

Me and You and What's Left

It feels like the last thing I saw was you. Though you left many months ago, and my eyes were open all the while, I think back to the last image seared into my mind before the blast came and it springs to you, the contour of your shoulders turning back at me to say goodnight, your body laying in our bed, your forehead lifting from the pillow to say good morning. It's an incredibly strange thing to confront: I am now constantly filing through the last few spreads of life, the final pockets of light leading up to the blast, but I can't recall any of the notes on my desk, which would have been useful, or any of the gifts my relatives had sent me, which would have been delightful. Instead, I see you. I don't like to speak in grand, sweeping finalities, but I actually don't believe I could recall the sight of anything specific other than you.

The blast didn't take my hearing, of course. Not that there's a bevy of sounds anymore -- the rhythmic aspect of nature, you would call it, is nearly gone. I haven't heard the faint whistling of the birds or the leisured, methodical swooping of the oaks. I would venture to guess they're all gone by now, all scorched, evaporated, vanished. If this is true, and if the blast took everything, then in some cruel way I must be thankful I cannot see it. Yet, I still weep for you -- I weep for the chance that you are still out there, and that you are in good health, and can see and hear everything as before. I would venture to guess what's left would break you. I would venture to guess it has broken me in ways I cannot begin to know.

I didn't even think to listen to your records at first. You can forgive me, of course, because I didn't know what to do at all. When the hero gains their power and asks *what can I do now?* the same applied to me when I lost my eyes, and before that, when I lost you. I started by slowing everything down, just one man in a world that had just collectively stopped. I decided to crawl -- I decided to crawl! -- to get myself to the food, the water, to find Chester. At one point, I remember screaming out loud, to no one, to myself, but not really, *I need to feed Chester!* Even amidst the sirens and the wailing, the debris and the dark, I think you would have found it amusing. I was always such a deeply confused man; now that I couldn't see only made it more acute.

Of course, my methodology proved almost instantly faulty, because I had assumed everything was in place just as before. *Roll my hands to the left of the lightswitch, and I'll find the sink. Feel around the ceiling until I feel the warmth of the lamp, then slowly swivel my hands to the fridge.* I believe you would have been amused by this, too, especially because you know that I knew there was no more sink, and no more fridge, and no more food. You would've had the idea for collecting rainwater long before I eventually did. But, had you been there, I wouldn't have had the idea to look for your records.

I know you remember this, because I don't remember almost *anything*, but I remember playing your records every night. It would drive you mad, like you wouldn't believe, because you had been performing all day long, and here I was playing your songs again and again. I would wrap my arms around you and say, *that sweet, marmalade voice*, and you would lightly knock on my forehead, and we would make love, with your records playing behind us, and you loved it so. That sweet, marmalade voice, and the woman who carried it with her everywhere. A few times since the blast, I would begin to sing a song of yours, to no avail; I can't hear it unless it's you. Anything else is fool's gold.

I'm trying to find you. In an hour or so, I will begin my search. I will arch my back to duck below the fixture that came down, piercing through the floor, and exit the house. I imagine, though I don't know yet, that I will feel the change of light on my face, and that is how I will know I have left. Once outside, I will hear little. I do know this, because the windows are all but smashed, and I cannot distinguish the tone of the room and the echoes from the valley anymore. I will walk. I will call out, *sing, my marmalade, please*, and I will continue to do so until I cannot speak any longer, and I will feel around for something to cover me and I will sleep. I may never find my home again, and yet, what is it without you? I will wake, hopefully, and when I do I will start again. I will have to make some mark or leave a small trail of pebbles to indicate the direction, or I fear I may just walk back the same way that I came. I guess, in some ways, it doesn't matter what direction I take.

I will find you because I realized very quickly after you left that there is no hope in losing you. It's silly, really. We almost always labored over money, over stability, we should have seen the irony in it, or at least you should have -- you were always more perceptive than me. We had no money, and that you had to leave to chase it shouldn't have hit me as it did. If only we had grown tired of each other, instead. If we had chosen, willingly, pleading to each other to leave, maybe it would be easier than it has been, than it is, and maybe I wouldn't leave here, the last refuge, to seek refuge in you. I'm asking you now, though you can't hear me yet: please, when I call out to you, sing to me. Let the words run a rolling warmth down my arms and legs, let the lifts of the melody bring me to you, so that it no longer feels like trudging, but like floating. I beg of you, let me float to you.

Can I point out something else? Although you aren't here to stop me, which you could, you could say, *just shut up already!* and I would laugh and oblige, but I do want to say it. The blast was no accident. I believe that it was meant as a collision between us, but not to drive us apart. As if the world knew we were not together and halted everything else so that we could continue. *You're full of shit*, you would say, and you have, and I may be, but I have no choice but to believe this very thought. If it was this blast that had to bring us back together, then the world

had it so. I know you are waiting for me, restless, tired, ready to move on and end everything. I know you're still awake. I know you are. I have little idea who is still here, but I just know that you are, because my heart is still beating, and if yours weren't, I would have fallen by now. I believe the world would have it so.

I should probably stop rambling. I am getting nervous now. How many days do I have to find you before my body shuts off? Will it be a measured, steady decline, or will it be instantaneous? How amusing it would be if I were to meander through what's left, through the debris I picture coating the ground, the dust I picture spinning through the wind, through sparse flames still yet to be extinguished, left to die out on their own like everyone else that remains, that I would move through it all, only to finally find you, and hear that marmalade voice, to explain to you that I have lost my eyes, and to feel your chin with my hands before dropping to the ground, succumbing to it all. You might be amused, I would have to say. You might even roll over laughing, and drop to the ground next to me. But I wouldn't care at that point, not even a little, because I would have found you, and I still *could* find you, and what if I do?