

the landscape after a fire

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the landscape after a fire

by [ryyves](#)

Summary

This is all you need to know:

Somewhere, a young girl falls in love with singing.

Somewhere, a young man with eyes red from cigarette smoke and dark from too little sleep and too much grief finds the glowing heart of the city. He lifts it from its Cradle and rends the city apart.

Notes

Written for Transistor Week, to the prompt "Roots"

See the end of the work for [more notes](#)

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, earth to earth.

There is a boy with a cigarette between his lips and red eyes that will one day be red for another reason. He has a deep, sullen stare, eyes like cracked glass, like cracked glass on his arms, and a voice like glass cracking. He is a prodigy in Traverson at fifteen, and one day he will be the greatest thing to come out of the school, and out of the city. He stands on a balcony and surveys the city that could be his, watches the way his smoke fades out the spectrum of neon-colored lights far below.

There is a man with hair turning grey far before his time and large hands, blunt fingers that have ached since his youth. He has not yet thought to change the world. He watches his coffee steam rise, and stares through with attentive eyes that burn like an open flame, like flickering candles, like the city burning down.

There is a woman dressing in a small, cozy apartment filled with warm jazz. She is contouring her tired face into a perfect mask, a smile that seems open and inviting, and smoothing her voice into perfect warmth. She shivers in the lonely rooms she calls hers. She watches the legs of women in heels; she throws back her head when she laughs, and drinks everything she's offered and more.

There is a cat that weaves around the legs of a young man with hair so pale it's almost white, never dyed. A recent stray, her bones still prominent through thin fur groomed smooth, already loud in her affection toward the man who carried her that first day back to his apartment beneath his raincoat. And the man, he is learning to choose his presence. He is learning to stand out with his words instead of his body. What can one man do with just his own voice? Amplify others.

There are four figures seated in the back corner of a crowded speakeasy, talking politics, weaving grand visions of changing the world into the air before them while frenzied couples spin across the dancefloor, while the musicians build a crescendo above the rustling of cloth over twisting bodies and thin, half-drunk chatter.

And this: A woman in the quiet backstage of a concert hall, counting her breaths to slow her pounding heart. The woman hunched over a table strewn with papers, chewing the end of a pen while a man sets a mug of steaming coffee before her and opens the window. The woman dancing with her hands on the man's waist as her own music on the gramophone drifts out over the city. The woman waking to the face of a man who looks at her like she is the sun and the entire sky.

And also this: A man alone in an abandoned suburb overgrown with weeds, coughing and cursing, smoking away the fear, as his demise approaches, and the loathing as one by one the voices of his friends fade to static through his studio speakers. A man pleading with the fading body of his lover, pleading to the savior in Fairview, pleading to the singer and the silent, frightened city.

And then: There are four strangers whose hands don't touch in the Country. Their eyes don't meet over waving stalks of wheat, over endless gold. They have no words to say to each

other, besides this: We did this.

Back in the city where the flowers grow the same vibrant neon as the lights, where the buildings grow up and fall, and grow again, the woman with a voice like the rich, pure golden color of the Country landscape plunges the glowing heart of the city into her chest. She is alone in a city torn up from its roots, stark white and devoid of life. A woman may be an island, or a city, and that day she was both.

Back on the Fairview bridge, the one she had built with no history, just whim, the woman stares at the fertile ground of the empty city and understands that rebuilding will be planting the seeds anew, but that nothing will remain, the way a landscape after a fire is the richest.

I am turning my back on this story. I am turning my back on an empty city built from the roots up. This is all that remains: Two corpses side by side, fingers entwined. A woman with a voice like golden honey and a man with dark hair and a voice that isn't quite his, anymore, and a jacket still stained with his blood and hers, the two of them holding hands forever beneath the clear sky of the Country.

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End Notes

Title inspired by a line from "Snow and Dirty Rain" by Richard Siken:

"This is the map of my heart, the landscape
after cruelty which is, of course, a garden"

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