Grace Over Fire

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Grace Over Fire

by Farla

Summary

It could've been a lot worse.

Notes

See the end of the work for notes

It could've been a lot worse.

The first few days were bad. Everywhere around was tripped alarms nobody could turn off, and gunshots, and fires and so much smoke.

I stayed put and stayed quiet. Even with all of us packed together in the city, one person being immune out of a thousand meant there couldn't be more than a few hundred living people in the first day. I don't think I ever saw another living person. There was gunfire, and sometimes there was screaming after the gunfire stopped, but that was always over soon.

I don't feel guilty. Melancholy, wistful... But I don't think anyone would've cared what I thought, and I didn't have much else to offer. I don't think I could've changed anything that happened.

I was scared of what was happening and scared I'd die if I went out and scared that I was going to die because I was too scared to go out while I still had a chance. That kind of thing was how everyone said it worked. The longer you waited the more dangerous it'd be. And all the food and stuff would be gone and you'd starve, that was how it went in zombie stories. Or they'd sense you somehow and all gather up around you until there was no way to ever escape. I thought about trying to sneak around, find places where they wouldn't be to stay safe... But then I thought, what if another survivor was already hiding there? What if they shot me by accident?

I think I'm alive now because I thought, if I have to start shooting people I should just shoot myself and get it over with. I've always been kind of a coward like that. I stayed put until long, long after it got quiet.

I know there's still other people alive too. Now and then I see cars on the road far away. But nobody's tried to come into the city in a long time. There were some broadcasts, but they all went silent pretty fast. I missed music, so I finally got into a station and set a channel of my own up, automated it, playing song after song. The directions said to keep the lines clear. But I figure if nobody else is broadcasting anything anymore, it's fine if I use just one channel.

It's lonely, but it could be a lot worse.

I never did anything with farming before except in videogames, but I have plenty of time to learn. When I'm trying to make sure my plants don't get stepped on, I tell myself, it's so much easier in real life than dealing with NPCs in Stardew! They don't want to smash up everything in their path. Angled and rounded sides and starting redirection a good distance off is all I have to do to funnel them around where I don't want them going. They only start pushing and shoving if they get stuck. And you know, you know, the whole big green is called the Commons, it's supposed to be for everybody, so it wouldn't be nice not sharing with anyone who wants to be here too.

Really, I'm only alive because of them. Like if people had only died, just dropped dead for good when they all got sick, and the streets were all still, if I were the last moving thing here for anyone to see - But with all of them around, I'm safe. I don't even feel scared leaving the

light on at night these days, even though it means someone can see I'm here. If one of those people driving by see it, they're not going to bother coming all the way in.

I do have fences, just in case, and the ladders. They're used to me doing things like hammering stuff together by now, but once I hit myself bad with a hammer and yelled and then - well you know. Every one of them in earshot was looking at me, and some of them - it was scary. I can't say it wasn't. But it isn't like, like they hadn't seen me and now they did and they'd been wanting to hunt me down the whole time, and it wasn't like they lost track of me again when I stayed quiet. They calmed back down.

I don't think it's quite that it makes them violent, like the news said. I think they just don't understand what's happening anymore. I mean, you think about the kind of stuff that gets them agitated and it's, I mean it's stuff that could upset anyone. When there were guns going off the sound scared me too, and I wasn't even anywhere near. Sometimes I imagine what it'd be like if I could only see one piece of the world at a time: someone is hurt, someone is screaming, someone is bleeding, someone is cursing. Something's wrong and you don't understand what. That can happen to people, and maybe it's what happened to them.

And they - you know, they can forgive you. I think that's what matters. Somebody on the radio in the first month was saying they were just like bugs now, whoever had been there was gone and there was nothing anymore but a body, that you have to kill every one of them you could because every one of them could kill people - bugs have feelings too. They're not human but bugs have feelings too. They don't like if I grab them. They get frustrated so fast. They can't understand I'm trying to get them free from where they're stuck. But I can let go after and they'll stop trying to bite and calm down again. They'll forgive me. You know, there was some robot thing, an art installment, where there were two robots and they'd start off saying nice things but then one would misunderstand something and say something mean back then the other'd say something mean to that until they hated each other, and I thought that was so sad and awful, but that's not how any real things work. Real things forgive. Cats forgive and wasps forgive and they forgive. They don't understand why I do things that upset them sometimes, and I don't understand them all that well either, but the most important thing is we can give each other grace.

End Notes

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