because it wasn't relief for his escape as such, but seemed a more empathetic response, almost as if I were within the ambulance, wrapped in the coarse blanket they had replaced my, his, wet clothes.

I sat for a while near where I had fainted, and allowed the world to catch up with me.

And that's the best way I can describe it. Don't take this as literal, but for a while after his accident the world seemed distorted, thinned by movement, all I can see is bright and fuzzy. As if it had been put through an Instagram selfie filter, so that everything looked smoother and shinier than it really is. Or perhaps than it appears to be, how can we know what something really looks like when all we have is our point of view to tell us what we see? Anyway, that's not the point of this story.

So, I waited for the world to catch up, or to seem normal again. And slowly it did, though it took a week or two. A period during which Louis kept intruding in on me. Not that I first understood what was going on- well I still don't really understand what is going on-, but at least I can observe and report. The Natural philosophers of the Age of Enlightenment would be proud of me; I don't worry about a theory of how or why, merely report the what...

How was Louis affecting me, that is a key question. Well, it was through the fact that somehow, from a distance we could communicate. Now I don't mean that we could chat or tell each other what cards we had across a poker table. Nor could he see through my eyes and describe everything in front of me, you know the type of stuff the NSA are anyways getting excited about in the Hollywood movies. But he could communicate if by that we mean he could influence my behaviour and vice versa.

Of course I don't even really know when it started. I just started doing things I would never have done. Like suddenly tidying my flat and putting things in their proper place. Very strange, believe me, as back then I didn't even have a proper place for things. When you spend half your life imagining how five divergent objects / people are going to interact to create the future of each other you don't put a great deal of store thinking about where you put your right shoe, let alone the pair. This is partly because I could always work out where I would have left things, so no need to remember.

To understand, you have to learn backwards, from the lesson to the facts. When I found the cafe, and his notes, I knew that I had somehow been caused to arrive there, and that it was that the cafe was a heart of the connection. Of course, as you'd expect my first theory was that the cafe must have been built over some druid lay lines which pointed directly at Glastonbury Tor, or some other such shit... Psych! I thought nothing of the sort! I am a scientist, I simply followed the data.

The cafe. I had never even see it before, didn't know it existed. But I dreamt of it. Again that's not really entirely true. I had felt restless from the day of the accident, almost as if I had been freed by

Louis's accident. On my way back to my flat I had decided I would look around for somewhere new to live, and established my flat picking criteria. Closeness to the railway was replaced by availability of storage in the flat, local shopping by privacy and quiet. On reflection, these are unusual choices for me. As I said, had I really been thinking about it, I would have spotted that something had changed in me, but as in all the best mind control stories, how can you really know if your mind is being controlled?

Actually, as a side point, that is something that sometimes worries me, but since there is no satisfactory answer, I won't go back there. And don't even get me started on the question of how do we know that what we thought happened yesterday actually happened, and isn't part of a delusion?

So, once I had worked out all the criteria I wanted to use to select a flat, where would the flat be was whittled down to just a few places that matched all the criteria. And one of those had the Red House cafe just up the road from it. It would be wrong to say I was drawn to the area, that suggests some attractive force, more it was as if I were changing my behaviour in reaction to something that was being done. But, as can be understood - I nearly said "as can only be expected", but that speaks of cause and effect. But as can be understood, my change of behaviour was not caused by another's actions, but was in response to. Think, if A then B, not A equates to B.

Dreaming the cafe. Ok, I had not dreamt it entirely, but in my description of what I needed to be near the flat had been a description of the Red House Cafe, or close enough to it. Now the big question. Did I find this area because it had the cafe, or did the cafe find this area because I insisted there had to be one?

Now, I know what you think. Does he have to be weirdly philosophical with every thought?

But, there is a well-recognised human centric view of the universe. It argues that the universe is exactly as it is, because if it were not we would not be here to see it. So, if the whole universe is arranged for us, I figure it's not too much to ask for a cafe to be just where I cause it to be.

The Red House Cafe. It was exactly what I knew it would be. Small, friendly, smell of fried breakfast and not quite grease. Sounds of music off and kitchen clatter. I sat myself near the back, and ordered a coffee. There were two hand printed signs pinned to the wall.

One read:

FOUND : Photograph, black and white, 6x4 inches, "Lewis" written in blue pen on the back. Apply at the counter for details. (note, photograph no longer in possession of finder)

The other read

VANISHED : Wallet, brown, leather, inscribed with cowboy on horse. Location most important, contents of less concern. Please leave details at counter.

I read these both a few times; it didn't take long. Ran variations of them through my mind, saw the routes that would lead to and from them. Could see how Louis, for I knew it was him, would want the dead end between the cafe and any correspondent.

The photo intrigued me a little. Hmm - can you be intrigued a little? Had Louis been the photographer? I wondered. But no, he had found it, so clearly he had not taken it. Two notes, written at the same time, paper from the same note book, ink from the same pen.

These are connected events. But, the wording is strange. The wallet, not lost or stolen, but vanished. The photo no longer in the possession of the finder, clearly it is in the wallet. But then why advertise it?

I see the bubbles and lines, the lack of any start, I see the middle, with the photo lying on the pond. He seeks to to... find where the ripples fan out to, to find the edges. These notes from Louis are like a bat calls in the dark, he is waiting to see what echoes back to him.

I study the notes whilst I drink my coffee. I see in the pen pressure on the paper his frantic sense of confusion. I see in my mind his ordered world. I see him controlled and controlling. See it with every word tight between the lines. See me, reflecting on the world until he collided with the lake's surface, saw me set off on my course by his collision.

I know him, but don't know how, our collision at the tarn left us separate but inseparable. His motion is unseen to me, but he changes mine and me. And vice versa. But, I sense it is more than that. We can reach out, and reach back and change, not cause a change as such but by doing imply a need in the other to do.. something.

The world shimmers again, this time I am a source, a starting point?!

An idea has come unbidden, yet how ridiculous is that? How can an idea come unbidden? To move, to travel, suggests something which exists of itself. Look at the absurdity of ideas. An idea cannot come bidden surely that much is true. So the idea has emerged, been released from? , from where? A thought, an idea, comes from nowhere, triggered by a connection through no when.

My idea shapes our joint world, as ideas always have, not shapes but reshapes not just the world, but the universe, in all its forms. I reach out in a way that has no direction, reach across no gap, and... influence Louis, influence him the evening before he woke to find his wallet was not where it should be.

I see him in my mind, do what he did. Cause him to do what he did to lose the wallet by doing what I do to help him find it. Here is the sum of cause and effect, we created the middles of each story and rippled out to new starting points, which are also ends and middles. Worlds without end.

I unpin the two notes that Louis left, borrow a page from the waitress- borrow, will she get this back then?

I write a note.

FOUND! A wallet, with horse and cowboy carving. Containing three ten pound and two twenty pound notes, two credit cards, some train tickets and a photograph. To recover, follow instructions on the reverse of this note.

I scribble on the back of the note, and leave. I will always be in touch with Louis, but I don't think we will meet.

LOUIS

The day after I had posted my notes on the small notice board in the cafe, I found they had been taken down. I did not think that was appropriate. Whoever had taken them down had stolen them really.

But I saw that a new sign had been placed where the other two had been.

On the back of the note, Lewis had written.

"Look in the right hand bedside cabinet , top drawer"

When I returned to my flat, I found the wallet in the top drawer, with the photograph.

I understand that somehow Lewis had reached out and in doing something, changed the way I had behaved. That is how the wallet came not to be where it should be. How we came to write our separate stories, how we came to recognise that we were linked, how we explored the universe together even now. All of that I sort of understand.

But what I don't understand is, who was the original photographer?