

# AS THEIR EYES TOUCHED GOD

Robin Gillespie

I HEARD SUSAN'S SMALL SIGH BEFORE SHE SAT BESIDE ME, SO I made room for her on the roof. A man behind us wept softly; she turned, giving him a small, encouraging smile.

"Mister Valeda," she muttered, when I didn't check to see.

"506?"

She nodded. "His wife shot herself this afternoon."

I winced but didn't answer right away. Screams and gunshots had been commonplace the last twenty hours and it had sounded like the damn Fourth of July. "Is anyone next to him?"

"Mark Jennings from 508. Mark's wife up and left, taking the kids 'somewhere.'"

"Somewhere." I laughed; it was an ugly, barking sound and Susan gently squeezed my hand. Her thumb wiped across my cheek and only then did I notice my tears.

Susan snuggled close. I rubbed her shoulder, grateful for her small comfort, and only then was I brave enough to glance around the roof. The crowds of people surrounding us surprised me.

"Wow."

"You were very persuasive."

I shook my head. "No. I was just tired of hearing gunshots, crying, and arguing. Really, what's the point now?"

"Well, you know *you*," she sighed. I kissed her softly on the cheek and she smiled. "You wanted everyone to be together, and nearly everyone who heard you yelling down the hall came up."

"I plead temporary insanity." I chuckled, but took my cell from my pocket and rubbed it absently. I thought about throwing it over the roof but quickly changed my mind; it could ring. It *might* ring. Even though all my family lived in on the East Coast, it could ring again.

Susan cupped my hand, covering the display, covering the time. "Have you heard from anyone in the past few hours?"

"No," I said sadly. Susan had read me and simultaneously stilled my thoughts. "But I guess I heard from everyone. Even

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*She nodded,  
then asked the question  
neither of us wanted to hear:  
"How much time?"*

*I bit my lower lip.  
"Maybe twenty more minutes."*

heard from some old college and high school friends, if you can believe that. I wasn't *that* popular."

She nodded, then asked the question neither of us wanted to hear: "How much time?"

I bit my lower lip. "Maybe twenty more minutes." Her voice quivered. "I talked to Mom a few hours ago." That surprised me; she hadn't told me. "I guess she thought ten years was enough time and we needed to bury the hatchet. She never did forgive me for marrying a black man." I smiled at her again and squeezed her shoulder. "It was nice talking to her. She wished you well, actually."

I smirked. "Well, well. First time for everything, Suze." I felt my smile shrink. "Did she stay on the phone with you?"

Susan nodded. She looked down at her nails and I gently rubbed her thumbs. "Until the very end. She said it looked like an electrical storm without the sound—or maybe an extra long aurora borealis."

"Tim said the same thing. He said it was beautiful, and I heard him start crying before..."

"Yeah. That's what they say. That it's beautiful."

A small wind from the west began picking up, and I could smell the California coast. Funny, I thought we were too far from the ocean. We'd made love for hours, Susan and I. We were ready, we'd said. Resignation had set in as cell phone and TV signals died, one by one, and finally even land lines winked out, like the world taking its knowing secrets into the unknown.

Of course there had been panic and pandemonium and death and chaos, and the churches rang with noisy prayers. But after a few hours of each area slowly passing like a novel's end, the quiet had set in. Those who knew, those who had settled it inside themselves, came to the full knowledge that the unknown had a beauty all its own. So why fear it?

"Look," Susan said. Her voice hitched as a curtain of purples, blues, yellows, and greens swept over the farthest curve of the earth. We heard a few brief screams in the distance, but they almost sounded like screams of joy.

*"Tim said the same thing.  
He said it was beautiful,  
and I heard him  
start crying before..."*

*"Yeah. That's what they say.  
That it's beautiful."*

“Father have mercy,” Mr. Valeda prayed; I nodded.

“This *is* his mercy,” I whispered, as the silken banner wiped through the city. I watched; no stars, no moon—nothing appeared behind the curtain. It was truly blank.

And it was beautiful.

*Not with a bang*, I thought absently. *Not with a bang*.

“I love you,” Susan murmured.

I smiled back at her. “I love you too.”

Then we held our breaths, and waited. ☹️

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Artwork: The Aurora Australis as seen from Skylab 3.  
Photo courtesy of R. Overmyer, NASA.

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## ROBIN GILLESPIE



When she's not tapping away on her computer finding interesting new websites, Robin sometimes finds time to write, [blog](#), and finish her grad work. She's actually found time away from her busy internet trolling to adapt two stories for graphic novel publishers (The Wood Boy - The Burning Man and Lords Of Avalon: Sword Of Darkness HC) and she occasionally works on scripts for comic books. But rumor has it, she totally zones out when she's gaming, and World of Warcraft is her current boyfriend. (Her chihuahua hates him.)