



Disaster

SO, EVIL strikes again, I say, and laugh.
People, a beautiful carpet, cover this terra
cotta plain.

The headcloths, tribalised. Fine
liveried goats in black and brown and
white. A touch of heavenly blue – that's
plastic – all now composed and just a-
buzz, still as a carpet from Shiraz that
barely stirs with little animals and runes.

Don't let the secret out.

Uselessly, I ask my friend – friend I
should bring to justice, or more likely,
shove justice in his face, 'What was this –
catastrophe? Earthquake again? Or
politics? Identity wars? Or grazing
grounds? Or just because it's goddam
hot,' that brings this press of people here,
shucked from their homes and business.
And so I think of drinks, cool bars.

Now, we shall start to pack these guys
and gals – here, some are dying, some
will soon, and some will wish they were

– squared off in tents. Neat.

History will start all over; these will become the hunters, gatherers, and we the fractious gods like Jupiters, assuaging our desires and few of theirs – with showers of coins or flights of swans. Then, let us unpack our boxes – our trove of things incongruous. That’s civilisation. Speeded up and started over. Warriors first, then farmers, later – lawyers. Catastrophe and after – and we are the guys who patch it over, tweak the mechanism – off they go again. Everybody!

We fix disasters.

Let’s suppose – the airship, squats down on the river, an immense donut. Tiny bodies falling from the sides, as finally, with foam and fire, it hits the grey-green water. Cars stop to watch – the thing should float, must have been planned like that, but no, it sinks, small citizens are drowning in their private drama. Here’s a tired helicopter bringing journalists, some leap in with cameras and such.

It’s so quiet, so peaceful.



Now, I’ve nothing better to do. Back in town, I ask the trainman, ‘What line is

this? I shouldn't have come with you.'

'Eighty', he says, behind the partition where he's received his guests, ingratiating – 'Ah, Geometer this, Engineer that.'

The train is nearly dark. 'Stops by request', we stop in Two Horses for an age, then jump and blur the Caustic Marches, Pyres.

'I'll just retrace my steps,' I say. 'Later I'll make this trip.'

I leave him, ask a woman as she goes home, 'Did a girl, maybe she's in crisis, looking for work, disappear in there where you both live?'

'We're all called women now, not girls. Why do you care? Some kind of molestation? Morbid tricks?'

'Time on my hands. In this place, if you don't speak the language well, the cops will pick you up for loitering, you have to say in dialect, "Fuck off, and on your pony, guy," and then you're safe.'

She says, 'We've all got crises here.'

I give her my friend's name: 'He's done some beastly things. A dance of death.'

She wore her crisis like a shawl. 'You'll have to wait,' she says.

'Absolutely not – I have to find my friends, and then this girl, this woman . .

.’

‘Maybe their house has been demolished. Or rebuilt. Elsewhere.’

‘It all seems a bit secret.’

Why don’t I take the 80 back, and start again? It’s all portentous, comes from only living once – I’ll ask the trainman, but don’t want to leave, I’m in this bar beneath the block where that girl disappeared, the district dull, deserted now but surely populous, the guys all doing who knows what, their ladies cooking, maybe on the phone . . . My documents are with my friend, the numbers, all the stuff you need to navigate, find where you are.



‘Don’t wait for me,’ the girl had said, no other choice, but now the bar is closing, maybe a funeral that’s passing, maybe the current’s off, no games or neon, coffee on the blink . . . And what the fuck’s her name? Try pushing all the bells, each one with two, three, surnames, – here starts harassment or abuse, so stop. Locked out and at a loss. At once you’re just a stack

of bones with dodgy flesh, exams all fudged or bought, your life a stack of Martian whispers.

Trouble, and cop asks, 'Who are you?'

Dammit, I know; I wish I didn't, wasn't here, some murder, suicide or other mystery. 'Oh no, I didn't know her,' into the slammer with him, no documents, prevaricator, molester even, don't know fuck about him! Nice feeling, found out and shameless; scary too, the devil made me see the world – a precious experience – but in the end, Satan is not behind me – stands there, in a cone of light.

Down the devilman!

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