

I. TIME

Jack lay awake, his lover's head on his chest. As his lover pressed his head closer and wrapped his arms tightly around Jack, Jack realized that he wasn't the only one awake anymore.

"Morning," said Jack.

"Morning," came the drowsy reply, muffled by Jack's own skin.

"It's a wonderful day."

"Mmm. I just want to stay like this forever."

Jack laughed. "Not really."

His friend looked up in mild surprise clouded by sleepiness. "Huh?"

"I said not really. You don't want to stay like this forever. You probably want another hour, maybe two. Then you'll remember that you have something more important to do than hold me."

"Will not. You're the most important thing."

"Right now, I am." Jack smiled. "And that's certainly enough for me."

They held each other for another hour and a half, and then Jack's boyfriend realized that he had class in half an hour. He got up and headed out to print the paper he'd stayed up late in bed writing the night before.

Jack sat up in bed and stretched, yawning a little as he dressed himself. *Perhaps, he thought, I'll head down to the café. I can watch the other people waking up.*

As he left the dorm room he shared with his lover and closed the door, he reflected that despite what people might want to think sometimes, "forever isn't long enough" is a hollow lie.

Forever, he decided, was probably a bit too long.

An hour and a half was ideal.

II. SIMPLICITY

It occurred to me one day to ask her how she flew.

She lay back in one of the overstuffed chairs that my parents had bought three years ago in the summer when I took long walks and the dead grass and leaves crunched under my wet feet. Her face and short-cropped curly black hair looked beautiful against the green velvet.

“It’s simple: you just do,” was her reply, and she took another sip of her orange juice before setting it down on the table without a coaster.

“That can’t be all,” I protested. “If it were that easy to fly, then everyone would be doing it.”

“Oh, I never said it was easy.” She fiddled with the black ring on her left ring finger. “I just said that it was simple.”

“But isn’t that the same thing?”

“How easy is it to pick up a glass of water?” She’d turned her head away from me.

“Very easy,” I said, mildly annoyed that she was trying to change the subject.

“Well, it isn’t simple,” she replied, turning back to me with an enormous grin that spread warmth into the room. “There are so many things working towards that simple action. Your brain tells your muscles to relax here, contract there, wait—no! Contract there now! Relax! Alright, now you’ve moved a finger.”

“Then flying is the opposite?”

“Yes.” She leapt off of her chair and soared perfectly up to the ceiling. “It’s very simple. But it’s difficult as all hell.”

She stopped and had a thoughtful look. She looked twice as beautiful when that happened because her mouth sort of turned up and her brow wrinkled. “Many things worth doing are.”

III. LOVE

“I think that we see love as something complete of itself too often,” he said to his friend.

“Ah?”

“Yes. I think that love is better characterized as something like clay.”

“How so?”

“Well, it can be complete in itself, but it’s often just sort of an amorphous mass. You can *do* something with it though. And I think that we should. There’s all this love that people have, and a lot of it’s even true love, but so few people do something with it.”

She looked thoughtfully at him. “I think that it’s not uncommon for someone to do something with love once the one who was loved is dead. Think about it: how many deaths of loved ones have galvanized causes? That’s what a martyr is: someone whom people love so much that they’re willing to make something out of the love.”

“Why don’t we ever do something with the love when our loved ones are alive?”

“I think that was rhetorical, but I’d guess it’s our of our fear of change. People don’t like things changing on them. They figure that if love is a good thing, then leaving it be is good, too. That way, when it leaves them eventually, it’s not their fault for doing something wrong.”

“I think the world would be a better place if people stopped being afraid of doing something wrong.”

“Or being humiliated. Really, if they just stopped casting blame for it, I think that would solve the main problem.”

“Yeah.”

Then they turned on the TV, and their conversation turned to idle things like the hairstyle and weight of the new popular celebrities.

IV. RAIN

People always asked me why I called her “Rain”. I try to say that I didn’t name her Rain—she just sort of named herself—but nobody really believes it, and in any case, it’s a lie.

Every night that she slept in the other room, I would hear a faint dripping. It was winter, and it was rainy, and so I gave it no mind at first. After a while, though, I realized that it couldn’t be coming from the rain; it must be her.

So I stepped into her room one night. She held her face over a metal pan and cried, her tears dripping noisily one by one and sounding like a very light rain.

“Why are you crying?” I asked her.

She looked up at me, surprised that I was standing there (for I moved very silently), but more surprised, I think, that I spoke to her. In all our years together, we spoke seldom. “It’s hard to explain.”

I sat down near her. “Try.”

She still didn’t formulate her thoughts well into words (despite her remarkably quick apprehension of the English language), so it took her a few minutes.

“It’s the way that the forest taught me,” she finally said. “I cry because there are people who cannot cry. I cry because there are people who are happy as well as those who are sad. I cry in part because sometimes even they don’t know the difference.”

“And you cry every night?”

“Sometimes only a few tears,” she said, nodding. “It’s the way. Someday, though . . .”

“Someday what?”

“Someday someone will come for us, and then I won’t have to cry any more.”

V. CHOICES

One night, she was lying awake late at night. It doesn't matter who she is. She's your sister, your mother, your daughter, all at once.

She was contemplating life when Something spoke to her.

"Our lives are so short," she said.

"Compared to what?" It asked.

"Just . . . look at the world around us. At geology and astronomy. All of these things happen, and they take generations of humans. Thousands of years. Sometimes even billions. I think I'd die as soon as I got interested."

"Maybe. But there was a Choice, you know."

"A Choice?"

"Everyone gets one. There's only one Choice, but its consequences make it seem like two sometimes. You can choose what you chose, or what I chose."

"What did you choose?"

It smiled. She couldn't see it, but she knew that It smiled, a wide, beaming smile that lit up her heart like the sun melting the frost off of a soccer field on a crisp autumn morning. "I chose to watch."

"What do you watch?"

"I watch more than you can imagine. I don't know when I came into existence; it was so long ago, and I don't have a concept of time like you do. Suffice it to say that I've seen civilizations rise and fall on other planets. My consciousness extends for billions of light years. I can see every detail on every leaf on your planet. I have watched stars born; I have watched those same stars die. I have watched as your ancestors developed. I'm watching now."

She was quiet, though not afraid. "What do you see now?"

"On a planet for which you have no name, there was just an enormous earthquake—10 on the Richter scale. On another planet, as far from the first as the first was from you, a pyroclastic flow buried a developing colony of bacteria in several hundred feet of ash made from elements that can barely be found on your planet. A star is beginning to go out on a solar system that contains a species that is barely beginning to develop language."

"What is the other Choice?"

"To act. I will live for a very long time—to you, it might as well be forever. But I cannot act. I can barely ever speak. You have no idea of the circumstances that allowed us to speak."

"So the Choice is to live forever without acting, or to act but live a brief life?"

"Yes."

"Do you ever regret it?"

"Yes. But it was the right choice. Either choice is right."

She lay there for a few minutes in utter silence, thinking. "Thank you."

"We all deserve to know the Choice we made."

She smiled and felt It smile back. "I love you."

"I love you, too."

"Will I ever hear from you again?"

It smiled again. "No. Never."

She closed her eyes, let out a happy breath, and turned on her side to go to sleep.