

In the arms of my love

My inability to move might be the least strange thing about the new situation I find myself in. What's worse is that I no longer possess a body made of flesh and blood.

The first thing I see is grey sky, but maybe “see” is not the right word. Even though I don't seem to have any eyes, I am capable of observing.

Clouds are hanging over me. They start crashing and thundering, followed by a bright flash of light. Then the heavens burst open and raindrops come rushing down, thousands of them, like arrows descending on a medieval battlefield. They land on me, soaking into the earth beneath me. The water penetrates my core, and I drink greedily.

The howling wind whips at me, I bend along with it. The experience would have been nauseating if I still had any sense of balance; my new situation is not at all bad.

It takes quite a while before I fully realize what I am now, but even longer to remember what happened to me.

I died, didn't I? I'm not totally sure; the images are intangible, dreamlike, unfocused and incoherent. A hospital bed. Cancer, the final stages, incurable. And I was only thirty years old, damn it!

The last image I remember from my human existence is of Max, my boyfriend. No, my fiancé! He had proposed to me the week before, knowing I had always dreamed of a beautiful wedding. He was such a dear man. In my last memory, he is leaning over me, his face white as chalk and his eyes brimming with tears. A kiss on my forehead, and a whisper while he holds me in his arms: “I love you.” Then the image fades and the world goes black.

This field I am in is endless. There are thousands of flowers, mingled with blades of grass and proliferating weeds. I wonder if a soul is trapped inside each and every one of them. Is this the afterlife? I think about that, and briefly I imagine hearing whispering, wailing voices rising above the pattering of the raindrops.

I never believed in reincarnation. I always thought the idea of going to the creator's heavenly bosom after a mortal life of hard work and sacrifice is one that we want to believe in so much, that most of us eventually do end up there. It was either that or an eternity of nothing, I imagined.

But I had never seen this coming!

A shadow falls over me. Panting breaths. I can make out what it is only when it runs right past. The animal towers over me. It looks my way, its tongue lolling from its mouth. The rain does not seem to bother it. When it shakes out its fur, drops of water fly around. Not a yard away from me, it lifts its leg. The yellow stream of urine misses me just barely, but the spray hits a few other flowers. I am powerless, no longer in control of a body. I can only observe and accept. Sooner or later another dog will come along and relieve itself on me, or someone will decide to build a new residential area on this piece of land.

If I die again, I think, where will I go then?

Shouting, somewhere in the distance. The dog pricks its ears, looks around searchingly, and then disappears from view.

Minutes go by. Hours. Time is relative, completely irrelevant. I exist, but I do not live. Acceptance. It's trickier than I had thought.

The clouds dissipate, making way for the warm rays of the sun. Raindrops on the field sparkle and evaporate slowly. It is a wonderful sight to see.

"*You're pretty.*" A voice, right behind me.

I hear something snap and feel the life draining away from me. I float upwards, into the air. The world spins around me. I stare up into the face of a little girl. She looks vaguely familiar, but I cannot place her. She smiles at me and tucks me into her other hand, already clenching dozens more flowers.

I've been picked! Somehow, the thought is a relief. I can imagine nothing worse than standing in this field for weeks on end, waiting for the change of seasons to be my ending. But I also realize that my life will be over even sooner now. Without my roots, my lifespan will be considerably shorter. I'm not sure whether I should be grateful or whether I should curse the girl. But it doesn't matter. Acceptance. Again, there is nothing I can do.

“Won't this be a lovely bunch of flowers for him?”

I am carried away, across the endless field that seems a lot less infinite from this vantage point, and into a car parked at the curb of a road.

“I'm sure he'll like them very much,” another voice agrees.

The door shuts, and the girl places me on the backseat with the other flowers. The car starts moving.

I hear voices talking. Music from speakers. None of it really gets through to me. I feel weaker with every mile the car travels. The world loses color, everything goes dark. I lose consciousness.

When the light returns, the car has stopped. I am being picked up from the backseat and carried to a house that looks somewhat familiar. My thoughts are too foggy to realize what this might mean.

A hand opens the front door. There are two people in the living room. One of them is a woman, and the other is a man I recognize instantly. I fleetingly wonder how this could

be possible, and for a moment I'm sure I must be hallucinating. This is another thing I have no choice but to accept. But this time I do so lovingly.

"... just wanted to comfort you a little ..."

The woman is talking, but I hear her only faintly. I feel the darkness slowly taking possession of me again. With all the strength left in me, I try to stay alert.

The little girl, holding her bunch of flowers with me as part of the collective, approaches the man. I no longer have a heart, but for a second I swear I can feel it beating so quickly I become fully aware.

"I picked you some flowers, Uncle Max." She hands the bunch to my fiancé. "I'm sorry Anna died."

That's it, I think, looking up at my boyfriend's sad face. That was my name: Anna!

Max accepts the flowers. I sense it when he wraps his fingers around my stem. It feels good. Familiar. This is the best it will be, I realize. He will put me in a vase, if I'm lucky. This is the moment I need to enjoy!

I feel the darkness slowly creeping up on me again, this time I let it. In life, I never believed in coincidence, but now I'm grateful for it.

Slowly, the light fades. But that's all right. I'm ready for whatever comes next.

And so, for the second time, I die in the arms of my love.