

What Is Existence?

I am Alive! From broken pieces—dead pieces—I was formed, I was born. I lived and knew happiness in my life, saw color in the outside world; gone were the dark days, the shuttered times where memory and temporal form were unknown to me...oh, what a glory it is to be Alive! I walked through life, alone but no longer lonely, I danced across the park, laughed, free from my home, sung while I worked, and all about me, people stared and wondered. I didn't mind the looks, the whispers; I was Alive. After a decade of death, I was Awakened. After years of death, of looking out at the living world through the window of my purgatory, I was at last able to touch and smell, hear, taste, and see all the things that haunted my dream-filled, restless death. And so I indulged those senses; new, soft clothes, roasted coffee enjoyed outside a cheerful cafe, a slice of cake on the pinkest of plates. My new life was a beautiful one, and I was so glad that I was Alive. And then They found out. They found out that I was dead. All my pieces, so carefully reconstructed, were the results of foreign efforts; I was not real, not really Alive, I was an imposter. How could this be? Touch the soft coat of a cat, listen to the plucking of a harp, watch the seagull chase waves, taste the salt, smell the briny tang of the ocean; how can I not be Alive? How can this not be real? And so I began to fear, what if this was hell? What if I was still dead, and all these pleasures were a mirage taunting my empty, pain-filled vessel? No, I will not believe it! I must be Alive, please, oh please, if there is any mercy, let me be Alive, let not this joy, this sense of life pull away like the tide!

I would know, I would know if I was not Alive, so *They* must be confused. I'm still Alive...aren't I? What if...what if they are right; could my death have been my life? Is my life now death? But I am happy. I am happy, and I want to be Alive, so that is what I'll be! Life is different now; I feel *thin* as if I'm not quite as solid and real as I once was. It is strange to feel so...*fake* when I thought I was Alive. But that's what they say, these people I trust, those people in my house; they think people like me are "zombies," that we are ghosts floating emotionlessly through the world of the living, those who have never been dead. I made a deal, I whispered for help in a small, cold

room. She answered me, gave me magic, said I could be Alive. I thought she was an angel sent to resurrect me; could she have been a demon instead, tricking me into believing I was dead? They might be right, I still feel the deadness within me, within this mausoleum, and if I'm dead inside, I cannot be Alive. She gave me poison, didn't she. She gave me something that made me think I was dead. There was never anything wrong with me, they all assure me. They say I was living just like everyone else, that what I'm feeling now is dangerous and that I will need to consume ever more to feel this way, that my hunger for this false feeling of "life" will only lead to my death, that they love me, that they don't want to see me die trying to prove that I was once dead, but am no longer.

Guilt. Fear. Weakness. They must be right; I am dying, I am killing myself. But I don't want to stop, this feeling of life is too powerful, and I'm afraid of what will happen if I go back, back to that former "real" life and away from this deceptive fantasy I am living in. Will I ever see the sun again? Will I ever leave this room? Should I stop? She said it was safe, the angel said I needed it, that it wouldn't change me, just allow me to feel Alive again. But what if she was a demon? Am I Alive? Please, someone, tell me. Please tell me! I don't know anymore, just tell me! Anybody? Please? I'm all alone, or am I. I'm Alive, or am I Dead. No one knows anymore; they won't tell me anymore; they say I'm going crazy. Crazy! They call me crazy! I was dead, and then I lived; now I'm nothing. Or everything. Help me. Please? All I want, all I wanted, was to be Alive, and now I could be both...or neither. I just don't know anymore. I just want to be Alive; please just let me be alive. I can't take this anymore; the shame of wanting life, wanting freedom, the crushing emptiness of what came before the magic, none of it is worth it anymore. Please, whatever higher power, whatever might be looking down, please tell me I made the right decision, that it is ok to want to be Alive in this world that tells you how to be *you*, and that if you deviate, you are weak and lesser than those who adhere to the "norm," to the pure ideal. *please. please. please.* I pray, just let me be Alive! I can't feel anymore, I want it to stop, or I want it to start. I want the light again. My room is getting smaller. I don't know anymore; I just...need help.

I put this at the end because I wanted it to be a cold reading. There are supernatural/Gothic elements, but they are mild, no ghosts or phantoms, but the constant confusion of life and death, magic that resurrects, so-called zombies, these all fall in line with Gothic elements of the supernatural. I try to channel more of the “Female” Gothic style because all of these supernatural elements could result from natural forces. They could be explained as intense anxiety, paranoia, even psychosis; I leave it up to the reader to decide on the finer points. I don’t base the short-short solely in a crumbling Gothic house; I wanted to still give that sense of travel and journey found in *Udolpho*, *Frankenstein*, and other classic Gothic works. For each section, there is mention of location and a tying, or contrasting, of the location with the protagonist's psychological state. The first “Alive” and happy paragraph takes place outside, in nature, and the setting is bright and beautiful. Yet, there is a lurking opposition of the peaceful environment with rising tension and doubt, reminiscent of the sublime. The second paragraph brings in the time of questioning; this is when the setting starts to shift into the confinement of a traditional “Gothic” house or castle. The protagonist refers to it as a mausoleum, further emphasizing their uncertainty of life or death. Another effect of moving inside a house is that the eyes of “Them” are closer. The lurking progresses to stalking, a haunting presence closing in and threatening psychological harm that might turn into physical. The protagonist is not specified as a young, virginal woman, but there is still the feeling of entrapment and threats of violence. Insanity and madness start to take hold in the final section. As the walls of the room close around the protagonist, all sense of reality is being crushed by waves of opposition; what is real, what is supernatural? What is dead, and what is alive? The Gothic often plays with binary contradictions, and my short-short tries to echo these opposing forces, like the purity of nature and the smothering effect of dark walls, happiness and despair.