

Chrysanthemums

The train barrels down the tracks, its horn blaring like a savage beast. You cannot see it but you can hear it. It is the precursor to attack, like the howl of the pack in the midnight hour. All around you the sky roars in a cacophony of thunder, lightning, and rain. Each droplet feels like a slap, waking you up, forcing you to attention. The train is closer now, the thumping of its wheels are like the slams of hammers on anvils. You can feel the tracks shaking now. The earth trembles with you, signs of even greater disaster. The massive metal snake rounds the corner. It blares its horn again and it screams at you. It hates you. Even now in the fear and in the panic you cannot move. All around you the lush evergreen forest joins together in discordant laughter, or perhaps it is just the brutal wind that sends nature away, running in fear. The train is only moments away—death is only a moment away, his scythe almost at your neck. With each drop of rain that slams upon the massive grate of the train, steam rises up, hissing. You are at the center of a storm that will send the world into bedlam. The world will not die slowly with the heat death of the universe, but with the fury of the devil himself. You are screaming, you are drowning, you are dying.

Death.

You stir your coffee in long wide arcs, watching the cream trace the gentle arcs of your spoon. Faint trails of steam dance from your cup and across the table she looks to you, a faint smile upon her face. The smooth sounds of the jazz band give backdrop to the conversation. Outside it is still raining, only gently now. You should return to the conversation, the silence has reached a point where it requires answer. You compliment her eyes and she smirks. Her eyes are

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emerald green and they turn hazel in the sunlight, an interesting trait that can't be seen on a day like today.

“So...you were saying something about your mother and her garden?” She says everything with a mouth that says ‘I’ve just thought of something funny’

“Yeah, where was I... Oh, my mother has a pretty big garden, and it's filled to the brim with chrysanthemums. They’re her favorite flower. She would love a day like today, with all this rain.” You say it cautiously. You are new dance partners. You don’t want to step on each other’s toes.

“I’m not much of a gardener but I’d love to see them. Any chance that your mother can give us a little tour?”

“Yes! Well I mean, I don’t see why not. When would you want to go?”

“Why not right now?”

“But....the weather.”

“What’s wrong with a little rain—” The tables and chairs begin to shake, only gently at first. Within a few moments they are rattling with the fury of an earthquake. You look outside and the rain has begun to pour from the sky, with rain drops that beat the pavement. With each passing second the fury of the storm only intensifies. The glass begins to crack and the cracks begin to grow. The patrons of the coffee house are in positions of panic and fear. The girl looks at you and you look back into her pale blue eyes for comfort. They are icy. She grabs you by the arm with an iron grip that you can’t break free from. You yell at her, begging her to release you, your arm is beginning to hurt. In the distance you hear the sound of a train blaring a screaming whistle. Across the way you hear a loud crack of glass. The windows explode and you are smashed first with glass and then with a torrent of water. It is bitter cold, it numbs you.

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As you slip into unconsciousness you are confronted by the image of her pale blue eyes.

You awake on the edge of a beach. You have not opened your eyes but the sound of the tide moving back and forth is unmistakable. Slowly you open your eyes. In front of you is the pale blue expanse of the ocean although you don't know which one. The beach extends off in both directions for a good distance. It is covered with hundreds of small rocks, shells, and bottle bits. You eventually orient yourself and sit up-right, looking off into the water. The sun is hanging low in the sky turning the blue expanse of the atmosphere into oranges, purples, and reds. For a while you take in the landscape, not concerning yourself with the important questions like where you are. That is until you see something floating towards you. It is hard to make it out at first but as it comes closer and closer it becomes instantly defined. A single pink chrysanthemum floating on the water. Fear overwhelms your senses.

It is here that you brave the unknown corners of the human psych and where your ideas of what makes a man a man and the world the world are assaulted. Here on this beach you are shown to be vapid in imagination and feeble in body. The chrysanthemum blossoms into unlimited possibilities so intricate and so complex that you are immediately overwhelmed. You see the stars. You see the moon. You see billions of lives tiny and insignificant and yet so very important. The sand is sharper now, it cuts into your feet. The coffee you were having is bitter now. It's all that you can taste. The train you heard is louder now. It deafens all things. The water is colder now, and it claws at the shore. The chrysanthemum is brighter now, its colors pastel, unreal.

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The small flower rests lightly against the shore, selling peace with look and doom with its location. Carefully you move towards it like a mouse sneaking around a trap. You extend one finger and with the gentlest of movements you touch it. The mouse has been caught.

You awake high above the earth, among the stars and planets. You are at once among each and every life that crawls, walks, skitters, and runs. You are in the mountains of Nepal, the jungles of the Amazon, and in the halls of a Wisconsin hospital. Your omnipresence gives you a heart for all things, one that beats to the desires and wills of others. But what they did not tell you and what you could never know was that food for the lion means death for antelope. In all your good intentions health came in equal kinds to sickness and in your absence chaos ruled supreme. For thousands of years man has been contemplating the existence of god but never once considered that it would be as useless as you are. If anyone ever asks you what happens when God commits suicide tell them this: It does not end with a bang, or even with a whimper. No, instead you will be confronted by thousands of sights you've never seen. A train that you can't escape, a beautiful girl with piercing blue eyes, an unrelenting storm, and one pink chrysanthemum floating on the shore. And then...Death.