The Voice in the Garden

by Harlan Ellison

After the bomb, the last man on Earth wandered through the rubble of Cleveland, Ohio. It had never been a particularly jaunty town, nor even remotely appealing to aesthetes. But now, like Detroit and Rangoon and Minsk and Yokohama, it had been reduced to a petulantly shattered Tinkertoy of lath and brickwork, twisted steel girders and melted glass.

As he picked his way around the dust heap that had been the Soldiers and Sailors Monument in what had been Public Square, his eyes red-rimmed from crying at the loss of humanity, he saw something he had not seen in Beirut or Venice or London. He saw the movement of another human being.

Celestial choruses sang in his head as he broke into a run across the pitted and blasted remains of Euclid Avenue. It was a woman!

She saw him, and in the very posture of her body, he knew she was filled with the same glory he felt. She knew! She began running toward him, her arms outstretched. They seemed to swim toward each other in a ballet of slow motion. He stumbled once, but got to his feet quickly and went on. They detoured around the crumpled tin of tortured metal that had once been automobiles, and met in front of the shattered carcass that was, in a time seemingly eons before, The May Co.

“I’m the last man!” he blurted. He could not keep the words inside, they fought to fill the air. “I’m the last, the very last. They’re all dead, everyone but us. I’m the last man, and you’re the last woman, and we’ll have to mate and start the race again, and this time we’ll do it right. No war, no hate, no bigotry, nothing but goodness . . . we’ll do it, you’ll see, it’ll be fine, a bright new shining world from all this death and terror.”

Her face was lit with an ethereal beauty, even beneath the soot and deprivation. “Yes, yes,” she said. “It’ll be just like that. I love you, because we’re all there is left to love, each other.”

He touched her hand. “I love you. What is your name?”

She flushed slightly. “Eve,” she said. “What’s yours?”

“George,” he said.