



# When I was Me

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Editorial Choice:

off

Media type:

Book

BfK Rating:

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Ella Sampson is a Londoner aged seventeen. One morning she wakes up to a number of surprises. In her bedroom is a wall that wasn't there when she fell asleep. The decoration is now pink. When Ella sees her mother, her mother's hair is white instead of brown. At college Ella finds she is studying science subjects instead of the arts subjects she was taking. Her old online profiles have disappeared. Her former friends are there at the college, but they are no longer her friends. In short, her entire existence has evaporated. Her parents think her puzzling new behaviour is the result of a car accident she had while her father was teaching her to drive. The questions posed by the novel are: what has actually happened? and which of Ella's two lives can be classified as 'real'?

Two very disparate cultures converge in Freeman's book. It is impossible to read it without thinking of Kafka's Gregor Samsa, who woke one morning to find that he had been metamorphosed into a giant beetle. But the book also leads to an exploration of the way contemporary quantum physics (with particles being located in two places at once) leads to the concept of different and co-existing universes. Freeman also raises the interesting question of the extent to which each person's identity is shaped by the company that person keeps.

This is a book of startling originality and consummate story-telling. Not many books for young adult readers have the courage to tackle the quantum. The ending of the book is clever, but perhaps unsatisfactory. It is a culmination that would appeal to Schrödinger, whose cat was simultaneously alive and dead. Freeman gives the reader three different possibilities, each one just as plausible as the others. One of the founders of the quantum said that he hated it and wished he had never studied it; one is inclined to understand what he meant.

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