

And in the End

These days, now that the full moon fills the sky every fourteen nights, I spend most mornings on the roof of the building where I have been staying, binoculars to my face, eyes on the horizon, looking for the terrible waves. These waves started right after the explosions. These waves tear 150 story high rises from foundations and throw ships the size of space stations ashore. One cruise ship landed all the way up into the Santa Monica 22nd Street Park where my parents used to play bolls back in the nineties—dressed in their whites, pleats ironed sharp, collars crisp against their aging necks. Now a destroyed twenty five story fun-ship covers that entire neighborhood. I watched—it took two days for the shattered ship to settle. Then the people came to scavenge, mostly yellow boxes of protein, the stuff we all eat 99.9% of the time, *Made in China*. A good chef can turn it into anything, puffy, delicious pancakes, steak and pomme frites; I can remember a wedding that I went to, early on when yellow boxes first appeared on the shelves, and there were still real rib roasts in the meat section, there were still meat sections, and everything from the shrimp on a toothpick hors d'oeuvre to the wedding cake came out of a yellow box and we all thought it a unique and fun party game.

I scavenge for food too. When I am not on the roof, I spend my time tunneling around this building, finding water and hidden caches of food: in desk drawers, taped behind those same drawers, tucked behind ceiling panels, in the back of almost any dispenser. I am quiet, my steps stealthy like a moccasined Indian. No one knows that I am and here—how could they?—at least thinking this makes me believe I am okay for now. No one else is here—unless they are as careful and shy as I am. A lot of people though—and I am not talking about yellow boxes of

protein—keep all sorts of fancy food stashed at their work place, hidden, no doubt, from the people they love, I've learned, real peanut butter, sweets made with chocolate. I even uncovered a whole bottom drawer (double-double locked) full of fancy dried soups, “Imported from Myanmar”—exotic mushrooms and shriveled up orange/pink shrimp, freeze dried from the old days, and they expand and are flavorful if I risk it and heat water over the single burner camp stove (complete with a case of mini-gas cylinders) that I found under the sink in one of the office kitchens. Without a doubt though, the kind of goodies I am finding are treasures, people would trade a leather coat for a jar of peanut butter, they'd give up a whole yellow box for one of the soups, not to mention what I could get for the chocolate--probably a whole set of polypropylene long underwear. People are like voles, like voles and like alligators.

Despite trying, I simply don't understand the post explosion science. I would say that 24 hours still constitutes the amount of time it takes for the earth to spin around on its axis, but that doesn't mean that axis hasn't shifted, that Mount Whitney isn't now in the Southern Hemisphere. So I sing, *Something's coming I don't know what it is but it is going to be great,*” to keep myself optimistic. When we were neighbors, my brother and I, and I would sing that song or some other equally happy tune, he'd laugh sardonically and call me an 'optimistic fool' and I would say you can call me upbeat anytime and he would sneer, and then one morning—I could see a few rays of sun so I was belting out some show tune—he pulled out his *Fone* and typed in optimistic and shoved the screen under my nose—a doctrine that this world is the best possible world—and then he screamed something about the fact that people, him and me and everyone else we know and don't know have totally fucked earth up and to be optimistic about one fucking thing makes me a stupid woman and that he hated thinking I was stupid because he spent 99% of his shitty life with me.

He pushes up daisies now. A lot of people are pushing up daisies who thought they'd be singing *Joy to the World* this Christmas, and a lot more are going to be pushing them up before long, yours truly, included. By my calculation there's enough bottled water in the cache for thirty days, maybe thirty two, and there's the water I'll capture from boiling urine and capturing the 'steam'. I saw some guys do this on TV's "How to Survive Disasters" show: fire, pan, plastic bag. Another alternative is straight urine. There is a word for this, and it is urophagia; my knowing this would make my brother proud.

He died the day of the explosions, died looking me in the eye, died happy knowing he was right about us and the world. You can't imagine how my heart felt watching the life drain away, not being able to see, or even imagine, really what broke. Maybe his spirit cracked in half, who knows? He died just four blocks from here, and maybe he was lucky to have died then when people, at least those of us lucky enough to live on what was the west coast of the United States, still pretended to have values; sure we hoarded stuff like fancy chocolate and flavorful soups, but we weren't eating our cats and dogs yet. With my brother dead, I don't have anyone but me to worry about (according to him I am a big time worrier) yet I don't see myself in that light. The world right now, though, depends desperately on people worrying, on us caring about each other, but from what I can see from up here, that ain't happening; people are working this game solo.

Maybe it turns out David was right: *People who need people are the loneliest people in the world.*

A woman's holed up at the Laundromat across the street. She's crafty, dresses tough enough to almost look like a man, but she's getting careless, taking risks, looking needy-crazy. There's probably a kid tucked into the package, which makes me think if optimistic really

covered my world view I'd find a way to communicate with her, share the bounty. But survival mode kicks in and I find myself remembering my kids dying, along with David's and 80% of the population under ten and any one of us would have torn our eyes out to have saved them, sweet bubbles. They'd gaze through fevered eyes knowing we would fix them and any one of us would have pulled the sun out of the sky if it would have helped so I know—tick tick—this lady would forget about the rescue and start calculating how to push me out the window.

Tonight, maybe, a venturing out would do the spirit some good, I haven't done it in weeks. I will hide a present for her somewhere where she will find it—maybe, since the door's lock's been broken, just inside, under the mail slot—which I know for a fact has been glued closed, and then at least she'll know she has a friend, someone who is keeping an eye on her. Hopefully no one else has seen her, no other eyes, no one with wicked intentions, anyway. If she comes upon a piece of chocolate, maybe one of the one's filled with luscious creamy cream, a hint of orange liquor, she is bound to know someone kind lives nearby.

Mrs. Sanchez, tenth grade English, said two things that I have never forgotten: being bored is the only sin and listen up, because what I have to say is worth hearing. We could all tell she really cared about us, and if she ever did get angry because someone talked during one of her enthusiastic lectures, or didn't read the chapter in Biology Today by the time class started, she would always find a moment, either during class or at lunch, to come over and let her hand rest, for a moment on a sweated shoulder, or when we were really young, and only in her Science Today class, she might even give the offender a little hug. Anyway, I am never going to die of boredom, I don't care how routine this life in this high rise gets—for I am only a daydream away from smelling that soft sweet skin under baby Billy's chin and that sends me to the happiest place on the planet.

And where that happiest place now is beats me. Maybe tomorrow it will be the moment when the lady across the way gets the chocolaty treat, and if she gets it and lets it melt and dribble down her throat, gets it and lets it, the cocoa and butter and sugar, float over each taste bud, that might be, that moment, the happiest place to be.

And now today is a good day because there is a plan to make, a place to be: *When you're a jet you're a jet all the way...*

The End.