

The Sky

THOM YORKE IS LYING atop a building in London. Supine, on the black tar surface of the roof of some building, built in the sixties, housing hundreds of miserable people in ties who sit in front of computer screens all day long. Lying, arms stretched out to his sides, legs slightly apart, largish sunglasses covering his eyes, mouth closed somewhat tightly. He is awake, is looking, through half-closed eyes and brown lenses, at the sky above him. His boyish look, his talent that sold millions of records, and yes all the baggage that comes with that is there with him.

How Thom Yorke, internationally known pop musician, came to lie atop a building in London is a rather simple matter. He was, forty-two minutes and thirteen seconds ago, walking on the street in London, the cars jumbling around everywhere, the people moving around in the way that only people in London can move around, when he was about to pass by the great disgusting revolving door that led into the dank-smelling lobby of this building. Instead of walking past it, however, he went inside, into the massive claustrophobia and simply bizarre heat of the revolving door, and into the building. He was not, in fact, accosted by anyone who exclaimed to the street “Oh Wow Thom Yorke Radiohead!” or whatever, since celebrities can and often do walk around public places unnoticed. No, nothing that can be objectively interpreted happened to Thom which drove him into the building he is currently lying on.

He went, quite unnoticed by anyone (the guard, uniform and all, sitting rapt with daytime television), into the building, into an elevator, and pushed the button with the largest number on it. With little incident, the elevator, which was very silver and brushed aluminum inside, rose to the floor indicated quietly and smoothly. The topmost floor accessible by elevator is something of a sight. It is just about completely barren. Nothing but expansive floor, a patchy white-and-gray, a number of (presumably) concrete columns (the same color), and a ceiling, again the white-and-gray in undefinable pattern. Banks of windows, mostly dirty, line all sides. No other lighting exists.

It seems to hold Thom in the same way anything completely and unexpectedly barren will hold a person, like a vacant lot or an empty storefront, like it's some sort of treasure box, with things to explore and discover. But, like all such things, the fascination is fleeting. It just leaves you really creeped out, and you want to escape pretty quick.

Luckily the stairwell is nearby. A door, painted red at some time in the past, is stuck to the side of a larger concrete pillar. The door leads to concrete stairs,

at this level only a landing; stairs which lead up. Thom climbs them (there are no lights in here, and no proper windows, just stray daylight creeping in from somewhere, so it's just fucking creepy climbing them) and comes to another door, light seeping around the edges of it. He opens the door, and goes out onto the roof.

Which is honestly not much better. There's a wall going around it, about four feet high, the base of which just sort of curves, no orthogonal meeting between roof and wall. It's fading black tar, just about everywhere you look, and some pipes and shit sticking up here and there. It's hot here, despite the bleakly overcast sky and the icy winds which are blowing. Thom sort of tries to look over the edge, but, not being of high stature, and with that weird curve at the base of the wall, not much can be seen without difficulty and probably danger. It's also damn quiet up here.

Thom appears disappointed, and is clearly unsure of what the fuck to do now. He pinches the bit of his nose where his large sunglasses rest, then sits down, not far from the wall he tried to look over. Then lays down. Nothing more complex than that.

So he's lying here, looking up at the sky (which is pretty damn near a solid gray at this point), dressed in baggy pants, a work shirt, and a leather jacket. He swallows some saliva.

Although, Thom did do other things earlier that day, some of which, or, hell, even all of them, in combination, could have sent him up this brown building and onto its roof.

Like this: Thom had lunch at a cafe that didn't look too busy (to him I guess, I mean, I don't think it looked busy). Water and a sandwich, looked like. He spent about an hour and a half there, even though he ate the sandwich (which was housed in some bowel-growling brown bread with nuts and whole wheat in it) in what looked almost like one smooth motion.

Most of the time, he was looking at a woman. This woman, who sat down after Thom did, a few tables away, ordered some soup and pulled out an obscenely thick paperback. She spent most of the time pretending to read the book, and, pretty obviously, if you knew how to look, was very close to crying. Thom looked like he knew how to look.

She was pretty, with straight brown hair, expensive-looking business suit, and refined, porcelain-like skin, and was rather boyish in body and mannerism. She went to the bathroom one time, briefly, while she was there.

Well, what happened to that woman, before she sat down over large bowl of soup and large rambling paperback, was truly fucked up.

Madeline Scattergood, her name, see, is married to one Michael Scattergood, a rather successful publisher of certain magazines that fall into a category like "semi-mainstream" amongst young adults. So he's pretty well-off, and so is she, in terms of money.

Michael, being male, successful, rather good-looking, and a general prick of the first order, sleeps with other women. A lot. Madeline knows about this, and, in fact, Michael has some of his women at the couple's flat, sometimes when Madeline is home. It's become pretty regular, and she has more or less

made the spare room her bedroom. There's only an overstuffed sofa in there, to sleep on.

Before she found out about her husband's sleeping around, before it became obvious, the couple were going through a dry period, sexually. Dry in the same way as the really really dry part of Death Valley is drier than the rest of it. Madeline, being resourceful, and smart, tried to rectify this, by exciting her husband. The planning and the buying of lingerie, wine, pornographic movies, and rum took much longer than the rejection Michael gave her. It went like this:

"Hey, there, baby." she says, putting her arms around him, her underwear just plain *draping* over her breasts. She kisses him, he smells like cigar smoke.

He doesn't respond, then pushes her away, holding her just below the shoulders.

"I can't stand fucking you. I fucking hate it."

That was pretty much all she wrote, typed, proofread, and sent into the local paper for consideration.

Except that, and all that came after, was not enough to drive her wander around London, huge book in hand, not at her job, looking at everything as though everything is looking down on her, judgmentally. Finding her way to a cafe, for no reason, ordering soup, for no reason, looking at her book, for no reason, thinking everyone in London is uncomfortably wishing, silently, that she would just *go the fuck away*. She is incredibly strong, emotionally, to put up with all this.

At work, though, on this one day, something cracked this milken shell off which so much had bounced. The thing that broke her, today, was nothing more than a message she received via office e-mail, of all things. Nothing even aimed directly at her, evidenced by the outstandingly long list of lowercase letters, dots, and mocking little 'at' signs which followed the "CC:" header. Another stupid office joke, something someone read in a newspaper, or, more likely, on some web page. Not terribly funny, offensive, or even long. Just three lines and a punchline. This woman, though, Madeline, employed as a writer, whose husband hates her, whose husband fucks other women because they have better hair or, in his terminology, a more comfortable cunt, this woman, this smooth, cultured, quiet, white woman, saw something in those words, something they never meant to say. Something dark, true, beastly; something that positively screams "All is nothing" in a voice you can't even hear because it isn't even there. Something black, expansive, eternal, ineffable that she saw in those words on that day smashed her headlong into a brick wall of solipsism and nihilism.

Her maiden name is May, which I think is just fucking brilliant.

The obvious thing that would happen in this situation would be: Madeline May, who'd married soulless Michael, who dragged her against rocks for years, which led her to finally break at the most inopportune of times, would enter a cafe which contained Thom Yorke. Thom Yorke went, *unexpectedly*, after looking at this woman for an hour and a half, into an office building and laid down on the roof. This building, then, would be the one where Madeline May worked, writing for magazines, and, in this state she's in, would return to that

building, which is as soulless as her husband, with the intention of leaping to her death from the roof. Thom Yorke, lying there for what to all appearances seems to be *no reason whatsoever*, would then be able to stop this poor woman from killing herself, and through some cosmic force which simply screams “This One Must Not Be Lost,” Thom, who is able to love, could save her from the despair in which she has become so entrapped inside.

Such magical things don’t usually happen, though, and they do not happen this time. Madeline does not, in fact, try to kill herself, now or ever. She resolves to leave Michael, and become a real writer, successful or not, and to stop being a corporate tool rotting under fluorescent lights.

So, the truth is, Thom Yorke has no good reason to be on the top of this building. Maybe he’s just feeling down, alone, and the sight of Madeline, on the verge of tears, was enough to simply weird him out, affirm the melancholy he was feeling, and make him want to go somewhere where people are not. So it’s probably selfishly motivated, this poor-guy-who’s-famous-but-isn’t-understood’s little journey to a place, in the scheme of things, not all that different from the street that’s (relatively) not far (relatively) downward, but still is a world away.

The night before was an interesting one for Thom Yorke. He went to a party. No real big whoop in that, but this party, even Thom would say, was different. It was held by somebody extremely wealthy; so wealthy was she/he that nobody attending was told who the thrower of the party was. It was held in the London Hilton, in rooms very posh and very full of expensive food and drink, and very full of talent and fame. At least talent and fame that came from Britain.

So it was an interesting night for Thom Yorke. It began in style for him, when the maitre d’ made some quite insulting comments about how Thom was dressed. Thom can act cool towards such gripes, though, and does this time. But then, spurred by something, perhaps those comments or perhaps the myth of brilliance that was surrounding him (because musicians, movie stars, models, etc. etc. are pitifully human as well, and all have the same psychic shit falling around them, and all deal with it in the same bury-your-head-in-the-sand way), Thom grabbed and drank a bottle of champagne more valuable than the teeth in his lumpy English head.

Getting a bit drunk was most of his motivation for beginning a conversation with a certain British actor, who was, himself, in a state of inebriation and was not fully enjoying the festivities. I think the whole party atmosphere had turned, for Thom and this actor, into a feeling not unlike the vibe given by someone when they’re waiting for you to pay your bill. You fumble around with your wallet (or purse or whatever you use), and they look at you, *patiently*, and you hope that they don’t see that you do in fact have exact change but want that twenty broken anyway.

And a dialog ensues:

“It’s just no fucking use this...(unintelligible)...”

“I think, I think, it’s just like if you look at, what, if you look at...”

“I mean why? What even does this...”

“Yeah, I think if you look at the magazines, in the magazines you always see, like, always see these people...”

“People and fashion and fucking chatty whatever.”

“Yeah! Yeah! Fashion. Like I think if you look at fashion, there’s these people, like in magazines, and they’re all fashionable, and of course it’s all phony and nobody’s really beautiful but it’s still...”

Etc., etc. But the night before wasn’t all that bad. I mean, sure, Thom was feeling pretty sorry for himself, by being invited to a party only because he’s somewhere up there on the pyramid that is fame, drinking a bit, and having nobody really all that interesting to talk to; these sort of things don’t make you do things like lie on the roofs of tall buildings, though.

But he’s there. He’s been there for nearly two hours now. Frankly I find it both impressive and troubling, his being there so long. Impressive because he’s showing a behavior that is, if anything, *anti-adult*. Attention spans in adults these days are way too short to lie in one spot for that long, even if you think it is what you ought to want given the way you feel. It’s troubling, too, because people just don’t do these things. There’s some reason, some aesthetic, to themselves or to some imagined observer, which shapes this behavior.

But, fuck me, I’m stumped.

Actually, it so happens that Michael Scattergood kills himself less than a year later, because the dumb fuck drank too much and drove his car into the sea.

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