

There Will Be No Dawn

Today is the day. And I said it to myself as my alarm went off, bleating the day, this day, into existence. It was not dawn yet-- it was four in the morning. My bed was warm, my sheets so soft and dry. But my head felt cotton-y, and unsteady. My cheeks were crusted with salt. Had I been crying? Probably.

I needed to get out of bed, because I was going to meet my friend Jake, before dawn and watch the sunrise. I needed to see this sunrise with Jake. It would make him so happy, he had said, begging me before I had a chance to just tell him yes, I would do anything he asked me to do today. I'm not gay, but God, I want to hold Jake and watch the sunrise. Just hold him. Know that he is there, physically there, with blood pumping warm out of a beating heart.

And like that I am out of my warm bed. My heat will leave it so fast. I mourn my warm bed.

I try to savor stretching. I almost do. I feel some small smile as my back pops. I'm a little sore but that good kind of sore, the kind you keep pressing to make sure it's still there. I shake my arms and it leaves me a little too fast.

In the pre-dawn air, my wet lips are cooled down to a chill I haven't felt since the winter months. I had snuck a drink from the sink. I didn't bother with a cup. My hands are wet. When I listened to the quiet in the house, and I heard my mother and father breathing, so fast asleep and in the corner of the house and together and oh God. I just leaned into the kitchen sink and let the metal catch my tears. I waited for the throbbing pang to pass and vomited out my sadness.

There is dew on the grass and stars in the sky. They twinkle together. I walk towards the hill, which is halfway between both my and Jake's houses. I relish the quiet, calm moments now. There haven't been many since the announcement about today.

I go to the hill and Jake is already there. He has probably been here all night, not sleeping. Just dozing and watching the stars, collecting dew. He doesn't react much when I lie down next to him, although I can hear his body shift on the wet grass. We lay our arms next to each other, just to know that both of us are real, and still here. We are quiet.

The sky is a purple dome with pin pricks poking out of it, and we are two warm blue lumps in a sea of shining green. Jake wiggles his fingers against mine and I let him hold my hand. The stars fade slowly as color erupts across the sky, duller shades of purple bubbling and burning away to a fiery red, orange, gold. The embers burn brighter than any of the flames. The sun is above the horizon. Then the sky is blue again, and the show is over. Jake kisses me. I feel nothing, but a comfort in knowing that he is warm and real and present.

He moves away from me.

"Still not gay, Jake."

"I know." But he looks down, ashamed.

"It's fine."

There is quiet. A bird sings. Would it be better if this was a normal day? If I just went on, not knowing that today was the last? I don't know.

"I never had a boyfriend," he says, his eyes begging, hopeful.

I smile and kiss him. It feels strange, but he is happy. We lie back down in the grass. The day is new and the birds sing. They still bother me. They just don't know. I want to tell the birds, so they can sing their favorite, final songs. But I also want to protect them all, take them in my arms and hide

them away in a thick, warm blanket. Just keep them from knowing that today is their last. I never want to know if birds cry.

“I’m never going to be a doctor,” Jake poses to the world.

“You didn’t come out to them, did you?”

He sighs. “I can’t have them be mean and stupid and bigoted today.”

His parents will never know. That’s okay.

“You can stay with me today.”

He turns and looks at me. “Really? Your folks would be fine with that?”

I look back at him across the grass. “You’re practically family anyway.”

And now I say, “I’ve never had a brother.”

I can feel Jack’s smile. He squeezes my hand. Today, he is my brother. I am his boyfriend. We fill roles we wish could have been filled later. But today, every wish come true, no matter what happens after you wish it. We get up, brush the grass off our backs, and walk back to my house.

My mother has made pancakes, and my father has burned bacon. They are both perfect. Jake does not say anything, and we smile all around the table, hiding sad eyes. We don’t have to see sadness today. Then it is time for Christmas.

We all gather in the living room, and my father lights a fire. It is so hot. Sweat drips down my face, and my mother’s forehead glistens with it. We smile. We exchange gifts, and just tear the wrapping paper and let it sit wherever it lands on the carpet. I didn’t have anything for Jake, but my mother just runs to the kitchen. She makes odd rattling noises. I am so curious what she is doing I find myself looking forward to it. It is the first thing I have looked forward to in weeks.

She hands Jake an object wrapped in untaped colorful newspaper. He opens it carefully, folding the paper to save it. It is a jar filled with lentils, beans and pasta arranged in a pattern. It is beautiful. Jake tells my mother that he loves it. They hug.

We sit, sipping hot chocolate and sweating buckets. Jake pokes the fire as my mother flips through TV channels. They are mostly playing a good-bye news broadcast that was pre-recorded for this day. Marching bands play patriotic music. Celebrities hope we are happy and surrounded by friends and family. News anchors sign off for the final, final time. My mother finds static and then turns off the TV.

My father is baking a cake in the kitchen. My mother gets something from the shelf--a book. Goodnight Moon. I lean into her and she reads it to me, to us, Jake and I. I lean into her and start just bawling, painful, ugly, unashamed crying when she’s only halfway through. She rests her head on my hair and cries, too. We cry together. She smells like Mother. It just makes me cry harder.

Later it is quiet and I can smell the cake. Its smell fills the house. Jake leans into me. The AC is on now and I am glad for his warmth in a primal way. Dad comes in and tells us the cake is done.

It is a mess. Dad was overly ambitious as usual. It’s a half collapsed, multi-tiered, orange-chocolate thing. I’m sure it will taste great. We still shove candles into it, and light them all. They twinkle, yet are more like tiny suns than stars. The birthday song casts its golden tune over us all. We sing for all of us, for everyone here and not here. For all the birthdays. This one is the last.

We eat the cake. It is delicious. I hate orange and I still love every bite. Jake hates chocolate and I see him savor it. Every time the fork comes up to his mouth it comes out shining. Dad smiles, and he is so proud and happy that I feel another wave of sadness come on. I hold it back and smile for him.

Soon enough, it’s time for the festival. We get dressed up. Dad is wearing his Thanksgiving best. Mom puts on a new blue dress. I’m wearing something comfortable, but nice. Jake raids my closet and

overdresses. He is flashy and glamorous. I take his arm, and we lead each other down the stairs. My father is speechless. My mother gasps and runs for her camera. She takes hundreds of pictures, it seems.

We walk out of the house together, but soon are lost to the crowd. Everyone in town walks towards the center of our small town, a little gathering place built years ago by some non-profit group. We sit in chairs that are thin and uncomfortable. People give speeches that are too long. They all say the same thing:

It's over. But gosh, it was good while it lasted, wasn't it?

We all cheer together. I run into former classmates, bullies, enemies, people I never talked to in town. We hug, and people tell me that I am the kind of person who changed the world, who always did what was right, and did what was helpful to everyone, regardless of myself. And I believe them like I never have before. And I express a love for those people that I never knew that I could hold within me.

It is a warm evening, descending into the cool of night, and everyone is setting out lanterns to keep the light going just a little longer. I wish I could change the date, give us all a few more years, another day, even just a few more hours. But schedules are schedules. When they announced that today was our last, we made our plans and settled our affairs, all together. Everyone made peace. I guess someone at the top of it all thought it was poetic. If we know that the human race is going to die here on this rock, why don't we do it in style. All together now.

I need to walk away from the commotion for a while. It is around six. The sun could go down anytime now.

Goodbye world.

I see my high school. I'd be there right now if it weren't the end. Goodbye, high school. And good riddance.

Goodbye pavement. You were good to me, mostly. Ignore that scar on my knee.

Goodbye house I grew up in. I don't have anymore growing up to do. You did a good job, house. God, but you did.

Goodbye street sign that no one paid attention to. Goodbye grass. Goodbye trees. Goodbye, sky. And goodbye sun.

It sinks, oh so slowly. The gold, orange, red, purple, sinks back into the sky. I miss it, even as it goes. Will it miss me, too?

After all (after all), it will go on, even if I do not. But the night is so, so long.

And there will be no dawn.