

THE QUARRY

Running On

Aleksandra Zaskalkina

CW: Swearing, sexual content, emotional abuse

i remember

the gallery through the trees

It was a warm and sunny Valentine's Day. He held fast to her hand as they walked. Her grip was lax, distracted. He gripped harder.

'The things I do for you,' he joked. 'Going to a gallery for Valentine's.'

'I'm sorry,' she said quietly, quickly.

He gave her a noncommittal shrug. 'You wanted to come here, so why not, I guess.' That conversation ended there.

saying how much it meant to me

‘That was so boring,’ he said, as they left the sandstone building. ‘Half of that was just some weird shit stuck together. It sucked!’

‘Just because you don’t understand it, doesn’t make it suck,’ she said quietly, as they crossed the road back into the park.

‘But it was so stupid!’

She shrugged in response. ‘I liked it,’ she said quietly.

‘Well then you’re stupid.’

*

riding trains, running trains, stopping trains, going trains

His hands were gripping hers once more. The carriage swayed and shook as the train ran on past station after station. The sun was holding out and shining in through the windows, brightening her blue denim dress and his icy blue eyes.

‘Did you have fun today?’ he asked gently.

She nodded in response and did her best to smile softly at him. He seemed satisfied and she looked back out the window, watching cracked and decrepit buildings dart past.

overgrown old buildings flowing into meadows, into flowers

my childhood hands pick them, small fingers weaving a crown

i seem to have lost it

*

‘You said sex wasn’t that big a deal for you!’ he half yelled in his annoyance.

She was laying half-naked on the bed, trembling like a leaf, as he withdrew his hand.

‘Every time with this shit!’ He leaned in close to her face and stared straight into her eyes. ‘Do you even love me?’ He sounded so wounded, so lost, like she had ripped his very heart out.

‘Of course I do.’ Her voice was small compared to his giant.

‘Then what’s the problem?’ he asked, innocently trailing his hands up her body.

She didn’t want him to, but she loved him, but she didn’t want him to. But his hands were soft and strong, but she still didn’t want him to.

He tried to kiss her. She twisted her head away, nose planted firmly into the pillow. His lips sealed and seared on her neck. She shuddered in a rattling breath.

gilded pillows in my gilded cage

rich green flower pattern carpets covering the stone ground

you trapping me in the sheets, i wanted to escape

*

‘Why can’t we be like that?’ he asked, poking her playfully in the side.

They were watching a movie on his TV, at his house, laying on his bed. His arms like bands around her. The couple on screen was cuddling happy in white sheets in a haze of post orgasmic bliss. Their smiles painted on their faces in ways that only an actor’s brushwork could achieve.

She looked up at him to see that he was smiling softly at her. It was a joke. It was always a joke. She smiled at him and dragged her eyes back to the screen, silently thankful to the world that the couple there had gotten out of bed.

*

you ran a carnival where i was the attraction

that gilded cage at centre stage surrounded by your eyes

to keep me in a convenient place

‘Hey,’ she said, coming up to stand next to him.

‘Hey,’ he said dismissively, ‘I’m talking to people.’ He gestured at the group around them.

They waved at her and said hello. They were polite. He was not.

‘Could you come back later?’

‘Um,’ a split second of hesitation, ‘I need to talk to you though.’ Insistence was not her strong suit, but she did try.

‘We can talk later. I’ll come find you,’ he said, waving his hand over his shoulder.

‘I’ll just hang around here,’ she beamed at him. ‘‘Cos, you know, you did say...’ she trailed off and looked up at him. He did say that he wanted her to hang around his friends more.

He did not look impressed, his smile almost a sneer as he spoke. ‘Aren’t your friends going to be missing you?’

‘Um...’ She looked away from him, down to the ground, giving a submissive nod. ‘Yeah, I guess. I’ll be in the library.’ Her voice was meek, quiet, afraid. She didn’t want another fight.

‘Aren’t you always?’ he laughed.

She drew in a breath and gave him the best smile she could muster, then turned around, and walked back to her place.

*

green spots, green leaves, green socks, green grass

Another sunny day lit up the grass on the fields. Surrounded by people. Surrounded by friends. Surrounded by light. It was a good day. He held her hand, and she his. They talked together. They laughed and kissed, and everyone called them cute.

She let go of his hand to take a drink and turned to talk to a friend. She and the friend talked about tea, and chocolate, and books they've both read. He looked on and grew cold. She laughed with the friend, and he walked away. She looked after him with concern. But her friend asked her a question, and she responded.

i spend days guessing, not knowing what you want

then days cursing myself for knowing all along that I cannot give

but you want and want and want

He came back when it was time to go and he grasped her hand again, so tight now that it hurt. Her friend walked on in front of them, and she turned to him.

'Hey, are you OK?' she asked.

'Yeah,' he replied too fast to be genuine. 'Why wouldn't I be?'

'You just kind of left without saying anything?' The words small and uncertain between them.

'Oh, I didn't know that I had to ask for your permission,' he muttered angrily, making her inch as much away as she could with his hand clamped on hers. 'Besides,' he continued, fixing her with his ice blue eyes and a disappointed slant to his lips, 'you looked like you were having fun talking to your friend. I wouldn't want to ruin that for you.'

She blinked at him, confused and afraid. She could feel the argument coming, could feel it breathing down her neck, tempting her to engage further.

And she did.

'That is complete bullshit and you know it.' Hers is a quiet rebellion.

He looked at her like she just slapped him. 'Are you saying that you didn't just completely ignore me for your friend?' he growled. They were among people once more and neither wanted to cause a scene as they descended the stairs into the station.

‘I wasn’t ignoring you,’ she hissed at him. ‘I spent half the day with you. I’m sorry you’re not the only person in my life.’

He threw her hand down and they came to a stop on the platform. ‘Can you not? You’re embarrassing me.’

She breathed heavily, looked at his face contorted in rage, his eyes burning with arctic fire. She breathed heavily, bit her tongue to not say all of the things that flashed through her head. She breathed heavily, turned around, and walked down the platform just as the train was arriving.

She apologised to him three days later.

i could not walk away from you

all i could do was hide in my own head, rebuilding a palace

i was once queen of this, but now

*

They were standing together under a covered walkway, hiding from the light drizzle the sky was gifting them that day.

‘I still don’t understand,’ he said, hands on her waist.

‘What don’t you understand?’ she asked playfully.

‘You always say sex isn’t that big of a deal for you.’

‘It’s not,’ she prompted, less happy, now knowing what he would say next.

‘But every time I try anything you always say no.’ He sounded hurt by the very idea.

She allowed herself a few moments where she could consider a new way to explain. ‘I just-’ There were so many reasons that she could list for him; his aggression, his control, her discomfort, but she could not get the words from her thought to her lips.

‘But you love me,’ he insisted, ‘don’t you?’

‘Of course I do,’ she nodded.

‘And it’s a way for two people show that they love each other.’ He tilted his head down and looked at her through his lashes. ‘And you refuse to show me that.’

Before she could respond, he was distracted by his friend walking past. His friend smiled at them, and kept going.

‘Great,’ he said bitterly, looking at his friend’s receding back.

‘What’s wrong?’ she asked, confused.

‘Now he’s going to give me shit ‘cos I haven’t had sex with you yet.’ He looked back at her, eyes slightly burning with a small spark of the annoyance, of that anger.

‘Oh,’ she looked down in embarrassment. ‘Sorry.’

i try to run, you always catch me

wrap your hands around me, drag me back to you and kiss me

i dread the marks you’ll leave

The sun was out by midday. They walked across the field. His arm was around her waist as they laughed together, playfully pushing each other. She tilted her head up in a laugh and saw a sky as blue as his eyes. She looked into those eyes that were smiling at her, and fell in love again.

She buried her face in his neck and he laughed, stroking her waist with a thumb, bringing his other hand to wrap around her, resting his palm on her back. Stopping, they looked at each other, smiling like fools, like they were in love. The moment, theirs. The world, theirs. This love, theirs.

They heard her friends calling her over, and the spell was broken as his expression soured.

She smiled at him apologetically. ‘I’ll be quick. They said they wanted to talk to me.’

He offered no response. He simply let go of her.

She missed the pressing warmth instantly, but she turned and began to jog towards her friends.

‘Oh no you don’t,’ is all the warning she got before arms ensnared her and pulled her back with a sharp tug.

The wind rushed out and the world was knocked off kilter. She stumbled back into him and he held fast, turning her around so fast she could feel the blood in her head slosh about. He sealed his lips on hers, cutting off the sound she was not certain she could make. She didn’t kiss back.

He let go of her with a smirk, sharp and pleased. She looked back at him, shy and small. His smirk cracked into a grin as he turned to look at her friends.

A quick smack to her ass left her red faced and panicky with embarrassment.

*

i know now you’re not good for me

i cannot help the sick dreading thrill that fills me

i think of you and i cannot

‘I’m just not getting what I want out of this relationship anymore.’

Words said quietly over a phone.

She sat there, trying with all her might to not let the first tear slip from her eyes. If one escapes, the dam will break.

‘What do you mean?’ She tried to keep her voice level and sure. She was almost sure she didn’t succeed.

‘It’s been months,’ his voice sounded strained from the other end, ‘and we still haven’t had sex.’

‘I don’t know what to tell you,’ she said quietly. She had many things to tell him, to cry at him, to scream at him. But none of them would save her right that moment, so she didn’t.

*

there has been time and time again

i think that i may lie and let you take and take again

but my torn crown won't let me

‘Hey,’ she says coming up to him.

‘Hey,’ he says confused. ‘What are you doing here?’

‘You said you wanted to talk?’

The sky was grey that day. A mirror image to his storm blue eyes.

‘Yeah,’ he said, uncertain. ‘Have you thought about what I asked you?’

‘Yes,’ she said, looking him straight in his eyes, trying to catalogue every detail of his face.

‘And?’ he prompted. ‘Can you give me what I need from you?’

‘No,’ she said, holding eye contact. Not backing away this time. Not this time. Not now.

‘Well then,’ he sighed, ‘that’s it.’

‘That’s it?’ she asked. It was not as big a blow as she thought it would be. She did not feel anything.

‘That’s it,’ he said firmly.

‘Okay.’

She walked away. She did not cry that day.

Those blue eyes. Ever pressing, ever present, like the sky above.

*

their arms around me now are yours

they do not understand why i shy away

i ran and ran and ran from you

i ran into my palace, my new crown waiting

i wear it now as i did then

i wear my crown, i am a queen

beating you back with an armada of thoughts

i tried and tried my best with you

i cried and cried my best with you

i let you

i let you

I let you no more.