

to love is (not) to leave

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to love is (not) to leave

by [thcscus \(blujamas\)](#)

Summary

“Do you remember,” said Tubbo, “the day we first met?”

Ranboo glanced at him from across the table, a cup of tea slowly growing cold between the cradle of his hands. “As if I could forget,” he replied, too exhausted to smile. He wanted to be able to give Tubbo that small comfort, that reassurance, even if things were... the way they were.

“Yeah.” Tubbo drummed restless fingers against the tabletop. “Pity we’re gonna kill each other at sunrise, then, huh?”

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Or, that fic beetwt hijacked my poll for /lh

Notes

This is the result of the Build-A-Fic poll I ran on twitter! so bone ape teeth <3

(also the first time writing beeduo yooooo)

See the end of the work for more [notes](#)

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“Yeah.” Tubbo drummed restless fingers against the tabletop. “Pity we’re gonna kill each other at sunrise, then, huh?”

Ranboo looked away, a bitter taste filling his mouth. “Don’t... Don’t say it like that.”

“Don’t say it like what?”

He couldn’t see Tubbo’s expression, but he could hear the irritation in his voice. Normally, it would take hell and high heaven to make Tubbo snap at him. Normally, animosity wouldn’t fester between them like a dark secret, or an untreated wound hidden beneath their gold-lined tunics. Normally, all it took would be a shared look and a soft, exasperated sigh for all to be forgiven. Normally, they were kinder to each other.

These were not normal circumstances.

Because, normally, they wouldn’t have daggers tucked into their boots or swords strapped to their waists or mistrust sown into every gesture. Normally, they would not have to meet in secret, in this abandoned, lightless house, only seeing each other through thick veils of shadow. Normally, two armies wouldn’t be gathering in the valley beyond, both hailing from kingdoms with something to prove and willing to kill for it.

Ranboo didn’t even know how it got so out of hand. One day, he was sitting at the round table with his parents beside him, laughing over something Tubbo’s own parents had said. Two kings, two queens, and two princes in a room filled with sunlight and hope. They often talked of peace and shared trade routes and plans for the future, while their sons grinned at each other and silently ordered the other to be the one to first ask if they could be excused to play. Sometimes, Tubbo would cave, but most times, it was Ranboo tugging at his mother’s gown, asking, “May I please...”, and he wouldn’t even get to finish the question before his mother was smiling with understanding and telling him to go.

And he and Tubbo would run, faster than they could breathe, out to the gardens where they had spent their childhoods learning and relearning each other, and where they would continue to learn. Friendship, Ranboo had realized, was simply a constant education on someone else, and he remembered sitting under the shadows of an elm tree, watching Tubbo attempt to catch a bee between his hands, and thinking, *I want to learn about you forever.*

And then, the next day, he’d lost everything.

Was it a misunderstanding that started it? From which camp? Who had uttered the first unforgiveable word? Who had crossed the line? Did it matter now, when nothing else did?

Whatever had started it, this was how it ended: two armies sharpening their blades for a bloodbath at sunrise, and two princes stealing away to learn each other one last time.

With a shaky sigh, Ranboo said, “Don’t say it like it’s a sure thing. Like there’s no way out of this.”

“Hate to break it to you,” said Tubbo, “but I’m pretty sure we’re beyond looking for escape routes now.”

“There must be something—”

“We’ve already done *everything!*”

Tubbo’s strangled words made Ranboo snap his gaze up towards him again. He could see the other boy breathing heavily in the dark, his shoulders trembling with every inhale. Instinct made Ranboo almost reach for him. Better judgment decided against it.

What would be the point, trying to be kind now, when they both knew how this would end?

Better Tubbo think he didn’t care. Better Tubbo think he hated him. It would be easier to raise a sword against him then.

“We’ve begged,” Tubbo continued, his words tripping over each other in their hasty desperation, “we’ve offered them solutions to whatever bitter grudge they still hold. They didn’t budge. They’ll *never* budge. This is…” Inhale. Exhale. “This is it, Ranboo.”

Ranboo stared at him for a few stuttering heartbeats. And then he said, “You asked if I remembered the day we first met.”

Tubbo blinked slowly, but didn’t reply, just waited. The sudden sting of tears made Ranboo look down at his cup of tea, salvaged from the pantry of whichever family had fled from this house, away from the fighting. Being here, even knowing there was nobody left to disturb, still felt strange; this house contained childhoods and adulthoods and lives that neither Ranboo nor Tubbo were privy to—soft, quiet, kinder lives.

“We were… six, I think,” Ranboo began, working to keep his voice even. “My parents brought me along for my first diplomatic visit. Practice, they said. Someday, their throne would be mine, and I had to know what that meant. I’m still not sure if I know.”

A small laugh that could’ve been a scoff.

It was encouragement enough.

“You were standing between your parents when we arrived. I remember your crown being too big for you, and it kept slipping down over your eyes, and you had to keep it in place with one hand. You saw me first and you said…” Ranboo chuckled at the memory, bittersweet as it might be. “You said, *‘Oh, brilliant, I need someone exactly like you.’*”

“And I brought you to the garden,” Tubbo continued, his anger at the world momentarily eclipsed by fondness for bygone times. “And I pointed out the kite stuck on the tree. *‘Grab that for me, please.’*” He pitched his voice high to mimic the bold, unearned authority only managed by six-year-olds raised to be kings.

“Your father was so embarrassed,” Ranboo teased, grateful for even this fleeting moment of levity. “He promised me you weren’t always like that. Guess he lied.”

“Hey,” Tubbo protested lightly, “at least I said *please*.”

“We spent the rest of the afternoon flying that kite,” Ranboo said. “Do you remember that?”

“Obviously.”

“Good. I just wanted to check.”

“Okay.”

“Alright.”

A silence stretched between them, a no man’s land.

They were always going to be the first casualty of this war.

“I didn’t, though,” Tubbo murmured, so low Ranboo wondered if he’d misheard.

“Sorry?”

“I didn’t lie.” Dark eyes cut through the shadows of the empty house, finding Ranboo. “I really did need someone like you.”

Ranboo’s hands tightened around his cup. “Tubbo…”

“You were… *are* my best friend,” he said resolutely, voice growing louder with each syllable. “You make everything easier. And that pisses me off a bit, I think, because you never asked for the burden of making me better, and still you carry it and you never complain and that pisses me off even more.”

“Tubbo—”

But Tubbo rushed on, “And it terrifies me, too, how much I rely on you, because how on earth am I supposed to function when you’re gone? How much of me is only me when you’re around?” He didn’t seem to realize he’d stood up, his palms pressed flat against the table between them, leaning so far towards Ranboo he might tip everything over. “So, fine, I might as well say it, because if the last decade wasn’t enough of a clear message, you’re my best friend and I *love you*. If you’re gonna take one thing with you into this war, take that.”

“For what it’s worth,” whispered Ranboo, “you’re my best friend, too.”

“I think,” Tubbo said, “that’s worth everything to me.”

“Oh, god.” Ranboo laughed without humor. “This is going to hurt like hell, isn’t it?”

“It already does.”

“I could join you,” Ranboo said, only because they both knew he never would. “Cross over to the other side, fight against my homeland. Imagine the look on my mother’s face. It’d be priceless. I would laugh if it wouldn’t tear me apart.”

Tubbo offered him a small grin. “What could she do then? *Ground* you?”

“Oh, no,” Ranboo said dryly. “How terrible. That is the worst fate she could ever saddle me with.”

“As if you wouldn’t just sneak out anyway,” Tubbo teased.

“I did that *one time* just because you insisted on going gallivanting through the forest at midnight,” Ranboo shot back with a fond shake of his head. “You’re a bad influence on me.”

“But not bad enough to ask you to betray your kingdom for me.”

“You love me too much to do that.”

“And you love me too much to ask the same from me,” Tubbo whispered. “Because you know the answer would be yes.”

“And I’ll hate you for it. We’ll hate each other.”

“So,” Tubbo said slowly, walking around the table until he was standing right in front of Ranboo. “Obviously, we’re gonna die on that battlefield in the morning.”

“I could stay far away from you,” Ranboo replied quietly. “If I have to go, I’d rather not have you do it.”

“Huh.” Tubbo cocked his head to the side as he considered Ranboo in the dim. “I was gonna suggest the opposite. Thought it would be nice.”

A bitter laugh. “What part of any of this is *nice*?”

“Dying in your arms. You being the last thing I see. Under any other circumstances, I’d argue it’s the best way to go.”

“You baffle me.”

“No, I don’t. You understand me better than I do.”

“Learning and relearning,” Ranboo replied with a smile that weighed heavily on his mouth. He was glad for the darkness, then. It hid his hesitation well.

But not well enough for Tubbo.

“You really don’t want to do this, do you?” Tubbo asked softly.

Ranboo felt irritation crawl and settle under his skin—not at Tubbo, just a general frustration at the nuisance that was the universe. “Of course I don’t. I’d imagine no one would ever want to choose between treason or killing your best friend.”

“Then let’s choose something else.”

The words fell between them like a sudden downpour, pounding against their shoulders and washing everything cold and clean.

“What do you have in mind?” Ranboo whispered, daring to hope, knowing disappointment or deliverance waited at the end of this road.

There was a renewed light in Tubbo’s eyes, a familiar one.

Tubbo put both hands on each of Ranboo’s shoulders and spun him around to face him fully. The teacup toppled with the motion, spilling cold and bittersweet tea across the table, but all Ranboo could feel was the warmth of Tubbo’s palms.

“I can’t make you choose between me and your kingdom. I can’t do that to you. I can’t let you do that to yourself. So, I’m choosing for both of us, okay? Let me do this for you. Let me do this for *us*.” Tubbo took a deep breath, his fingers holding on to Ranboo for dear life. “Let’s go.”

“*Go*?” Ranboo repeated, unsure whether to laugh or cry at the absurdity of the offer.

“Yeah,” Tubbo said, his face dead serious. “Let’s just *go*. Let’s leave. Run away and never look back.”

Ranboo began to protest, but Tubbo was a force of nature, uncontainable.

“Look, what’s two people missing from the battlefield going to do? They won’t notice. Our parents are so busy trying to kill each other they probably won’t be bothered to ask where we are until this all blows over, and by then we’ll be far away from here.”

“Tubbo,” Ranboo croaked, “my *family*—”

“We can come back,” Tubbo insisted. “Of course we’ll come back, after everything. But I refuse to let them do this to us. I won’t let them, okay? I just *can’t*.” His voice shattered over the last word, and Ranboo felt the same thing happen in his chest. “You were looking for an escape route, weren’t you? This is it. And you’re either with me, or you aren’t. Just say the word, and I’ll be quiet forever.”

For a moment, they only stared at each other, the only sounds their uneven breathing, Ranboo’s heartbeat rushing in his ears, and the slow dripping of spilled tea onto the hardwood floor.

And then, gently, softly, afraid to break more than he already had, Ranboo said, “Where will we even go?” and Tubbo grinned, because he knew it was Ranboo’s answer.

“Everywhere,” breathed Tubbo. “Anywhere. I don’t really care. Do you?”

“No,” said Ranboo.

Just as long as we’re together, he thought, but it didn’t need to be said. He let Tubbo step closer into the circle of his arms and buried his face against the front of Tubbo’s tunic. He felt Tubbo’s own arms go around him, holding him close, and for a moment, they just *existed*, Tubbo standing and Ranboo sitting in a small, dark house, miles away from everyone and everything else. Ranboo took a deep breath as the full weight of the decision began to settle on him, but he only needed to hug Tubbo just a little bit tighter for everything to feel light again.

“We could find a little town,” Tubbo mused. “Make up stories about who we are and where we’re from. We could be *anybody*.”

“Snake oil merchants,” Ranboo offered with a muffled chuckle. “Or a traveling two-man circus act.”

“You’ll play the part of Unnaturally Tall Man, and I’ll be the ringleader getting us into all sorts of problems.”

“Oh, so, business as usual, then?”

“Mm-hmm,” Tubbo said gently, tightening his hold on Ranboo. Ranboo could hear his heart through his shirt, keeping in time with the steady beat of Ranboo’s own. “Business as usual.”

They left on the eve of the war, vanishing like smoke or figures in the mist that were never there to begin with. They were not on the tally of the survivors, but neither were they among the dead scattered across the dirt and mud. The kings and queens would call foul, blame the other for sabotage, or hostage-taking, or more betrayal to add to the pile, but even if they turned every rock and mountain over, it would be clear that the disappearance was not involuntary. They would understand, quite soon, that it would be more difficult looking for people who did not want to be found.

It will take some time, but scouts would find that little house, abandoned once more, its door hanging open as if in invitation. There, they would find two swords and two daggers discarded on the floor, their gilded scabbards gleaming in the hazy morning light. And on a table, right beside an

overturned cup, two gold crowns lying side by side.

Later on, the first of the reports would begin. Many of the claims would be unfounded, but the rest spoke the same, sure story. They will speak of that sunrise battle, of almost getting so caught up in the frenzy of war that they almost missed it: in the distance, standing just beyond where the frontlines had carved the field in two, were twin shadows cast in daylight.

They would say the shadows stood close, almost as if they were a single, two-headed thing, or two separate beings holding fast to each other. The stories began to differ towards the end: was it the taller of the two that had been the first to walk away, or was it the shorter one? Did they linger, or turn away without hesitation?

One truth remained above all.

Neither of them looked back.

End Notes

Thanks for reading <3

Title take from Ben Platt's song, "Run Away"

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