

Intro: MCR/ACLU

James Baldwin said “to encounter oneself is to encounter the other: and this is love. If I know that my soul trembles, I know that yours does, too; and if I can respect this, both of us can live. Neither of us, truly, can live without the other.”

So I responded to the prompt “when was the first time you remember experiencing a moment of thinking the world was ending” with a memory of my trembling soul:

On the stone stoop, the sun is blinding, and I close my eyes against its intensity. I practice looking out of one eye and then the other. The lilacs and the apple trees beyond are blurred, fuzzy masses of color.

The radio, our one link to the world, perches just inside the doorframe in the shade, angled toward us as Mama gardens to country music, punctuated by congenial DJ’s promising to stick with us through the afternoon if we keep it locked on WOKQ.

We are farmers, planting today in the soft, hot, aromatic dirt. We are on the earth, which is a ball. A spinning ball. I love to spin, to whirl as fast as I can, and bring my arms in *just right* to catch the extra momentum.

Suddenly the voice of a Serious Man: “This is a test of the Emergency Broadcast System. This is only a test.” Then a loud, long, unnatural beep – a sound like something broken, like a robot. Like it goes on forever. I know this is in case of Nuclear War. I know there are Bombs big enough to shatter the world and melt our bodies. That the bombs are pointed directly at us. My heart pounds and my hands clench my knees. A pause. A long silence. I can’t breathe. Mama is still digging, her back to me, paying no attention, but I’m sure the bombs are already coming. I listen hard: when do we grab the iodine pills? How much time is there?

But here again is the Serious Man: “This has been a test of the Emergency Broadcast System. ...this concludes the test.”