

"Closure" by Mira Braneck

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Closure

By Mira Braneck

Bird dies and Friday loses his shit. He puts on his good suit, and together he and Bird's mother put Bird in the ground. He goes back to her house for coffee and cake, makes niceties with what feels like everyone he's ever met, kisses Bird's mother good-bye, and promises to come by very soon. Then he goes home, gets in bed, and immediately falls asleep.

He sleeps for seven days and seven nights: a deep, dreamless sleep. And when he awakes, Bird is sitting in the corner of his bedroom.

"Finally," she says, when she sees him stir. "You've been asleep for a long time."

His limbs feel stiff and he aches. "What day is it?"

"It's Friday," she says. Friday grimaces at her. He hates when she does that, the same joke for twenty years. "Fine, it's Wednesday." He tries to count backwards in his head. A week. "I didn't know a person could sleep for that long."

His joints creak as he stretches them out, his brain foggy with sleep. "I didn't know a person could come back from the dead," he replies. Friday's words hang between them, suspended. He's not sure what he's supposed to say. "I mean," he says finally, "I didn't expect to see you."

Bird's eyes narrow. "Touché," she says. She doesn't sit so much as perch, her back straight as a rod and her legs tucked under her. "Though I'm still dead. I think this is more of an apparition."

She sits on the chair she had picked out, an ugly, vomit-green armchair. “Don’t you just love ugly things?” she had said to him, when she took him out shopping to furnish his apartment right after he moved in. All he had was his bed, a mattress on the floor, really, and a wobbly kitchen table with three mismatched chairs. He watched her stare at it and sit in it, so at ease, and then he saw their whole lives before him, her drinking coffee in that awful chair every morning. They weren’t together then. He forked over forty bucks and they threw it in the back of his truck.

“An apparition,” Friday repeats, rubbing the sleep from his eyes. “Sure.” He stands and stretches his arms to the ceiling. “Do you want some coffee?” Friday has always been thin, but a week of sleeping has made him even bonier, gaunt, almost. You could count his ribs if you wanted to.

“More than *anything*,” Bird says. “I know I’m dead but I still have the caffeine withdrawal headaches. Can you believe that? You’d think bodily issues would disappear once you were rotting in the ground, but no dice.”

“I mean, I don’t ever have to take a shit,” she rambles on, following Friday as he silently pads down the hall to the kitchen. “And I’m never thirsty or hungry. But my head has been killing me. What I wouldn’t do for a couple of Advil.”

Friday, still in a week’s worth of post-sleep haze, slowly tries to find his way around the kitchen. He methodically makes the coffee, just like Bird likes it. Thick as mud. She hovers, following him around the kitchen, watching over his shoulder. He stands in front of the coffee pot while it brews, the only noise its rumblings.

He fills a mug and hands it to her. Bird goes to grasp it, and Friday lets it go, and it falls right through her hands. They stand in silence, looking at the mug, broken in two even pieces, and the coffee, splattered all over the floor.

Friday looks at Bird. Bird stands there silently, brows furrowed, looking at the mug. Finally, Bird speaks. “Huh.”

“Bird,” Friday says hesitantly, “you know that you died of severe head trauma, right?”

She looks at him, her eyes narrowing. “I did not die of severe head trauma,” she says evenly. “I died due to a crushed skull.”

Same difference, he thinks. He keeps his mouth shut.

Friday cleans up the mess while Bird stands over him. Then they sit down at the kitchen table. His coffee, untouched, sits steaming in front of him.

“Aren’t you wondering why I’m here?” Bird says finally.

Friday looks at her. She doesn’t look like a ghost. “Of course I’m wondering why you’re here.”

“Well,” she says, peering into the steam, “me too.”

She tells him what happened. He knows most of it. She was driving home from work when a semi overturned onto her car. Friday was working the second half of a double shift with the EMT squad. His was the second ambulance to the scene. The driver of the 1989 Blue Oldsmobile was pronounced dead by the time that he got there. That’s when he knew—when he saw her giant car, unmistakably hers, smashed in on itself.

The man driving the truck had nothing more than a deep cut above his left eyebrow. He walked away with six stitches and sent flowers to her family.

“All I remember is driving home from work, the moment of the crash” she says, “and then suddenly I was here, and I had this headache, and you were asleep. I tried to grab the doorknob but I couldn’t, but I realized that I could walk through the door, if I wanted to. So I went home, to my mom’s. She was sitting on the couch, staring into nothing, and I stood in front

of her, screaming. I bent down so my face was right in front of hers, and looked right into her eyes, and nothing.” She pauses. “It’s like I wasn’t even there.”

Friday thinks that Bird might start to cry. In life, that was not Bird’s way. He wonders if dead people can cry.

“So I came back here, and I sat, and I waited.”

Friday goes to place his hand over hers. He’s not sure if he’s surprised or not when his hand does not fall through hers and to the table. Rather, it sits on top, as it would if she were there and alive, but he cannot feel it, cannot feel the warmth of her flesh or the weight of her bones.

“Can you...”

“No,” she says. She pulls away. They sit in that moment, both of them hurt, in different ways.

“I’ve been thinking, Friday,” she says finally, “that I’m still here because you’re supposed to help me.”

“With what?” He reaches for his coffee, takes a sip.

“I don’t know,” she says, “find peace?”

“What does that mean, ‘find peace?’”

“You know,” she says with a wave of her hand, “find peace. Go to heaven. Whatever is next. The great unknown.” She goes on, getting more and more excited. “I died so young, Friday, and I’ve been sitting here watching you sleep and thinking of all the things I never got to do, all the things I was supposed to do, the things we were going to do. Maybe I have to do them, so I can move on.”

Why would you want to move on, Friday thinks, to some unknown, *the* unknown? “I’ll help you,” he says. “Of course I’ll help you.”

So they sit and they make a list. The two of them have lived in the same town all their life, they’ve barely ever left, and there are a lot of things that Bird never got to do. Learn to surf, see the Grand Canyon, read *Anna Karenina*, go to Tokyo, dance until dawn, get married, bake bread, learn to play the banjo, eat lobster in Maine, listen to all of Joni Mitchell’s records, paint that one wall in her bedroom a deep blue, write a poem, finish college. The list goes on and on and on. Friday feels like there’s a hell of a lot more things she hasn’t done than those she has.

They make a subsection for “Unfinished Business.” Unpaid parking tickets, the late electric bill, unanswered emails, dirty laundry in the hamper, dishes in the sink. Apologies: to Sally Parkins, for kicking her in the shins in the second grade; to her boss, for calling out sick on the first nice day last spring so she and Friday could spend it drinking in the park; to the one-night stand from a few years ago, for probably giving him chlamydia but never telling him because she never got his number; and to her mother, for dying. Revenge: Tod Rolf, for what he did to her in Molly Lawrence’s parents’ bedroom at that party in high school; her father, for the night he drunkenly hit her mother across the face and then never came home again; and whoever gave her chlamydia, for giving her chlamydia.

“So,” Bird says when she’s satisfied, “where do we start?”

The first time Friday saw Bird, she and her mother were moving into the house next door to his. She was six years old, all bony knees jutting out from under her yellow dress. He was eight, an awkward, gawky child. Bird did not have a father, and that confused Friday. He

watched as she, trying at all costs to help her mother, struggled to bring boxes up the front walk.

It made him sad to watch her try and struggle with the boxes that were too big for her tiny arms, so Friday asked his mom if he could go over and help. His mother sent him over with a Bundt cake. “Hello, my name is Friday,” he said. He stuck out a twig-like arm. “Why don’t you have a dad?”

“What kind of name is Friday?” Bird replied.

He turned red. She grinned at him. They were best friends after that.

Friday didn’t fall in love with Bird right then. But they did walk to and from school together every day and run in and out of each other’s houses like they owned the place and they buried each other in the leaves in the fall and made snow angels in the winter and puddle-jumped in the spring and ran through sprinklers in the summer.

And then they were in middle school and the hormones were raging and they were still friends but not inseparable anymore. They were two grades apart and Friday had his friends and Bird had hers. Bird’s knees were still bony and knocked around under her dresses and Friday’s body had grown so fast and so long that it didn’t even feel like his, and he was constantly flailing around like he had no control over his limbs. And then they were in high school and their friends started melding together the way they do in small towns where the same people are at the same parties every weekend. And at these parties, Friday looked on as people watched Bird from across the room. He watched as Bird, still all knees and shoulders and elbows, suddenly became desirable. But of course Friday had always loved her, and when he reached the age for desire he had wanted her too, had wanted her first, even, but he had always loved her in one way or

another since they had met, and now it was a different kind of love, but it had been there all along.

Friday watched her sit cross-legged on a blanket in the yard, reading books for hours, and tried to remember when they stopped spending every waking moment together. One day, she said, “Why are you always watching me?” and he just looked at her, and after that they were inseparable again, and he was invited to sit in the backyard and be quiet with her.

They decide to start back at her house. Some simple tasks, some unfinished business. As soon as they enter, they realize that no one has been there yet. Everything is exactly as Bird left it: dishes crusted over in the sink, rotting milk in the fridge. Bird tries to pick up a dish but she can't, so she sits and watches while Friday gets to work. He does the dishes, starts a load of laundry, writes out the checks for her overdue bills, and makes her bed. She silently looks on.

“Feel anything yet?”

“No,” she says, brow furrowed.

Friday is a little amused by her frustration. “Did you really think this would work?”

She glares at him. “I sure hoped.”

Friday stares at Bird and he realizes that this is serious, and Bird stares at the floor very seriously, and then she looks up at him and says, “Want to take a bath?”

He goes to the tub and lets the water run until it streams out scalding hot, and then puts the stopper in the drain. Steam comes off in rolls off the water and fogs up the windows. Friday doesn't go to touch Bird, and she makes no move to touch him. Instead, they slowly undress in front of each other.

Friday gets in first, lifting his long legs over the side of the tub and easing himself in. She stands there, looking down at him, before climbing in and sitting down across from him. Friday watches as the water does not move around Bird. Rather, it stays eerily still, even as she moves through it and reaches out to touch his face. Her big eyes are right in front of him, and Friday can't feel a thing.

The first time Bird kissed Friday she was ten and he was twelve and she ran up and kissed him and giggled in his face and ran away.

The first time Bird really kissed Friday was on her twenty-third birthday. Friday and their friends had a surprise party for Bird at Friday's apartment, and when Bird walked in and everyone screamed *Surpriiise*, she started to weep. Everyone froze and Friday looked at their panicked faces, and Bird crying next to him, and then he threw his arm around her and said, "Hey, turn the music on, or I'll start crying, too!" and everyone, including Bird, started to laugh. He put a beer in her hand and she smiled up at him and he smiled down at her, and they stood there together while the party moved on around them.

Much later in the night, when few friends were left, some passed out in chairs and on the bed and on the floor, some passing a joint around on the couch, Friday went looking for Bird. She was standing outside on his fire escape, drinking from a bottle of cheap champagne and smoking a cigarette. Bird rarely smoked anything, so Friday was surprised, but he didn't say so. Rather, he stepped out of the window and onto the fire escape and leaned against the metal railing next to her. He took the cigarette from her hand and took one long, slow drag before handing it back. She passed the bottle to him and he took a swig. The two of them stood there in

the cool air, and someone laughed inside. Bird flicked the cigarette out into the night. Friday watched the lit end glow in a perfect orange arc before hitting the ground.

“Thank you,” Bird said eventually. “Thank you.”

And then she leaned in real close, and Friday thought he might be having a heart attack or some kind of fit, and he could almost taste the smoke and alcohol on her breath, and then she kissed him, her mouth open and soft against his, and he could taste the alcohol and the smoke on her breath and underneath it, her, and before he knew what was happening she pulled away and whispered, “Happy birthday, Birdie,” and then she threw her head back and laughed, took the bottle back from him, and climbed back inside, leaving him alone in the chill of the late, late night.

“Where should we start?” Friday says, looking at the list in front of him. They sit at Bird’s kitchen table, having spent the night in her apartment.

“Don’t you have to go to work?” Bird asks.

It hadn’t occurred to Friday. “I guess I do,” he says, running his finger around the rim of his coffee cup. It dawns on him that his dead girlfriend is sitting across from him. “I’ll call in sick.”

“Friday,” Bird says, staring flatly at him. “I’m not going anywhere.”

He sets up *Anna Karenina* to play on tape and runs her a bath before he goes. “I’ll be back right after work,” he says. As he pulls the door behind him, he sees Bird sitting in the tub, watching him go with big eyes, the water undisturbed.

She finishes *Anna Karenina*. She finishes all of Joni Mitchell's albums. She watches while Friday tries, and fails, to bake a loaf of bread. Friday paints the wall in her bedroom blue and pays the next month's rent on her apartment, and on his. "I told your mother I would clean out your apartment," Friday tells her one Sunday morning as he unloads a bag of groceries into her cabinets.

"How is she?"

Friday isn't sure if he should tell Bird about the nearly unrecognizable woman, this person who moves mechanically through the motions but seems to live somewhere deep in the corners of her own mind. "She's ok."

"Really?"

Friday reaches to put a box of pasta in the cupboard. His back to Bird, he says, "No."

He's doesn't want to see whatever is on her face. He grips the counter, nervous to face her. "I want to see her," she says finally.

"What?" Friday says, turning back to her. He sees that Bird has that look in her eyes, all sharp.

"I want to see my mother."

"How?"

"Figure it out, I don't know," she says. Friday sees that she's made up her mind. "I want to see my mother."

Friday swallows once, and turns back to the groceries. He goes to put the milk away. "My friends told me they think I'm acting weird," Friday tells the inside of the fridge. "They say they haven't seen me lately."

“Well, they haven’t,” Bird says. “You’ve been spending all of your time at work or here, with me.”

Friday shuts the refrigerator door. “Larry wants me to come out with him and Tyler tonight.”

“You should,” Bird says. Friday knows Bird’s worried that he’s slipping away from the world because of her, and Bird knows Friday doesn’t care that he’s slipping away from the world because of her. “You should go out tonight, a boys’ night.”

“What will you do?”

“I don’t know,” Bird says. “You can put on a movie for me. *Casablanca*. I’ve never seen it. Maybe it’ll do the trick.”

It’s not the right thing to say, and they both know it as soon as it sits between them. But Friday still leaves her there, the opening credits rolling, and goes to meet his friends. And the whole time, he thinks of how the hell he’s going to get his ghost girlfriend to see her mother, but also of the movie ending and Bird disappearing and him going back to her empty apartment and finding himself alone.

“Where are you, man?” Larry asks over the din of the bar. Tyler looks at Friday with concern. All of Friday’s friends have been worried since Bird died and Friday couldn’t be reached for a week, and then, when he suddenly reappeared, he was always elsewhere.

“I’m sorry,” Friday says. Will she go in a poof of dust? A flash of white light? “I’m just distracted.”

These are the people Friday has known all his life. They, therefore, have known Bird all her life, too. He doesn’t know how to look at them when they look at him like this, with concerned eyes. He doesn’t know what to say to them, for the first time in his life.

“How’ve you been, Friday?” Tyler says. “We know you miss her. We do, too.”

Friday sometimes forgets that he’s not the only person who lost Bird, but that he is the only person who got her back. He forgets that not everyone sees her, talks to her every day, that these people, their friends from childhood, her mother, her friends from work—they all lost her, and, if things go on as they have, they’ll never get to see her again.

Even when she’s right in front of him, Friday always remembers that it’s not as it seems. Because he cannot touch her. Because when he reaches out in the night, she is there, but he cannot feel her. Because last week, he went to graze his hand across the small of her back, which once made her shiver, and she did not notice, and he did not feel her goosebumps rising under his fingers.

Right now, though, he does miss her—he wants to be back in the apartment with her, on the couch, watching *Casablanca*. “It’s different than you’d think,” he says, “the missing her.”

Tyler and Larry look at each other. Friday tries to remember how the bereaved act.

But he can’t. He can’t remember. And he knows if he says anything about Bird, back at home on the couch, they’ll have him committed. “I’m sorry,” he says again. “It will pass.”

They sit in silence. Friday looks around and recognizes everyone in the bar, the only one in town. He wonders if he’ll still be here in thirty, forty, fifty years. He had never been able to picture his whole future, just his future in fractured parts, a stained glass that makes no image: Bird. Taking care of their aging mothers. Children? A house with beer in the fridge, coffee on the counter, a garden in the yard?

“Do you guys remember that summer when we were seventeen?” Friday says suddenly. Tyler and Larry, surprised, look at him. “And we were all working at the resort, down by the lake? The worst job in the world, all those rich summer people screaming at us if the butter was

too soft, or too hard, or too cold. And we constantly smelled like grease. But then after work, real late, we'd drink shit beer and go skinny dipping and lay out on the dock. Remember how warm the water was?"

He thinks about floating far out in the lake, and looking towards the lights on the shore, and he could hear his friends laughing, he could hear Tyler and Larry and Bird and all their other friends laughing, their young bodies glowing and splashing through the water, and he looked up to the stars and they were bright. He would let himself sink under, and he would close his eyes and listen to all the water moving around him, all the nothing. And when he felt his lungs burning, he would shoot up and break through the surface, and he would hear his friends laughing, and he was happy.

Friday watches his two oldest friends as they share a glance. He swallows hard, once. "You guys want another round?"

The first time that Bird let Friday sleep over was unexpected. They had been having sex sometimes, but whenever Friday tried to bring up how he felt he could see Bird retreat right before his eyes, so he kept his mouth shut. Every time they had sex Bird found a reason for them not to sleep next to each other, to wake up with each other. Even when it was at her place, she would make up excuses: you have to leave, I told my mom I'd take her shopping in the morning, I have work early tomorrow, I'm getting up at six to be first in line at the DMV, etc.

One night Friday let himself into Bird's apartment to drop off a pie that his mother had made for her. Bird lived in a weird old building, and there was a giant, claw-foot bathtub right in her kitchen. He had tried to help her move it once, but they couldn't even budge it an inch.

“That’s ok,” she had said, hands on her hips, regarding the mammoth tub. “I kind of like it there.”

When Friday let himself in with his in-case-of-emergency-or-eviction key, she was sitting there in the tub, knees drawn to her chest. There was steam coming off the water, giving the candle-lit room a soft, dream-like glow.

“I’m sorry,” he said, turning away, trying to look anywhere but *there*. “I thought you were at work—”

“It’s ok,” she said. “I had a shift but I called in.” He could feel her looking at him while he, frozen, studied the spot where the two walls and the floor met. Cobwebs were collecting. I’ll clean those for her, next time, he thought. “Friday,” she said quietly. He half-turned towards her. “Do you want to join me?”

He turned to her fully then, and looked at her—her body folded over itself, the notches on her spine. He slowly stripped and stepped over the lip of the tub, easing himself into the scalding hot water.

They sat there silently, sweat beading on their foreheads and upper lips and dripping down salty over their mouths. “This is my favorite thing, you know,” she said, slowly easing back against the edge of the tub. The water rippled around her. “An almost unbearably hot bath.”

Friday tried to relax. “Here,” she said after a while. She reached for an empty glass on the floor next to the tub, and then turned the cold water on, filling the glass. “It will hurt a little at first, in a way.”

She poured ice-cold water over his neck and back, and it did hurt at first, in the shock to the system. And then he felt a new, unexpected kind of pleasure, as the water cooled his too-warm skin and sent shivers down the small of his back.

They sat for a long time. When he wrapped her in a towel after, Bird told Friday that he could stay the night.

Friday stands before the stove, slowly stirring the steaming pot in front of him. "It's my mother's specialty," he says over his shoulder. "She says hello."

Bird's mother sits at her kitchen table, a cup of tea, now cold, in front of her. Bird sits across from her, head cocked to the side, watching silently.

"She made this batch for you," Friday continues. He's rambling, and he knows it. He can hear his voice shaking. "She wants to come over sometime. Maybe next week?"

Bird's mother doesn't answer, and Friday turns to look at her. She's staring at something on the wall, something only she can see. He looks to Bird, who stares, unwavering, at her mother. He tries to unclench his jaw.

Bird's mother turns to him, slowly. "I'm sorry, Friday. What was that?"

"Nothing," Friday says. Bird finally looks at him. His heart is racing. He doesn't know what to do with his hands. "Nothing at all."

He ladles soup into two bowls, and sits down next to Bird's mother, in his designated spot. Bird's mother looks at what she thinks is Bird's empty seat. Friday looks at Bird, who, for him, sits clear as day in her designated seat, like she had never sat anywhere else in the world. Bird looks at him, and the only time he has ever hurt so much in his life is when he saw the twisted metal of Bird's car, before she came back to him.

"It's different than I thought it would be," Bird's mother says finally, turning to him, "Is it that way for you?"

Friday puts his hand over hers. It's warm under his. "Yes," he says. "It is, for me, too."

Bird stands and regards them for a moment. Friday waits, unsure what she's going to do. She turns away and silently floats through the door, leaving her mother and Friday truly alone. There's nothing Friday can do but watch her go.

It's the middle of the night, and Bird and Friday sit in Friday's truck outside of Tod Rolf's house.

It's bitter cold, and Friday can see the beginnings of flurries in the streetlight. It's been months now, the seasons have changed, and they've made it through most of the list, the local things and the things that don't require Bird to hold anything in her hands. Bird is still here, wearing exactly what she was wearing when she died at the end of summer. Friday looks at her in her t-shirt and shorts, and looks down at himself, wrapped from head to toe in highly insulated fabrics. She looks out at the snow.

"This is my favorite time of the year," she says, like Friday doesn't already know. Then, she turns to face Friday. "Do you think he's home?"

"Well, his truck is there."

"Do you think he's awake?"

They both turn to look at the dark house.

"It's now or never," Friday says after a moment. He opens his door and gently shuts it behind him. Bird floats through the passenger side door.

Friday silently leads the way to Tod Rolf's car. Bird watches as he slashes the tires for her.

They get in back in the truck. The silence lingers. Even for Friday, the act feels insufficient.

He gets out of the truck, goes around to the back, and reappears with a tire iron. Bird watches from the passenger seat as he strides over to Tod Rolf's car and smashes the windshield in, beating it over and over again. The sound is deafening, the iron hitting the glass and the glass shattering and, above it all, Friday screaming.

Friday gets back in the truck, out of breath, and hits the gas.

It's a while before either of them says anything. "I wish we could castrate him," Bird says finally, looking out the window as the snow begins to swirl.

Friday asked Bird to marry him, and she said, "Ask me tomorrow."

Friday asked Bird to marry him, and she said, "Why would we do that?"

Friday asked Bird to marry him, and she said, "You're my best friend."

Friday asked Bird to marry him, and she said, "Friday, we're already married. Don't you see that?" He stopped asking after that.

By the time Tod Rolf wakes up the entire neighborhood screaming truly vulgar obscenities and kicking the bumper of his car repeatedly, Bird and Friday are halfway to Maine, where fresh shellfish awaits them. Friday calls on the way and quits his job. Time works differently for them now. They stand perpetually at the end of something and right at the beginning of something else. Friday feels like he is constantly looking over the edge of some abyss at something—what, he's not sure.

Before they know it they are on the ragged, grey coast, overlooking the Atlantic. "I've never seen the ocean," Bird says, looking out over the sea. The wind whips around them, and she stands perfectly still, untouched.

Friday knows Bird wants to kiss him and Bird knows Friday loves her more than he'll ever love anything or anyone in the world, and, now, that scares her. It didn't, before. "I'll never touch the ocean," she says. "I'll never eat lobster."

They get back in the car and head west.

West, across long expanses of open land. They go for miles and miles without seeing anyone or anything, first over rolling hills and then land flatter than Friday though possible. The sun sets and the sun rises and they watch the land change colors and the big sky drift before them. Through mountains, prairies, deserts, and small towns, where they sit silently in diners, staring at their coffee. Sometimes, they smile across the table at one another. Sometimes, they just sit.

No one looks twice at Friday, who, in the other patrons' eyes, sits quietly and alone, searching for something in the bottom of his cup.

Days pass, and nights are spent in cheap motels or in the truck on the side of the road. They sleep on opposite sides of the bench seat, heads leaned against windows. On the road, they talk less and less, the silence in the car not uncomfortable, but slowly changing in a way that Friday can't name.

Eventually, they arrive at the opposite coast. Friday opens his door, stretches his legs, walks around a bit. Bird drifts through the door and stands silently regarding the Pacific before her.

They head down to the shore. Friday combs the rocky beach for dry driftwood and starts a bonfire. Friday and Bird have the whole beach to themselves, and they sit and listen to the

waves crashing against the jagged coast. They have always been good at sitting with one another.

“Why do you think I’m the only one that can see you?” Friday asks, as they watch the sun set over the Pacific.

“Why do you think I happened to die that night?” Bird replies.

“I don’t know.”

“Exactly.”

They continue to sit until the sun slips deep below the horizon. Then, they get back in the car, and move onwards.

Days and days of driving. More flat, more nothing. The bluest sky that Friday has ever seen. Giant, white clouds drifting in front of them over infinite land. From the view behind the driver’s seat, the road looks endless. Friday’s not sure how Bird feels, but he thinks that this must feel endless for her, too.

It’s been a while since they slept in a bed, and Friday splurges on a motel room. He takes a scalding hot shower alone, standing under the spray until his skin turns red. When he comes out, Bird is already under the covers.

They leave the motel while it is still dark. Friday has to let the truck warm up so he can scrape the ice off. On the way, they stop at a gas station, where Friday buys a cup of coffee and, after a moment of hesitation, a pack of cigarettes. Bird waits in the car. There have been a few awkward moments in which Friday was caught mid-sentence, seemingly talking to himself. Now, when they stop for gas or snacks, Bird usually waits in the car, or goes for a walk to see

what's around. Friday sits in diners alone, staring into his cup of coffee, or out the window at Bird as she floats about, seeing what there is to see.

“Since when do you smoke?” Bird asks as Friday climbs back into the truck.

Friday shrugs. “It’s a lot of driving,” he says. “I need something to do with my hands.” He lights a cigarette and pulls out onto the road.

The Grand Canyon is bigger than either of them expected. Watching the sun rise, Bird asks Friday, “Do you think we would have had babies?” and Friday says, “Did you want babies?” and Bird pauses to think. “Maybe.” Friday looks over the edge and down into the deep, deep chasm. He holds his breath.

When they return home, Friday is out of money and they are out of luck. He is tired, from driving through the entire terrain of the country—the mountains, the plains, the desert, both coasts. He has been more places and seen more things than he ever has seen in his life, and in death, Bird, too, has been more places and seen more things than she ever had in her life.

Bird crashes down in a chair at the kitchen table. Friday gently pulls out the chair, the only noise its legs scraping over the floor. He sits down across from her and looks at her, and watches unfamiliar, painful emotions pass over the features of her face.

“When will this end?”

And Friday answers as honestly as he knows how: “I don’t know.”

They sit at the table for a long time, each of them trying to think of what can be done and each coming up with no solution. “I’m tired,” Friday finally says, and stands to go to bed, leaving Bird alone at the kitchen table.

He undresses in the dark, and is surprised when he turns around and Bird is standing at the threshold of the bedroom. Friday gets into bed and pulls the covers back for her. She stands over him for a moment before climbing in next to him.

They lay next to one another in the wordless dark. Friday knows Bird wants to say something but doesn't know what to say, and Bird knows Friday is waiting for her to say something.

"I hate not being able to touch you," Bird says finally.

And Friday says, slowly, "We could try."

Bird looks at Friday and Friday looks at Bird and she tries to kiss him but it doesn't work. They touch themselves in the dark next to one another, talking to each other softly, and when they are both ready, she pulls herself onto him.

There's a moment of stillness, when everything hangs suspended in a single second. Friday takes one breath, in and out, real slow. It's the only noise. And then: "I can feel you," Bird gasps, "I can feel you!"

Friday can't feel a thing. He doesn't have the heart to tell her. Rather, he watches her as she moves on top of him and he looks at the length of her neck in wonder. He's never seen her like this. They've made love so many times but they have not touched in so long, Bird has not been touched in so long, and she is different, now.

And soon Bird comes. Friday watches and he thinks he sees something return back to her body as she throws her head back. He can't feel her but he feels something, the stirrings of some kind of pleasure, and she begins to glow. He thinks, this is it, and he feels scared to see her go but relief too, and the relief is what surprises him.

After, they lay next to each other in the dark. He's surprised she's still there next to him. He thought that would do it, would send her off to whatever unknown she seems so eager to get to.

"Wouldn't it be nice," she says finally, "if that was enough to bring me peace?"

He has to turn away from her then, so she can't see his face. When he closes his eyes he can't feel her next to him. It's like she's not even there. It's like he's alone.

Friday doesn't remember drifting off, but when he awakes, it is late morning and the sun slants through the blinds. His body is stiff, his joints ache. He reaches across the bed for Bird like he used to, and his hands come up empty.

He sits up and scans the room for her. He panics for a moment, that she has disappeared in the night, left him to his own devices. Not that she has gone onto this unknown she craves, but rather that she has floated through the door and out of his life.

And there she is, perched in the ugly green armchair that she picked out for him.

"So," she says, "what's next?"