

The Cataclysm

No one has yet endeavored to record the real reasons behind the cataclysm. Most of us are so absorbed in the reconstruction that we find little time for investigations and probings, or even simple reflection. We are united now, to be sure, yet we have no philosophy to guide us. Our plans and aspirations are sufficient to the task at hand. Something indeed has been lost, not just our buildings and our homes, but something less definable, something we will never recover no matter what lies ahead.

Indeed, the second generation has come and gone, yet we, their heirs, have not forgotten this something deeply ingrained in our longings and our hopes. The myths have been resurrected, those same myths which had been cast into oblivion centuries ago. Indeed, our immediate forefathers, whose names we have tried in vain to erase from our memory, had severed themselves from the past. But in all honesty, they had merely played the roles assigned to them long ago. They never questioned, it seems, the end results. Today it is too difficult to sort out the present from the past. I fear that we are following a more or less similar course of events, even granted our disadvantages under the present circumstances. The future, it appears, is already determined.

We were suddenly thrown together into one group. The divisions among us were immediately dissolved. It was as if they had never existed at all. And we discovered that what we had found so demanding and oppressive before, our institutions, were little more than conveniences we had adopted for the propagation of the race. Some of us had indeed foreseen this long ago, yet, at the time, pragmatic considerations made any programs for reform seem unnecessary.

I am not bitter about this in the least. The stage had already been set and everyone—even the directors—could only wait for the curtain to be drawn. You can imagine our surprise when instead the curtain was ripped in two before the expectant audience. The theater had been overcrowded from the start and when reports of fire sounded, a bedlam ensued. The trampled died, of course. But we felt no vengeance towards their murderers. We can only answer for ourselves.

Chaos bore two children, Night and Erebus, and from these came Love. We are the grandchildren of Love. As with all progeny we were begotten not by parents of our own choosing but as a matter of chance. Or necessity if you prefer. Life after birth is simply the instinct to survive. But love is not the fragile thing our ancestors praised but never practiced. For us it is something hearty and unsentimental, not born of Night and Erebus, but of self-preservation. We scorn altruism and all forms of pity.

In the days before the cataclysm, our kind of love was avoided at all costs. In it our fathers saw the source of all evil: selfishness, spite, and revenge. How misunderstood we would seem before them now, how malevolent we would appear. Yet are we in fact more beastly than they? No, we are really primitives at heart, inexplicably drawn together into one united clan. Many vestiges of the past in matters of manner and custom are retained, but we have long ago ceased to take them seriously.

A point which cannot be overemphasized is that we are almost uncontrollably prone to laughter. We proceed slowly, knowing that progress is inevitable, even though it may take an eternity to achieve all of the goals we have set for ourselves. We frequently finish our work early and spend our leisure hours happily. We prefer conversation that takes our minds off our situation or at least pokes fun at it. It has not always been this way, however. Indeed, several decades have been consumed trying to reach this very point. Some are still dissatisfied, of course, but our standard of living is relatively assured and sufficient to our needs.

And this is the point which our ancestors understood least. Happiness for them was something that always lay outside the human domain, an ideal which they constantly strove for, not realizing it was unobtainable. Idealism is the source of all dissatisfaction. Two persons may live together peaceably enough in a valley should there be an ample supply of resources to meet their needs, but when winter comes and crops must be stored, hostility becomes inevitable. It is fear that leads them to greed, and greed that leads them to anger, and anger that leads them to war. A fortress is the only kind of security they know. The man of power must protect himself and his goods, so we see him building a bulwark with guards at each entrance and weapons in every turret. The only remedy for such paranoia is the assurance that we are safe within our walls. To be free, of course, we must tear down the walls that not only keep others out but that also keep us in.