

## Reflections

by Kambria Stratton

“The Wilsons packed up and left early this morning,” you tell me. We are sitting side by side on the back of my dad’s old pick-up truck. My shirt sticks to the back of my neck, wet with sweat. It’s midsummer, and the sun is beginning to set. The sky is a deep shade of red, fading slowly into a deep blue. Eventually, it will be black. I wonder if we’ll be able to see it when the stars begin to fall. School was set to start next month, but they announced the year off for all the students in our state. Then later, the rest of the US. I’m sure soon everyone will be doing it, all around the world. I laughed when I found out. I wondered why they phrased it like that. Just the year. As if there would be anyone left to return after that. As if things could be normal, after that.

“Did they say where they were going?” My voice feels strange. Too normal and somehow entirely alien to me. I feel as though I should be screaming. Running back and forth in the street and screaming, screaming, screaming. Like the people on the news, doomsday believers and religious fanatics. Falling to their knees in the street and carrying crosses, like that would save them from the falling sky. I suppose I’m neither of those. I sit quietly. I pull my knees to my chest and watch the sky.

You smile. “Disneyland.”

I laugh. You do too. Neither of us are sure why that’s funny.

“Mom wanted to take us, when we first found out,” I say. “She said she wanted the kids to at least see it once. Couldn’t get tickets or anything though, sold out so fast. I think everyone else had the same idea.” Mom apologized for it, later. She has always been like that. She apologized as if the end of the world was entirely her fault. Entirely her responsibility. She threw a birthday party for my younger siblings last weekend. She’s having another in a couple days. She says she’s trying to get to eighteen for each of them, before time runs out. I don’t question it. I’m pretty sure she just needs something to do.

“Maybe that’s a good thing.” I look at you strangely. You don’t look back. Your eyes are on the sky. A wry smile pulls at your lips. “I mean, do you really wanna spend the rest of your life in *Disneyland*? I hear the crowds are horrible this time of year.” There’s a dry humor in your voice, and I smile, because there’s nothing else left to do anymore.

We are quiet for a time after that. The sky continues to darken. In the distance, I can hear screaming. It doesn’t alarm me anymore. People have been screaming ever since the beginning. Or maybe it was the end. No one has really given it a proper name yet.

Before they dismissed school, I watched one of my teachers stop in the middle of class and just walk out. He didn’t say where he was going. He just walked out, then walked out of the school, and kept on walking. We never saw him again, and none of the other teachers ever mentioned it. A girl in my first period started crying during bellwork. No one looked at her. At the time, we were all still pretending everything was normal. At the end of the year, they gave everyone A’s no matter what class they were in. They were the best scores the state had ever seen. Our principal told us that, like it was something to be proud of. Every school did that. I

don't know if anyone even approved it. I don't think it mattered that much anyway. It isn't like any of us are going to be worrying about college any time soon anymore.

"Are you scared?"

I hum. The sky is black now, and I could see the stars spread out above us. My friend in elementary school once told me the sky was like a great big sheet, and the lights from all the stars were just the light of heaven shining through. I wonder if he's watching the sky too. I wonder if he still believes in heaven.

"Not anymore," I finally say.

You nod, and turn your eyes back to the sky. We watch as a star in the distance trembles. It's subtle. I can almost pretend I don't see it, but watching it give out and fall from the sky is harder to ignore. Falling stars. It's beautiful, in a way. Beneath us, the ground shudders. I reach for your hand. You squeeze mine and I squeeze back.

"Do you think there will be angels?" I ask. Mom thinks there will be. She's been praying since school shut down.

"You mean the ones with all the eyes and spinning rings and everything?"

"I was thinking more like, you know, cherubs."

"I don't know. Maybe."

That's the only answer anyone has been able to give me. Maybe. The news anchors on TV have it in their eyes while giving the top stories of the week. Weather reports. I find those funny. I half expect them to all start laughing, like it's a great big joke. *Falling skies on Wednesday, slight chance of doomsday and a thirty percent chance of rain. Don't forget to bring your umbrella!*

"Is it weird that I don't really believe it, even now?" You ask as the ground shakes beneath us again. Another star falls. The screaming gets louder. I wonder if my mother has started praying again. I wonder if my father believes in god. I can hear someone singing, but I can't quite hear the lyrics. A friend from school invited me to a party the other day. *The last one before the end, you know?* Parties for the end of the world, celebrating as if it's new years, instead of the last one. I'm pretty sure it's just because they don't want to be alone when it happens. I'm pretty sure no one does.

"What do you mean?"

"I'm still thinking about what I wanted to do. With my life and stuff, you know."

You speak, and the ground is really starting to shake now. The stars fall faster, and there's a hum in the distance. Pebbles on the ground tremble and I can feel a heavy weight in the air, pressing down on us like the moments before a lightning strike. We are running out of time. I squeeze your hand tighter.

"What did you want to do?" I say. Strangely, I'm not afraid. Contentment settles on me as stars fall from the heavens and crash into earth. I wonder what my classmates are doing. I wonder if my sister is watching from her college dorm. The sky is falling, and I am not afraid.

"Everything," You answer, and I smile. My eyes are on the moon.

"I think I'd want to go to Disneyland."

I hear you laugh, and as the last stars fall from the sky, the sound warms my chest. The screaming is slowly overtaken by an overwhelming sound, like the rolling of thunder. I close my eyes. I hope it doesn't hurt. You don't let go of my hand.