Our Conversation

It must be tough for Maddie, coming back home after so long, and to see the house in such a state. Beating a setting sun, their two-door bumps along a gravel driveway up to a house about appropriate size for the standard midwestern family. Slamming shut the driver-side door, Nick noticed that the quaint, blue siding was chipping. Dilapidated was the word; gutters were loosely hanging or missing, and the attic window pane was shattered in. But, it stood. So did Maddie, next to the passenger side door of the car, the side closest to the house. Nick met her there, and whispered some question in her ear, to which she nodded. They walk up the driveway. Maddie fumbled with the key.

“I feel like I’ve got a headache coming on.”

“Maybe you’re tired, I can make up a bed for you once we’re inside.” *Clank!* The bolt jumped back; the two of them stepped in. The room opened up to a living room on the right, a dining room on the left, and stairs going up straight ahead. Nick moved toward the living room, testing and cleaning the pillows, couches and chairs. Above them all hung pictures of Maddie’s old family, with a few of them featuring little Maddie herself. The photos in their frames seem distant though.

Leaning on a wall, Maddie frowned, “Do you see these pictures? I hate to think about where these people are now.”

Nick glanced at her, with a look of worry, but quickly got back to his work, “Did your parents remember much before this government?”

“No, I don’t think so. They talked about how scared they were when they saw the misery laws enforced against friends. They were always so scared. If they did remember anything they wouldn’t tell us.”

“This government does like to spread its fear. It’s like they’ve managed to erase the history before it, but my parents remembered some of it. They love to tell this story about missionaries, regular people who dedicated their lives to go somewhere they thought they could help. And they’d stay there and help, often for the rest of their lives. They’d just up and abandon their life for the sake of someone else.”

“That is very illegal now.” Maddie’s response was short to the point of terse. Nick glanced back up at her.

“Yeah it is. Um, but, it’s not perfect, but I cleaned up this couch as best as I could, if you want to lay down while I try to get some food together.”

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The next morning they started, and early. By 7:30 AM every corner on the main level had been searched, and by their lunch break every box in the basement was upturned. Hungry and tired, they put two grilled cheeses on the stove. Nick tended to the browning bread while Maddie sat hunched on the counter, thinking. Also she was drumming her fingers.

“What if it isn’t here?” Nick blinked a few times, searching for words. Maddie continued, “What if…we don’t find it? I mean, we’re far out from the city. Running from the police out here would be tough. I don’t know if I could even make it a week, honestly.”

“We could make it as long as we needed. But we may not need to worry about that at all, who’s to say what will happen?” Maddie seemed unmoved, “Did you ever get your hands on a really old book called The Lord of the Rings?” She shook her head.

“Never even heard of it.”

“Well, I read a copy once. In it there’s this old wizard that’s sort of like the central supreme guide in the story, and he’s always saying these sayings to the other characters.” He flipped the grilled cheeses. One was burnt. “One of them was this,” he jumped into a weird voice, “ ‘even the very wise cannot see all roads,’ I take that as a reminder that the future is impossible to predict completely, and that bridges are better crossed once I reach them.”

“Maybe so.”

Nick handed her the not-burnt sandwich, with a look of worry that mirrored hers, “It’s killing me to see you this way.”

“After lunch we should check the attic.”

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The shattered window Nick had seen earlier was the only one into the attic. Through that hole, a fading light bounced off of a thousand dust particles displaced from their pictures, toys, and books. Nick shuffled through an old stack of pictures, scanning each on the front and back before setting them aside. Maddie rummaged through a pile of her old toys, idly playing with a few trinkets she fancied. She had nearly solved a Rubik’s cube when her eyes flashed at the pile. She started pushing plastic robots and notebooks until she suddenly stopped, releasing a gasp like the wind had been knocked out of her. When she caught her breath she thought aloud, “There’s some old me inside that’s holding me back,”

Without picking up his head, Nick responded, “Well why don’t you tell her that I miss our conversations.”

“Everything is going away; things are changing and I can’t stop it.” Maddie’s breath quickened, her palms started sweating and her fingers were drumming.

Nick picked up another picture, one of two cute kids playing outside, and warm recognition spread across his face as he looked down at it. One the back a note was scrawled like a postcard. I’ll read it for you,

*Check out this gem! You’ll always*

*be my Mad-y and I’ll be your Nick-y,*

*you have my life and my…”*

“Nick the room is spinning.”

His head snapped up and focused on Maddie, who was sitting on her knees, laser-focused on some black box. He rushed over family albums and boxes of old ceramics and put his arms around her. “No it’s not, the room is still, you’re sitting in your attic and I’m here next to you. Keep it together, you can do this.” He put his left hand on hers. She looked at it, took a breath, then moved her eyes back to the safe in front of her. She reached for the combinational lock. Nick quietly started some chant, and Maddie joined in as she deftly unlocked the safe. She slowly opened it, and golden light shone from the box onto their faces. Maddie reached inside. The knick-knacks were washed over with that golden light, and the room was painted with it.

But the shards of glass left in the window reflected an alternating red and blue from the flashing lights outside.

The front yard was trampled by boots, the house door splintered by a battering ram. Maddie’s bed torn apart and the last of the bread smashed. The chief barked with the dogs and the sirens screamed with Nick and Maddie. Bound and tossed in separate cars, they watched their house lit up by flashlights in every room, searching, until a sharp uniform handed something over to the chief. At a wave of his hands, those sharp uniforms lit up the house with fire. Maddie and Nick were shipped away, in different directions.

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What were you doing out there? Who were you with? Why did you go? They were in separate interrogation rooms, both with initially friendly offices that were getting less accommodating. What did you find? Tell us what you were looking for! Tell us what you found! Without an answer they liked, the offices separated their questions with hits. In Maddie’s room they placed a walkie talkie, as they did in Nick’s, and through those each could hear the other’s suffering. They started chanting together again, through the walkie talkie. It went like this,

*Though the truth may vary,*

*this ship will carry our*

*bodies safe to shore*

The chief stepped into Nick’s room and handed an officer a picture with a note on it. As the officer looked at it, Nick’s chanting quickened, and quickened more when the man set down the picture and picked up his weapon. Maddie’s chant tried to keep up with Nick’s pace, but it just got faster and faster until she was the only one chanting.

At that, her officers left her in the dark room, alone. Tears streaming down her face, she hung her head and thought about Nick as she pulled out something golden she had hidden in her jacket.

Personal Notes:

I think I want past tense. It’s a bit more natural to read and write, and I want it to feel natural. There’s a lot going on around here, but just like the song and the title, I want the focus to be on this conversation and relationship. That’s really what’s significant here.

Maddie is the girl, she’s scared and worried by here surroundings and her situation. She’s almost inconsolable, which is noteworthy because Nick tries to console her often. He’s not unaware of the situation, but he his most focused on Maddie, and he is concerned because she is. Maddie drives the search when she can, and Nick pick it up when she can’t. It’s got to be tough after all, to go back home after so long, and in such a state.

Some sympathetic omnipotent narrator? I like that.

Notes From Writing Society:

Enjoy the suspense, but I do know a lot

What are they searching for? Why are they being hunted? Cool not knowing what’s going on, kind of.

What was the glowing thing?

Like the description…this government, not the government, cool!

Normalish life…for a while, why did they parents leave.

Did Nick die? People think he did.

Didn’t catch that it was the song, still worked, except for the chanting

Song is actually about Alzheimer’s

Descriptions really good, focus on a few short details, enough to tell what’s going on. Burnt grilled cheese. Feels natural.

Clicked at it kills me to see you this way

Breaks natural, good length between, not jarring. Like break symbol?

More about what’s happening with the cops, felt rushed. More than just the jist.

Ultra-carbon is a new show, got a vibe.

Like the chief barked, set it up. Seemed ferrel. Not described by proper people pronouns, their not humans

Write notes at the top of the note section, instead of in the middle of it