

Home; noun

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Home; noun

by [loversghosts](#)

Ten.
Nine.
Eight.

Count down from ten, he told himself, trying to focus his racing mind. Count the seconds, get your heart to match the pace, focus on your environment, ground yourself. Techniques for when he was panicking. Was he having a panic attack? He told himself he wasn't... No, no, he was.

Kneeling on the grass, his chest felt like it was being shredded apart. Knives had settled in the spaces between his ribs, intent on tearing him to pieces. There was a pleasant breeze rustling the tall grass that did nothing to quell his mind and heart. Aside from the breeze, the country was silent.

Nobody around him.

There was nothing but the grass and his own failures.

His head spun as he sat there, allowing himself the chaos of his mind being set free. Royce's thoughts swam in circles around him, dizzying him as he tried to focus.

He had to start with something he knew.

Royce knew Red was gone.

Even if she had lost her voice, he knew she was gone. There were no sounds from her footsteps or her breathing. She had the Transistor, and he had lost. Never in his time with the Transistor did Royce think he could ever lose a battle with it. He understood it in a way nobody else did. Or so he thought.

Seems Red has a better grasp on it. Though, he supposed, that's what happens when you have a loved one inside of it who can talk to you. He had been lucky enough to not lose anyone important to its blade. Not until all hell broke loose. Sybil, Grant, and Asher. They all left him.

Now their only memory recorded in the trace banks. He couldn't even bring himself to look in that direction.

Royce knew there was a chance, maybe, that he could find them here. He didn't know how long it would take though, or if he even could. Nobody has ever come back to tell the tale of the country, so nobody knew what it was like. Nobody knew how it worked.

He wasn't sure how long he had been kneeling in the grass, trying to focus his mind. All of his muscles and bones felt stiff with exhaustion after the fight, his body ached and screamed at him in pain. He needed a distraction, so he pulled at the edges of his sleeves, fidgeting with the buttons of his coat. They weren't even needed. Royce had the seam closed, but had the buttons there still so he could push them in and out of the button holes when he needed to.

He felt like he had been there for hours. His body had settled into the position he sat in, and he thought he was calmer now.

There was grass stuck to his pants as he stood up, and Royce did not stop to brush it off. He was dead anyways, what did some grass matter? The sound of his footsteps crunching against the grass was something foreign to him, something so unlike the atmosphere of Cloudbank,

that he had to stop. He took another step slowly, almost smiling at the noise it made. A satisfying crunch. Something simple, something natural.

There was a house off in the distance that he could see, so he started walking. Maybe it was somewhere he could find respite.

Each step felt like his feet were dead weights, and he wanted nothing more than to lay in the grass and let himself fade away. But he couldn't. He wouldn't. Not anymore. He was dead, there was no 'fading away' in the country.

He couldn't stop, not anymore. Not that he'd ever been one to slow down or stop in his life. Always restless, always moving, deep in his work. How foolish he had been.

The house was getting closer, and Royce thought he could make out shapes on the porch. His vision was blurred, and it took him a moment to realize that apparently, in death, he still needed glasses. And didn't have his contacts in. So he squinted at the shapes in the distance. The breeze made the tails of his coat sway, and Royce glared at nothing in particular. He wasn't fond of the feeling. There was a reason he had it weighted, specifically so it didn't do that. He didn't like it blowing around. It was a distraction. A small distraction, but a distraction nonetheless.

His head ached from the strain on his eyes as he walked, wishing that he had a pair of glasses instead of a multitude of pens in his coat pockets. One would think that death would allow him the peace of not having to wear glasses.

As he got closer, he started to notice more details. The house faintly reminded him of one he had described to Sybil one night. The two of them sat at the edge of Fairview's docks, a warm drink in hand. They spoke of their dreams as they stared at the city lights.

Royce wanted something simple, something old, classic. A farmhouse with a porch. He knew it wasn't his 'style' of architecture, but it was something people had enjoyed for a long time, years before Cloudbank, and he enjoyed it too. Royce nearly chuckled, thinking of that night how Sybil had almost fallen off the dock in the wee hours of the morning because she was so tired.

Then, he remembered, she was gone. He'd probably never find her again. Never find his closest friend.

He hadn't realized how close he had gotten until he heard a sudden noise to bring him out of his thoughts.

"Royce?"

Was all he heard, before he was nearly pushed to the ground by sheer force. Soft, cloudy hair covered his face, and a faint smell of jasmine and rose. He knew that smell.

Sybil.

All the air left his lungs as he desperately grasped at her, relief flooding his body like a tidal wave. His chest screamed with relief and pain at the same time. She was safe and here with him, but she was still dead, and nothing he could have done with the Process could have changed that fact. He knew she must be standing on her toes, because she had her head on his shoulder. She must have had her hat off as well, because it didn't hit his head.

He heard Asher say his name as well, and then the familiar huff Grant made when he stood up after sitting for so long, they were all here. Sybil let go of him for long enough that he saw Grant and Asher walking down the steps off the porch. All he could do was fall to his knees. Royce didn't notice when the tears began to fall, he hardly noticed when Grant put an arm

under his shoulders and lifted him up, leading him to a couch on the porch, before disappearing inside. Sybil and Asher sat on either side of him as he shook softly.

A warm cup was pressed into his hands, and chamomile flooded his senses. Tea. Right, tea, Grant made tea.

Royce took a breath, inhaling the smell, letting the aroma settle around his chest like a warm, gentle ribbon. The arms around him helped pull him back to the ground, and a soft blanket was put over his legs.

“I didn’t think we would see you here Royce,” He wasn’t sure who was speaking, their voices blended together like one unnerving melody. He hummed in response, saying nothing.

“Is the city okay?”

“What do you think?” Was all Royce could utter.

He couldn’t say he had lost the Transistor. He had lost to Red of all people. She had control now. Something added pressure to his lap, and he felt a gentle rumble.

“Midnight...” Asher mumbled, a smile audible in his voice as his cat crawled into Royce’s lap. He wouldn’t ask what had happened, or maybe it was a figment of the country, but the cat was a welcome presence nonetheless. Midnight’s purring relaxed him, and Royce looked out over the fields of the country. He wanted to take in every detail, catalogue it into his own private collection of thoughts.

Later that evening, after they had watched the sun set on the horizon, the natural sunset, the first any of them had seen, they all went inside. The interior was beautiful. He could tell Sybil had designed it, remembering all the things he had said about his ‘dream home’ in their many conversations. The high ceilings, wood beam walls, soft rugs, it was gorgeous. She had an eye for design that he could relate to. Architecture and event planning weren’t so different. Coordination of art principles to create something pleasing to the eye. Form, shape, colour. The other three could tell that Royce was in a state of bliss, running a hand across the walls and counters, inspecting the windows, and muttering to himself.

“Do you like it?” Sybil asked, following behind Royce. She sounded happy... But he knew that likely wasn’t the truth. Later, they would talk about that, but for now, they needed to rest. All of them.

“I love it.” Was all Royce could say, his chest starting to ache something awful again. “I didn’t think I would find... You, any of you.”

“You thought you could get away from us that easily, Royce?” Grant’s hand was on his shoulder, and a kind smile. “You should’ve known better.”

“I suppose you have a point... Indeed...” Royce was staring out a window, looking at the stars. He knew of them, of course, but with the light pollution from Cloudbank, he could never see them even from Fairview. Here though, they filled the sky like glitter spilled across a black board.

He felt his hands twitch the slightest, itching to record what they looked like, so he could never forget them.

“Come, let’s get you some sleep. You need it.” Sybil took his hand, leading him to a room down one of the halls. It was perfect, he knew before he had even seen it. Sybil knew him deeply.

The room had a large window on one side, a bay window with seats. Bookshelves lined the wall around it. There was a wooden desk, a dark, rich colour... It was too much to take in. Sybil noticed, helping him take off his coat and draping it over a chair. She smiled at him, before walking out. He knew to call for her if he needed to.

He sat on the bed, feeling the duvet beneath his hands. Nowhere had ever felt like home to Royce. Nothing was perfect. His room during university, an apartment in Cloudbank, his house in Fairview. They weren't right.

Now though? He knew he was home.

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