

The Fortress of Paris

My great-grandfather's house was dilapidated. The railing next to the chipping concrete steps was rotten. The wire screening meant to protect the porch from invading pests a broken barricade, the porch hidden beneath mounds of worthless bounty. A lone swing sat like a dragon, lording over that dusty treasure trove, those mounds that meant nothing to me.

No memory clung to those finds, no vision of a time where I could remember his face just by thinking of his name. Even objects can die here, lost to the accumulation of dust and age, forgotten as he is in my ruined mind. Remembering only a figure of a plump old man sitting at a table, arm stretched out, his hand closed around a secret treasure I can remember.

Inside the falling fortress sat an assembly of boxes on decaying sofas. A rotary telephone near the archway of the kitchen reminded you that, in this house, time stood still. The refrigerator that held Chocolate Kisses and Rootbeer stood empty, yellowing in age, along with the tile floor, peeling away from Death decaying the walls in which it slept for so many years.

No sense of life existed in those chambers. Instead, the musty smell of absence made its home in the air. The dust seemed to tell me I was intruding on the house's loss. Nothing moves here, neither should you. But I do, disrupting the grieving of the fortress that could not protect Paris, and so it mourns. But I cannot remember him, I do not belong here.

I walked the rooms like a ghost, floating above, searching the contents for anything alive and personal, then drifted down the ever shortening hallway, Empty-handed.

How It Feels To Hold A Life In Your Hands

It's like when he was depressed his mom would monitor his texts to make sure his only connection left to life was through me. He said I was the only one who could keep him from slitting his wrists. I don't see how since he would constantly ignore me until his fits of depression flared once again. But how could I turn away when I was the string desperately clinging to him, trying to pull him away from Death's vice grip. I was threatening to snap any instant. My whole world had become his, just a single string wrapped around this decaying thing, and he constantly yanked at me to see how much pressure it would take to break me.

It's like when she counted down to her death over text.

10... No!

9... Please stop

8... I need you in my life

7... You'll get past this

6... What will make you stay?

5... (Oh shit I'm having a panic attack)

4... (I can't breathe)

3... (This isn't about me)

2... (I need to stop her)

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There were too many minutes before I heard from her again. She said she didn't want her little brother's to find her corpse hanging in the closet. So it all worked out fine I guess. I hope she and the boy who forced himself to be my world are happy together.

It's like when my cousin called in the middle of the night and I'd be terrified that when I answered Death would already be creeping up her throat. She'd want me to talk her down, persuade the demon to let her make the choice. But what if I couldn't? What if she chose the knife? She would leave me nothing but guilt. My only memento of her the sharp pain in my chest when anyone mentioned her name. Her reflection staring back at the world she left through the tears rolling down my cheeks. She'd be reduced to nothing but grief. And I don't want that. I want her loud laughs. Her self confident moments. When she'd say, *Curvy is sexy!* *I am sexy!* ... I want her happy.

It's like when I felt the urge to kill myself, I didn't say anything to them. Because I've felt the pressure of lives dropped into your hands.

Maybe I Am Ashamed

Maybe I am ashamed of my body.
Maybe I am ashamed instead of proud
that my stomach pokes out
that my hips drip fat
over the edges of my jeans.
And maybe to you that's not how it seems,
but I've experienced pelvic bones
so sharp my skin feared for its life.
And I liked it. And I still think about it.
Maybe I am ashamed.

Maybe I am ashamed of my sexuality.
That it's not clear cut like so many others.
That it mocks me at night when he
isn't there to remind me why I'm not
trying to figure it out. No, I've never been
with anyone but him. Yes, I still consider
myself bisexual. No, I've never even kissed
a girl. I don't know why but
maybe I am ashamed.

Maybe I am ashamed of my anxiety.
That I shake, tremble, and feel
self-deprecating words clog my throat
when too much attention is directed at me.
That my heart stops when my phone rings.
That my throat closes when they ask
a question – or say anything – I don't know
how to respond to. That I sit in that silence
until they ask again, until I can think
of anything at all to say.
Maybe I am ashamed.

Maybe I am ashamed that I'm
popping pills to keep a smile on my face,
writing poetry and stories to keep
my self-hatred at bay,
seeking approval from everyone around me
instead of finding peace inside me,
still thinking about all the people who hurt me,
still believing everything they told me.

Yes...

maybe I am ashamed.