

Lightning Rod

1.

The War is over. There is none left but myself. Nothing standing but this old (miraculous!) barn that juts like a broken tooth from the earth, breaking into the bloody sky. Everything else is gone: the phallic buildings, curving bridges, winking lights, brilliant inventions ... all gone, all dust. Like the book says.

But for this one place. But for this one being.

I miss them. Hated them for so long when they eclipsed His original children as His favorite plaything. Typical older sibling response. That was before the War. Now, surrounded by an dead world, stripped of all my power, left behind to my own version of a Samuel Beckett play, I desperately miss them. With their farts and sneezes, bright eyes, petty jealousies, fears and desperate bravery. I miss the sounds of Beethoven and Tom Waits, the colors of Degas and Picasso. I miss the small voicings of desire made in the dead of night by a sleeping accountant who, by day, lives a life of dreary desperation, but by night and in dream, rode strangers in leather, swam in the depths of stars and cried Havoc, letting slip the dogs of war, lust, adventure, beauty and death. Beyond anything, I think, I miss their dreams. We don't dream. We never dreamed.

How long is time when time is stopped? How many angels can dance on the head of a pin? Useless questions really.

The War was always over before it began. It did not, contrary to some of the human mythology, manifest itself through riders of the apocalypse, whores of Babylon, numbers of the beast or anything nearly as hysterical or over-produced. It was a quiet affair involving the folding of a few dimensions, the unfolding of a few others. Without going into the mathematics of it all, He simply breathed in and it was all gone. I had tried to gain more time, convince him that there was still enjoyment to be had by using the world and its life as pawns in our increasingly chaotic games. There were moments when my arguments spared the world. He was all set to fold it up when I suggested the deluge and it made him laugh, thinking about those terrified little people in their leaking little boat. The Bubonic Plague was mine as well, and yes, the Holocaust and Stalin, Pol Pot, the Tsunami and the Nuclear "accident" that destroyed much of South America ... all mine. He had no hand in those. They were my ideas and I executed them flawlessly. I used them as ways to keep his interest, but with each one I had to be more and more creative (by creative I mean destructive) and in the end, as I had always known it would, His desire for innovation and experimentation with this world had run out. He breathed

in, folded several aspects of spacetime, and it was over. His will be done. As it is ... well, as it just *is*.

2.

So, this barn: two stories high and maybe fifty feet across by seventy-five deep. I have not been inside it as of yet. I have all the time in the world. The doors are bright red, but the rest of it is peeling, flakes of dead paint clinging to old grey wood. The roof makes an "A" above and there are two windows on the second floor. From the front it looks like the archetypal house that children would always draw: a triangle atop a square, two square eyes for windows and a rectangular door. Often they might draw another small rectangle atop the triangle for a chimney. There is no chimney here. There is, however, an old-fashioned lighting rod. Three feet of iron and copper with baroque curves and curlicues and a cobalt blue glass sphere for decoration. Waiting to protect this barn from destruction. There will be no destruction ever again.

To be honest, I'm not quite sure why this place still exists. More than why, I'm not sure how it exists. Or myself. Something has gone wrong, some minor fold left untucked. Not like Him at all. I wonder if He is losing his touch in His old age. I hope so because the alternative would be too cruel. Even for him.

So, this barn. Peeling paint, sagging wood and blank, sightless eyes. The sky doesn't move. There is no wind. Silence like nothing this planet has ever known. Time itself has unwound and come apart. I would weep if I had tear ducts. The irony of this is not lost on me. I remember, early in the planning stages of this world, our arguments over the general design. There were so many aspects of humanity I thought useless. He simply smiled and knew the rightness of it all. I felt that tear ducts were not necessary. He knew, even then, how much fun He would have with them. And now, I understand and even envy the human capacity for weeping: an external manifestation of sorrow that releases some of the churning, desperate pain that belongs to all sentient being. I have no such release and so it burns inside. All this loss and frustration and terror and there is nothing I can do to release it. Angels cannot dream and cannot weep. No wonder he grew bored with us so quickly.

3.

I cannot measure time in heartbeats or breath. I can only measure time through the firings of neurons in my brain. And the fact that I have kept busy counting ever since the War ended. It's a long time I have been standing here. Billions of numbers. Nothing changes.

4.

I go inside. I hope for the doors to creak loud, screaming in time and stiffness. They open silently. The red light of the sky creeps into the darkness, reminding me of a cautious kitten. Of all the animals on earth other than humans, I felt closest to the cats. Not the wild ones, no, the domesticated cats. The pets. At least some human mythologies got that right. I loved how they seemed to despise their owners and how they had the air of being exactly *right*, no matter their surroundings.

The light creeps in as I enter.

I was hoping for ... something I know not what. Bric-a-brac, canning jars accumulated through the decades, an old musket, yellowing newspapers from generations past, the steering column of an old Volkswagen Beetle (the first ones mind you, not the remake from the end of days), disassembled ploughshares, a WWI uniform with mold growing happy and contented on the hemp fabric, a fading calendar from 1923 with half the months missing, a dying tintype of a man and a woman so obviously in love that it hurts, a broken Victrola along with a box of 78s of the Glenn Miller Orchestra and Billie Holiday, one of those old console televisions with the wooden cabinets that, when the picture was turned off, would show a solid point of light and hang there like electrons breathing for a whole minute until finally going dark.

There is nothing. An emptiness so perfect I have to laugh. Being who I am, I can not. Empty but for a set of stairs leading to the second floor. I climb them. They do not creak or squeal. Here again there is nothing but for a small door set in the roof. I climb through.

The sky seems brighter after the dark. A change, albeit small and completely, irrevocably subjective. I smile. Yes, We can smile. Our smiles have been known to start wars and cease heartbeats. This smile does not last long.

5.

We were Children of Light and our desires were simple. We flew on star shine and subatomic particles, gazed in rapture at His creations, sang songs that lasted as long as suns. We knew no pain, no doubt. There were places in the world where we still lived, even to the end: in whale song and the aurora borealis; in a flower atop Mount Kilimanjaro and the ozone scent before a thunderstorm.

But time, and the necessities of His War, made us twist and crumble. Many lost their wings and their songs. Without tears, pain simply fills the eyes with a black, vacuous stare and the Children of Light were made blind by His capricious and cruel desires. There were some of us who fought His will, attempting to divert his awesome power from the humans, our fragile younger siblings. Some stood tall, taking upon themselves the might of his anger, the terror of his joy. In the end they failed, His power

melting and twisting them one by one until all those willing to stand were puddles of molten slag and his fury ignited upon the humans.

I was not one of these proud defiant ones. Indeed, I looked down upon their sacrifices and saw them as fools. I played a more subtle game. There were times when I thought I might win. More fool I. There are times since that I believe I should have been destroyed in one swift blast rather than playing Devil to His Godhead. Gone down fighting. Proud and tall until the very end rather than skulking in the shadows, calculating, playing the odds with human life in the vain attempt to best Him. Of course it is too late to change anything.

6.

I stand here. Billions upon billions of numbers have gone by. I am bored and decide to stop counting because it means nothing. An unchanging blood red sky and a barn beneath my feet. My fingers trace the cool metal of the lightning rod and I can taste it: iron like the taste of burnt toast and copper the taste of blood. It is a useless thing now. Here. Beyond the end of time. Waiting for a lightning strike that will never come. The War is over.