

Burning of Alyssa

Haunted and haunting.

I scream up at the stars that lay a mask for the gods. Tonight, my view is blocked by clouds; I think they are hiding. I think they have frozen me here because they cannot look me in the eye. They cannot look me in the eye and tell me that they do not remember. They wouldn't be so cruel.

I remember though. The heat, the flames, being stood amongst hundreds of people and not recognizing all that I had memorized about her. And what I wish I could forget: them pushing me back and me moving with them. It is merely instinct to turn from glowing death like that, only I did not know she was the embers of the blaze.

I did not know much at all. The gods think I am naïve, I think I was fooled. We blame each other. They fooled me into speaking my last words to her, believing there were more pages of the script. They fooled me into thinking I would find her again. They fooled me into dreaming pain lay with mortality.

The gods laugh. I hear them. I think they are scared. I think they are hiding because they are scared of the reflection they see in my tears. If I really were naïve, I would think they were sorry.

Maybe I do not know as much as the immortals, but I knew not to take out a knife when you've been stabbed or else let the blood pour. Survival, I knew that. Her death cut deep, and my beating heart was the only thing holding the blade still. Without my pulse, the knife fell and now I am nothing but an open wound, tracing paths I used to know. Grief: survival did not prepare me for that.

It seems the world keeps pressing down. All that's left are my thoughts, but the weight is crushing my lungs. All that's left are my eyes to watch the moon and cling to some wild hope that tonight I might find her silhouette dancing beneath it. All that's left is the phantom limb of my heart that leads me to the living as they talk about that day. As they long for the poems and songs that they lost. I understand that. She was a set of lyrics to a melody I have not heard again; so much like art that they burnt her with it. What I do not understand is why they complain as if they are the first to miss something. Like the trees do not stretch out empty branches every Autumn without fail.

The gods can pretend they are no longer watching, and maybe they aren't, but I'm still here with blurry vision and a memory so clear that the ache of that day never dulls. Some nights I visit her grave and the hyacinths I planted there so that if nothing else, she would have roots to hold her. On others, I go out searching again, looking for another captured soul. In the first few days when I could not find anyone, I tried to return to familiar faces only to discover them gathered at my funeral. After that, I thought my hope would leave me but maybe tragedy and belief are rarely seen apart. Icarus' story would not have reached so many had he been born with wings. It is believing you can fly when you have answered to gravity all your life. Hope and the inevitable fall. Those are the stories the gods write, that is the part I play.

I am still half convinced that one day I'll turn the corner and stumble back into her arms. For now, though, it seems my solitude is far from fleeting. But I can wait. I waited throughout the rest of my life for death. I was not scared; I would have helped them bury me. I could not have imagined that it would not reunite me with her. As I took my dying breath, I thought only of her and let that grief breathe, anchoring me to this world. Some ghosts haunt for a missing sandal, I was missing the end of our story.

I am still half consumed by wishes. I wish I had known she was there, and I would have followed her in despite the flames, stood alight where the smoke was too thick for them to see us. They would have found burnt petals from a forgotten bouquet and two skeletons; bones still interlocked. It would have been freedom, I think. And when our time was over, we would have made it to a second life

together. Ours ended too soon. Youth is wasted on the young and it is wasted altogether when the young die.

The gods will not answer me, maybe I am muffled by the wind. Pretend my cries are the rustle of leaves but do not pretend this is fair. No other was cheated of their ending like us. At least Orpheus found Eurydice in the Elysian Fields. I thought I would find Alyssa there too and we would run hand in hand: two girls ankle-deep in a promised future to heal a stolen past. I would even rather my liver pecked out like Prometheus. I do not need it, I rid toxins in my tears, and our crimes match enough for the same punishment. His was giving humanity fire and mine was losing my humanity to fire.

Gods, I will not ask any longer to make it to the underworld. I think instead I would like to join the rivers, settle into the clouds and fall with the rain. I will be the tears of the earth and I will weep eternal, putting out the next fires.

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