

Reflecting the Surface of You: A Relationship set to “Finally, Peace”

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With glittering hands

On collapsible land

The first song you ever sent to me after we admitted we were in love with each other and spent days learning the topography of each other's bodies, as you dropped me off at LAX and drove back to your house that would be our house, was "Saved" by Swans. This is not "Saved" but that was the song you sent. You told me once Swans was the first band that made you feel something maybe hot and electric in your sternum. I sobbed as I listened to it, looking up the lyrics, sitting in the JetBlue terminal, feeling foolish. I already missed the way your hand held my hand, your big hands, your long fingers.

Sometimes now we wake up and if I turn to face you the sun does peek through the slits of the blinds and you say to me "You look like a creature from heaven". Anyway, that was the first Swans song I ever heard.
But this isn't it.

We're praising the sun

For the damage he's done

In Massachusetts, I miss the always-sun of California, where every day feels and smells like fall or summer. Even if it is snowing and I love the snow so much and the cold and how sometimes it is so cold it makes me cough and my cheeks burn red, even if it's like that I don't feel ok. I stand on my three-season porch and look out to the dead-end street and it's two a.m. and everything is quiet.

I bought this house because I thought that was what I was supposed to do but even though I fell in love with it, this little bungalow, even though Aidan could rest his head in his own room every day and feel safe, I am not happy.

I am afraid to admit this. I try to lie to myself and say I wanted this, the kind neighbors and the cat that comes from next door and hangs out with me— his name is George— but I know I don't want this and instead of just admitting it I fall deep into depression. Though we talk every day and you're the only one I talk to now I don't want to tell you that every night I stare at my bottle of 90 Klonopin wondering if I should just die.

A ruinous eyesore

Oh, what is the world for?

Once you took me to a bar and I wore my black dress that's now your favorite dress, the one with the low neckline, and I wore my best bra and black tights and maybe even heels. I don't remember what I wore for shoes. My hands were shaking

Swans

"Finally, Peace"

The Gate

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Young God Records

waiting for you to get me. I don't remember what I drank. I don't remember what bar it was. I know I was trying to flirt while not flirting, and I wanted so badly for you to press me up against the hood of your ancient Jeep, leaking transmission fluid, sputtering loud when you drive it, I wanted you to push me up against the hood and kiss me but you didn't. Instead we went back to your place and watched *Marwencol*, a war zone in a back yard, a damaged mind, and I laid next to you on the couch and played with your hair. You didn't understand and went to bed alone and I slept on the couch alone. The next morning I wrote in my journal that I wished there were two "me"s, one for Massachusetts and one for California, and then I masturbated, wishing you would wake up, wishing I was brave enough to wake you up.

*Just a knife in a lake
Just an arrow in space.*

I got drunk at a bar that only served beer; I snuck in vodka in two Polar seltzer bottles and I should not have drank so much, but I did. I didn't have insurance yet and I was cutting my meds in half. My bipolar was out of control. You always say my friends tell you how bad I was before we became a thing. You always say you don't understand what they're talking about because you've never seen me desperate and wild and broken the way they have told you. I can get very dark, and you said you could handle it. So I went to this bar with my contraband vodka and I went to a dark place, a place where I want to be dead and take everyone with me, and to get even with you for the anger I felt—this anger of you loving me, this anger that comes from nowhere and makes no sense— I sat on the edge of the tub and carved four even lines in the space above my right knee, and then I came out to show you and I think you were slightly panicked but you bandaged me up. Even to this day I do not know where you hid the pocketknife I used. The scars faded, my medication situation got fixed, my manic episode ended, and now we don't talk about it, maybe we've even forgotten about it.

*All creation is hollow
And a picture's a shadow*

You tell me Michael Gira has been accused of rape. I am not even as big a Swans fan as you are but I still struggle with this information. We saw him in concert in Boston and he was very greasy, like he hadn't washed his hair in weeks, and I thought to myself later, yeah, maybe I could see that. Not that a rapist looks specific in a way, but I think by now I can trust the gut feelings that come from sizing someone up as a predator. I don't like supporting rapists and I know that if I am struggling with this as a casual Swans fan, you must be torn with the knowledge that someone who has meant so much to you is probably a monster.

I don't tell you that I just assume everyone's a monster. It's easier that way.

*Just a symptom of love
With a lack of a cause*

I hate the thought of you with anyone else, that hitch-hitch of your breath in someone else's ear, your mouth on someone else's mouth. I hate the thought

of me with anyone else, even though you never ask about it and I bet
you never think about it. I don't know why I feel this way; it's a feeling I haven't had
in the better part of twenty years. I'm like a jealous teenager.

To make things easier, we agree to pretend our lives started with each other,
and we rarely talk about our pasts, even though truthfully
I can't help but think about yours.

In bed some nights, we listen to Swans. It is louder than we are.
I am sure the neighbors appreciate this kindness. In bed is the only time
my brain doesn't get carried away with self- sabotage. I need you
crushing me to block out all the bad things.

*Now the city's dissolving
And heaven's inhaling*

Los Angeles is folding in on itself. It is self-destructing.
Everyone is on edge here, trying to keep a straight face,
grimacing through their teeth.

Still, I can't help but feel a warmth in my chest
when I drive home and see the city blanketed before me,
an ocean of lights. I know the first time I thought of California as home
was when I first flew back to Massachusetts, before I met you.
I wouldn't want to be in this city without you, though. You're what makes it home.

I know the first time you thought of California as home you were standing
on that one marble square at the Grove that is darker than the rest, watching
the people coming and going, their shoulders jostling you
as they squeezed by you. This was before you met me.
You shared this memory with me, and now when we go to the Grove
we always stop there, even for a moment, to kiss.

*While the ocean is thinking
Of the surface reflecting*

The first time I stood at the ocean with you we were cold
and tipsy and I told you I was afraid. Afraid of what being in love with you meant,
afraid of how to face the world back home without you. Now, we take weekend afternoons
and drive to Leo Carillo and have a picnic and look at the tide pools. We get sunburned
because we are lazy about sunscreen. We go as often as we can. And, because
it's California, because of heat waves that seem never ending,
Aidan can swim in the Pacific even in early fall while back east
everyone is already putting plastic on the windows and turning on thermostats.
You and he wrestle in the sand. He has become a son to you so quickly.

In October we got married on the beach. The breeze blew your hair
so in every picture outdoors you look goofy, like a member
of Flock of Seagulls, which, I guess, is appropriate. The waves crashed
and crashed again, bearing witness, and when you read your vows your voice shook.

Your glorious mind
Your glorious mind

Sometimes
I like to put my hands on either side of your face and put my forehead to your forehead.
I think of how I love you, how complete you've made me.
How safe I am with you. I think of how brilliant you are.
How your loud laugh intoxicates me just as much as that first day. How
every time we fuck it's like the first time, so perfect no one would believe
us if we told them. How my head on your chest comforts me. I think
of how you look when you're sleeping, your hand cradling your shoulder
and your little twitches. I think, I love you, I love you, I love you.

I hope, in these moments, that you can read my thoughts.
I think it's the only way you'll really know the extent of what you are to me.

Your glorious mind
Your glorious mind

There is, finally, peace.

Lyrics: "Finally Peace", Michael Gira 2016
For Fritz, naturally