

**BE HERE
TO LOVE ME
AT THE
END OF THE
WORLD**

SASHA FLETCHER

 **MELVILLE HOUSE**
BROOKLYN • LONDON

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@melvillehouse

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IT'S BROOKLYN. It's winter. It's so cold outside that you could execute billionaires in the street and it hasn't even snowed. In the aisles of the supermarket, the landlords gather. The sun has gone down and all around is darkness. It is 4:30 at night on a Sunday afternoon. People've wrapped the bare and shaking trees that line the streets in Christmas lights. It's almost beautiful. Sam and Eleanor are sitting in a bar. Later, Eleanor'll ask him to tell her a story. Later, tanks will roll through the streets. The sky will look like you've never seen it before. It'll look like a movie. It'll change your life. Then there'll be a history lesson, followed by a reasonably good dinner, but after that, it's the end of the world.

Meanwhile, Eleanor and Sam are in love, they live together and everything, and it's been a long week of missed deadlines and unread invoices and, as I mentioned, no snow, so they went out for a drink and, wouldn't you know it!, the moment Sam walked into the bar at 4:30 at night on a Sunday afternoon, snow fell, hip high, from the sky, and it just kept falling and falling and falling until, one day, far in the distant future, it stopped. Eleanor was already at the bar, waiting for him. She went out to look for a book she really wanted, about all the different times the world ended due to total disaster and ecological collapse, and Sam had some emails to send regarding invoices. I should let you know that Sam had maybe three or four outstanding invoices that would each cover rent for a month but not one of them had been paid yet, it really looked, according to the software Sam had installed to see if his emails had been opened, like those emails he had sent

were just sitting there, unopened, and this caused Sam a good deal of distress, to know that he could easily make rent and maybe even take Eleanor out for dinner if people would just pay him the money they owed him for the work they'd contracted him to do, but they had not yet done this, and it gave Sam a very bad feeling inside. Not having money is a very very bad feeling to have, and I hope you never have to have it. As Sam opens the door to the bar his glasses fog up, he can't see a single thing, and he realizes, in this moment, that maybe what he should do is not put INVOICE as the subject, and instead he should act as though he was about to do some free work for them, and then they open the promised sample, and look, it is not a sample at all, but an invoice!, and proof that it has been seen! This is a good plan, to scam his way into being paid for the work he has done, he thinks, as Eleanor says, "Sam!" and he smiles with his whole face. Today, in New York City, the cops shot fifteen unarmed people, and two armed people.

So now, for the first time all winter, it's snowing.

Outside, the snow is now falling with such heaviness it sets off car alarms, which are then muffled by the weight and depth of the snow covering the cars like a blanket or a body or the end of the movie. Sam takes his fogged-up glasses off, and he looks around, and he blinks as Eleanor takes his hand and he sits down beside her.

So now Sam and Eleanor are sitting at the bar while outside the snow falls and falls, they're talking about how, while

Sam was walking over to the bar with his phone in his pants under his parka, where he could not reach it to see, the President told everyone that it was possible a nuclear missile was going to hit New York. Everyone in the bar is talking about it and Sam just wants a drink.

It's a hundred years later. The clouds are gone, everything's on fire, and the air's fucked. For the next hundred years, hurricanes the size of Texas rip across the continent, spitting up the boiling ocean and the rotting husks of everything that ever died all over your lawns. A thousand years later, birds show up. They grow bigger and bigger and bigger. Ten thousand years later their wingspans are the size of houses. They tear at the earth, and they eat up your dreams, and they weep. You can track the promises we made to each other each time we crawled out of the sea whenever you look to the sky. Next time will be so different.

Sam and Eleanor are walking home from the bar. It is freezing! Eleanor burrows into him for warmth. "I will wear your skin like a hot wet blanket to save me from this weather!," she says to him, "Baby, I will carry you with me for all of my days." They make it home to their rent-stabilized two-bedroom in Crown Heights, where the second bedroom is big enough for a very small child (who can't even pay rent, the child, any child!, because in 1938 America passed the Fair Labor Standards Act, which restricted children under sixteen from working in manufacturing and mining, and in 1941 it

was mandated as constitutional by the Supreme Court, and anyway the quote unquote second bedroom is absolutely too small for a sixteen-year-old, but it's great for an office), and they take off all their clothes and they crawl, together, naked, into bed.

The streetlights come on. The snow is falling so heavy that all you can see is the snow, and the lights, and the night.

As the city sleeps, the subways begin their slow march towards service failure. Everyone in New York City dreams about a nuclear missile turning the sky green, and screaming. They dream about new civilizations, a wholly new humanity composed of pure thought winding their way to the heavens from the subway tunnels where their dreams were born, they dream of Yankee Stadium's last stand, the final slugger, stepping up to knock the nuke out of the park and into the sun, the final grave, they dream, they scream, in their dreams, they cry. I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this. Take a sip of water, please, and just close your eyes. In the morning, it'll all be so different. I promise.

It's morning. Eleanor's awake, and propped up on one arm. It is a good arm. It is the best arm. She turns to Sam, who is absolutely not awake, in their bedroom, with its light-blocking curtains, for Sam is a shit sleeper. "Sam," says Eleanor, "I think that it isn't that a nuke is going to be dropped on New York. I mean I know that's what the President is saying, I know that's what the news is saying, but I feel like because

they're saying it, I think everyone would see it coming, I think it would be scarier, I think it would be in a van, I think the reputation of vans will never recover, and I think that's really sad." Sam makes a noise, Eleanor pokes him, and Sam, eyes closed, says, "I think there should probably be a fallout shelter in the building, right? It used to be a hospital?" Sam opens one eye. Eleanor says to Sam, "This is absolutely something to look into, Sam." Sam opens the other eye. He loves her very much, and he is so very tired. Soon, Sam is going to look into this! What will he find? I'll tell you when he finds it! Later, it'll be dinner time, which is Sam's time to shine. Later, Eleanor will lean into him on the couch, which is the most expensive thing they have ever bought, and the first thing they ever bought together, which is another story I'll tell you, later, I promise, and she'll sigh, a really happy sigh, and put her hand on the couch, and feel how soft it is, how well it holds them, and she'll lean into Sam, and sigh, and he'll kiss her, right on the head. Soon I'll tell you all about it. At some point, the President is going to make some absolutely wild announcements that will only end in doom, which is a sentence no one has ever said before in the history of America, and I would know, because I looked it up, and I would never ever make up a story just to prove a point. Every night there will be dinner. Not in America, because of income inequality, but here, in the apartment where Sam and Eleanor live together, because Sam loves to cook Eleanor dinner, and to sit down together at the table they bought together, and to eat this dinner, together, as, outside the window, the snow falls.

Up in Heaven are the angels and then the rest of us are just here.

Maybe there are some things I should tell you first, while we're just here. I should probably tell you, while we're just here, that I'm telling you this story about Sam and Eleanor, and, as I'm telling you this story, sometimes I just want to talk to you, directly, outside of the story, and also inside the story, and so sometimes I can't remember the order things in the story happened, and sometimes it's important to hear them out of order because that's what the story needs, and anyway I'm doing the best I can with it, and trying to stay as true as I can to the heart of it. I'm doing the best I can. And I am so incredibly sorry if it's not enough. I just don't know how else to do this. And anyway this is a great time for the camera, the narrative, whatever, to zoom out, and for me to tell you about Sam and Eleanor.

Close your eyes. Picture a lake, with a beach, surrounded on all sides by trees, and grass, and cabins. Try to smell the water, and the grass, and see if you can tell if the grills are lit, and see if you can smell the sunscreen, and the sweat on your upper lip, and the beat of your heart.

The sun is out, the grass is green, your hair looks great, and you smell amazing.

Welcome to summer camp.

Sam and Eleanor met at summer camp. This was years ago. The sun was out and the grass was green and out on the lake were the canoes and on the shores was a cookout and even the air smelled alive. Earlier there had been a mock trial, and later everyone would really learn something. Meanwhile, there are hot dogs. Sam and Eleanor stand close enough to be holding hands, and then they are. After that, the sky splits open. It's a good start! It's a premise, at least.

Everyone's always writing letters at summer camp.

They're writing them in their bunks they're writing them at their desks they're writing them on hikes on paper on the backs of their knees where the skin is so smooth the ink just slides right off as you hike up your shorts, out there, in the woods, where we keep what's left of the mysteries. The greatest thing about summer camp is that nothing is like anything else and everything is covered in sweat and nothing, *not one single thing*, outside of this moment is real or of any actual consequence.

There's a lake. There's activities. There's the woods, where we keep what's left of the mysteries, stacked one on top of the other. In the woods things get stacked, one on top of the other. I don't know why. I'm not the woods. It has something to do, I think, with trees, and with the ways they can menace, how stacking things like mysteries or wolves one on top of the other forever in between the trees that were there when you were born and will be there when you die, cold, alone, hav-

ing done nothing anyone will remember in fifty years, these trees that will still be standing, assuming the camp hasn't been turned into a golf course that will cost between \$5,000 in the northern and easternmost states and \$107,800 in the southwestern ones to keep watered every single year while small groups of people stand on them for no more than four hours at a time. It happens all over. The average golf course is maybe 150 acres, which amounts to about ninety-four city blocks. And none of this matters at summer camp! This is the beauty of summer camp! If the counselors weren't busy having rich inner lives, maybe things would be different, but they're not different, and wondering what things would be like if they were different really doesn't do any good, now does it? That's why there's a cookout. And activities. That's why the trees keep inching closer together. This is maybe the only time one thing is like something else at summer camp, is whenever the trees start to move.

Sam and Eleanor's parents worked hard to be able to afford to send their kids to summer camp in the summer so that said kids would have something to do, yes, but also so that their kids'd be out of the house and they, their parents, could, maybe!, for a little bit!, enjoy the summer for themselves and themselves alone for the first time in years. They missed their kids and all but as a parent it gets exhausting to be a parent. It's endless labor, more or less. And, again, your kids aren't paying their share of the rent. So Sam and Eleanor're at summer camp, they've been flirting for years and writing letters during the school year, like you do, but they've kept it up,

which, as you know, dear reader, that's notable. That's a thing you notice. And so their hands noticed the other's, and were held, as the sky split open.

It is absolutely a fact that watching your whole entire summer camp drown in a lake during a storm straight out of the Bible is a deeply upsetting thing.

Years pass over days, days pass over years, whenever it was, this is what happens after. They wake up in their beds, at home. Their parents are weeping. Their sheets are soaked. I can't tell you how long it'll take to not feel like the world is falling down. And then, one day, the world stops falling down. Sometimes it works like that.

Sometimes it doesn't.

And, again, the years pass! They pass over high school over college over graduate school over parties over sex over the first time and how tender a mistake it is (Eleanor) and sudden and awkward and ecstatic it is (Sam) they pass over so many graduations and heartbreaks, over hunger and warmth, the years pass over snowstorms and squalls, they pass they pass they pass they pass, until, one day!, after the sky split open, but before the snow started falling, let's say this is five years ago, Sam walked into a party in Brooklyn one summer and there was Eleanor. "Hey," he said, "remember when the sky split open?" And then a light came on, and the sky split open.

Eleanor would tell him, at some point, that the thing about that night, back when the sky cracked, was that it was nice to remember what it's like to not know if the world will still be there in the morning. Sam had something he wanted to say but he couldn't figure out how to say it, and so his heart set itself on fire in his chest, and grew wings, and a crown. I'm trying to tell you that this was always going to happen, that it was always going to be beautiful, and beset on all sides by a sudden and certain doom. That's what I'm trying to tell you, here. That's pretty much the whole point. Meanwhile whole years pass. We shed so many cells. We've said so many things we'll never remember. But here you are. "Sam," said Eleanor at night, very early on, like maybe six months after that party, while they were laying on top of Eleanor's bed in her studio apartment with the bathroom that was as big as the rest of the apartment, it was an incredible bathroom, and she never again has a bathroom this nice, and a part of her will never let that go, and that's fine, "Sam,