

it has no future but itself

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by [signalbeam](#)

Summary

A month before the end, Dave takes Rose to California for a vacation. Carpe fucking diem.

A month before their showdown with her Imperial Fishface, Dave took her to California. Most of it had sunk, but he had a house on a rocky part of the northern coast, about two hours from San Francisco by car.

One of the benefits of the world ending and the only form of long-distance transportation being a jpeg rocket skateboard was that it was only half an hour from San Francisco by air. She perched on the end of the skateboard, a bored expression on her face as they surfed over blackened forests and towns. It had been weeks since she bothered to find ways to call the skateboard gaudy, or obvious, or sure proof that there was no god, had never been a god, for no god would allow such a mockery of creation and all four-wheeled, twin-jetted objects to come into being. Well, s'up, god, I've just made you my bitch, he thought, and didn't think about the names of the towns and forests, so many of them, and so far away.

The beach was protected by two things: its totally shitty location, and a massive rock wall that encircled the area in a black embrace. It hadn't changed much. Even in the sun, the sand was wet and clumpy, and stank of rotting seaweed and birdshit, and the water was just a shade bluer than its usual ugly gray. While he was gone, a goddamn seal had washed up by the rocks, still fat, and now surrounded by gulls. Tucked away on a far corner near the rock wall was his house.

"A colonial," she said while he tried and miserably failed to remember where he had stashed the spare key. "No wonder no one's come to plunder your abode over these long years. They feared the New England draftiness."

He hacked the doorknob off with his sword.

"After you, milady," he said, extending his arm to her. At another point of his life, this would have made him look like a total douchenozzle, but he had gray hairs now, and he was too badly in love with her for her to judge him too harshly.

He took survey of the house. No one had been in here in years. Plastic sheets covered the furniture and rugs. The generator still worked, and the water still ran. Sometimes he'd catch her perfume—jasmine blossoms—floating over the scent of dust and leather and air freshener, and he'd get the distinct impression of being hunted by something scarier than the Batterwitch and her clown thugs. He'd look behind him, and see her peering at a poster of *Holla Hella Jeffa 3*, and feel relaxed; then he'd turn, and he'd feel it again, that subtle terror pressed against his neck.

They decided to take a bath in the master bathroom. He scrubbed out the grime while she was changing in the bedroom, dug up some soap from the closet, even found a half-open tube of toothpaste. He even found his old stash of candles, from when he had bought a shit ton of them because he thought it'd be romantic but said it was for crap like earthquake preparedness, and lit them all with a match. The light was eerie in the mirror, reflecting in odd ways and leaving whole swaths of the room unlit. He felt uneasy, as though he was in the most unfathomable kind of danger, so horrible he had no hope of even imagining what it might be. The feeling only worsened as he stripped down to his boxers. He sat on the edge of the bath, and tried to remind himself that he was Dave Strider, slayer of presidents and clowns, routine

banger of dudely gentlemen and badass ladies, suave motherfucker who felt like he had to pass out whenever Rose freaking Lalonde wore dresses that showed her knees.

The bath was half full, and Rose still had not finished changing. What was with her, he wondered, and went out to see her. He found her sitting on the mattress with the window open, sea stink blowing in and rustling her old silk robe and the mattress' plastic cover. She had tossed it on the floor instead of trying to fold it. She was writing in her journal with blue ink—the true sign of the apocalypse, she had said once—and when he entered, she shut the journal.

“Come on,” he said. “I go through all the trouble of running a goddamn bath and you’re all, ‘dear diary, it’s me, Margaret. I must, I must increase my bust.’”

“You’ve forgotten that I’m Satan. Nothing more than your bloodied heart cut fresh from your chest can summon me,” she said. “But lacking that, I will even accept a, ‘Hey, Rose, what up,’ shouted from the distant lands of your bathroom.”

She drew her robe around her as she stood. The robe, she had told him once, had been her mother’s. What mom, he had said, and she replied, That’s just what I tell people. She used to talk about children. A few years ago, she took him down to Houston, and told him that she’d cast a spell to seal his apartment for the next four hundred years. They stocked it with orange soda and shitty junk food, enough to last sixteen years. “Only sixteen?” he said. “Way to have faith in our future hellspawn.”

“It’ll be enough time,” she said, and had him take her rifle shopping.

When he first met her, she had a nursery next to her study, but as the years went by, she packed the things away and replaced them with more and more paper: paper in boxes, paper in cabinets, paper thumbtacked onto the walls. Diagrams, charts, random ass notes about her novel that she left up there, long after her publishing company in New York got taken over by the propaganda goons, long after there were no stores or people to read her stories. The last time they had gone east had been to seal away her house. Then it was back west to gather the last of their people to make a stand against the troll witch. It had been weeks since they began, and they were the only ones alive.

Now it was them in a house on a beach, Rose looking as though she was slowly fading away, and him with his head buzzing with a slow, adrenaline-fueled panic, as though the force of his desire might keep her with him. The future she talked about, four hundred years from now, seemed more real than this house or the crystalline fragility of this moment. Looked through another lens, they could be two lovers sneaking away from Hollywood for a weekend, or the last survivors of the human race in some zombie movie, or an old, married couple enjoying one another; but the light slipped and it was nothing but the two of them, a dead seal on the beach, and a sky that looked as though it had given up on them years before.

She extended her hand to him, and he took it and let himself be led to the bathroom. The robe slipped, revealing the faint browning spots on her otherwise stark white shoulder, the top of her breasts; she shrugged it back into place.

The bath was full when they arrived. He turned off the water, took his boxers off, and sank in. She tossed her robe into the sink, and joined him. As she entered, some of the water spilled over the edge, rolling over the porcelain like billions of molecular lemmings. They watched the growing puddle forming on the floor, her fascinated by the light from the candles or some flowery shit like that, and him by the sharp curve of her shoulder blade, the freckles on her arm that, when he looked closer, were sunspots instead. This wasn't their time, he knew; but in thinking this, understood there was another time for them visible in their pooling flickering, candlelit reflection, a time as subtle as the press of eyelashes against each other, a time as fleeting and final as the flare of gunpowder igniting, with no one left to see it.

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