

Excuse Me, What are your Opinions about the End of the World?

The old woman scrunches up her face.

'Well-' her voice is a long drawl, molasses falling out of a spoon. 'I guess I'm fixing to spend it

with my family. Or least, I would be, if they hadn't all gone off to Wichita to try and get into that last

shelter. News said it was open till midnight but I don't believe it. It's like those gas stations that say

they're open twenty four hours but the one time you're outta gas on a long ride home there's never

anyone there.'

Her fingers tremble slightly as she pulls up the zipper of her cardigan, nose sniffing at the sky

with its faint scattering of ash.

'So I guess it's just me. Me and Zeke, though he's not got long in him. Doctor said his liver's gone. Wouldn't give him more than a week, even with all the pills he handed me for free.' She shakes

the pockets of her coat and they rattle like they are full of bones. 'Guess I can give him as many as he

needs, and I've got all the TV dinners I could ask for. Even if the boys come home, we ain't gonna run

out.'

Under her feet are shards of glass, blown from broken windows at the end of the street. A car,

her car, she had said, is parked crookedly against a lamppost.

'But I don't know. Hopefully they found a way in. They ought to be looking after the young, after all.'

A growing wind picks up cinders which she blinks out of her eyes. The glass cracks beneath her

shoe.

'Not that we ever did, anyhow.'

Her gaze drops to the end of the microphone.

'Why is it you're asking? Haven't you got somewhere else to be? Watching that spaceship launch or finding a bunker or something?'

She cocks her head as she listens to the answer, a strand of hair twisting loose in the breeze.

'My set packed up two weeks ago,' she says, after clicking her tongue against her teeth.

'Been

getting all my news from Rod Selbert up the road. Been there over fifty years, told us he was never

leaving. Went up there last night to find the place empty.'

Her hat is speckled with grey, the white bobble on the end flopping down to graze the top of her

ear. Behind her, the mountains seem ready to burst into flame.

'Just goes to show. Nothing but death and taxes.' She laughs, and it is like the wind whistling through a screen door. 'Now we ain't even gotta worry about taxes.'

The whistle dies to a faint crackle, just a dry patch of leaves in her throat.

'Ain't you got anyone?'

At this reply she shakes her head. A hand, brittle as glass, grips your sleeve. Somewhere, there is

the rumble of thunder, though the air is too dry for rain.

'Well if it's just you, why worry about who's gonna be listening?'

Around her the ash drifts down, among the trees which now begin to crack like guttering on a

hot summer's day.

'Oh I don't think anyone will mind. I'm sure they'd be happy you found yourself somewhere.

There's not much else to be doing, after all.'

She shifts her backpack a little higher on her shoulders, the stack of trays threatening to tumble

out of the top.

'I mean, it's just me and Zeke, like I said, and I ain't gonna get through all these dinners myself.'

The old woman takes a step up the path, toward the mountains which seem aglow with

something almost like a sunset. She looks back over her shoulder, her bobble hat tipping off her head

and into the dirt.

'What's that?'

She shakes her head, and beckons you, ash spiralling around her arm as it waves.

'You want mac'n'cheese, or lasagne?'

She beckons, and you follow.