

19. THE CONFLAGRATION

“Is this when the Lord decides to destroy everything on the earth?”

“I wish that there was such a good excuse for what is going to happen to the world?”

“You believe in the Conflagration?”

“I just don’t know how we can keep acting like this!”

“So we’re going to get punished for trying to hold a job, fighting to stay out of the hospital, trying to find good friends in the world.”

“No, you’re going to be punished for getting fucked up all the time.”

“My hangover is punishment enough!”

“If that’s all there was to your dissipation.”

“You’re mighty moralistic for someone who really takes no chances in his life.”

“I take risks.”

“All calculated risks. All on the normalcy meter. You could leave your neighborhood for once.”

“I go to work. I go shopping. I go on vacation.”

“You’re permanently on vacation as far as the world is concerned.”

“I’m not going to go places where I’m not wanted.”

“You can’t find that out unless you leave your home.”

“It’s almost like a meteor. A fireball is going to come hurtling from space and engulf the whole world, this will be the punishment for all the injustice in the world. “

”You are destroying the innocent along with the guilty.”

“There are no innocents here. Just the guilty waiting to accept their vocation.”

“There are a lot of people who want nothing to do with this tomfoolery.”

“At gunpoint, you will you accept the certain world of the eternal savior.”

“I might accept the safer word of the terminally certain.”

“You think that is the way to go. We can’t really be certain about anything anymore,;’

“What about Vanessa’s smock?”

“It’s not what’s on the outside that counts.”

“You are taking inside to mean something extremely sexual in nature. I think that we meant things to go completely the opposite way.”

“Vanessa is desperate. She is going to have to take whatever she can get.”

“Vanessa doesn’t want to do another high school movie.”

“This is more of a disaster picture.”

“Anything that you do in the bedroom is a little bit of a disaster film.”

“I’d like a little bit of a nature scene here.”

“Vanessa meets her maker. Then she realizes that she is self-made.”

“Is this a scene of worship?”

“If Vanessa could only kiss me, then heaven and earth would be united.”

“They will be united in a fireball. And all your ignorant and extremely cruel enemies can be consumed in the conflagration.”

“You are simply embracing the credo that you have already rejected.”

“Vanessa is defenseless.”

“She know way more than we give her credit for.”

“Btu she lacks for metaphysics.”

“I gave you a warning that you didn’t heed.”

“I had no time to read that shit that you sent me.”

“You need to read it. It’s all about you!”

“I looked at a little of it. But it was full of equations. It was all over my head.”

“Just read the part that makes sense.”

“I can’t bother.”

“If you don’t take the time, it’s going to catch up to you.”

“It’s just not very fun!”

“This is important!”

“What do I have to worry about? I go to work every day. It’s not as if someone is going to invade my home.”

“You can’t take your life for granted.”

“So there isn’t anything that I can take for granted.”

“That boring job of yours.”

“I was expecting something better.”

“It’s not going to work like that.”

“So I can rest assured that I won’t lose whatever I have. But I’m never going to get what I really want.”

“I was trying to warn you about that. And when you can’t move forward, you start to move backwards.”

“Backwards.”

“Every little crisis sets you back a thousand years.”

“I’m not a hypochondriac.”

“You’re in a really terrible place. And I’m here to help you.”

“How? By bringing me breakfast in bed.”

“I was thinking of supplying you with the necessary medication to turn around your attitude.”

“I thought that was what you were trying to warn me about.”

“I only wanted to tell you that a change in attitude could be beneficial to your future. Otherwise, you’ll be more susceptible to their influence.”

“More conspiracy theory.”

“It’s only a conspiracy if you fail to respond to my warning.”

“I am starting to see it as more of a threat!”

“The world is about to change in some major ways.”

“And what am I supposed to do?”

“You could buy some waterfront property.”

“And what good would that do?”

“It would be a great place from where you could launch an ark.”

“This is the most ridiculous thing that I have ever heard of.”

“Every good prophecy begins with a moment of doubt on the part of the benefactor.”

“You’re offering me something really good?”

“Whatever you need!”

“You’re not pulling my leg.”

“I’m not a charity case.”

“So listen to what I told you.”

“I don’t really like how you’re trying to set me up.”

“You can’t start on the top.”

You were hanging out with the love of your life. And things were getting out of control.

“I am so high that I can’t even feel my body.”

Time was slowing down slower than slow.”

“Who did this to you?”

“Some kind of plant!”

“The Lord made the plants. So the Supreme Being is really fucking you up!”

“I was thinking this is part of a bigger conspiracy. Get us thinking that the world is against us. Then we’ll submit to pretty well anything.”

“Are you still feeling messed up?”

“I’m feeling that it’s worse than that. Like I’m fucked up permanently.”

“But you’re not. It’s just been a crazy day!”

“Crazy me!”

“Do me a favor! Act as if things are all OK!”

“I feel as if the world is crooked. And you want me to feel that I’m walking the straight and narrow.”

“Don’t worry. No matter what you do, they can read your mind. So just do something really stupid, and they’ll have no idea what you’re up to.”

“So I just need a secret agenda.”

“Better yet. Have no agenda, and they’ll never have any idea what really motivates you.!”

“I still leave an imprint that’s traceable.”

“You’re moving slowing. But you haven’t yet stopped the universe.”

“How I am going to do that?”

“You’re going to have to reach deep into yourself.”

“I can’t do that by myself.”

“You can always get help if you think that you can manage.”

“I did what I could to get the help that I needed. But she wouldn’t have me.”

“Maybe you’re not ready to have her. You could just find some other love of your life.”

“We all take what we can get!”

“That sounds a little pathetic!”

“I’ve pretty well lost my motivation.”

“We could say that you’re down so much that the only way to go is up.”

“There’s always a way to dig a deeper hole.”

“How do you expect me to do that? I don’t even have a shovel.”

“You could use your hands.”

“I was just thinking that if you have the idea, she must be as good as the idea that you have of her.”

“The world is as good as over when you’re no longer going to be able to get what you

want.”

“Quit complaining. I’ll just take what I can take.”

“It’s the weeds talking. You need to give a voice back to the flowers.”

“Just because we want to resist the end of the world doesn’t mean that we can do a thing about it.”

“You’re overdramatizing things. Your life is only taking a turn for the worst!”

In this part of the journey, the protagonist decides just to get out of his skin.

“It’s one thing to want to leave, but someone is going to have to tell us where to go.”

“Just go where you can feel like yourself!”

“Who’s paying for the trip?”

“There’s an endowment that has been set aside for emergencies like this.”

“We’re going to a part of the world where it never cools down. That is the closest that we can get to the coming fireball.”

“So you feel ready to take off!”

“I was pretty well ready when I was wandering around without any idea of where I was.”

“So we want you wandering around the desert while we film you burning up as hot as a thousand suns.”

“What’s hotter than that?”

“Your candidate for the love of your life.”

“Vanessa?”

“Vanessa’s a little young for you.”

“Vanessa’s is my shrink. She knows everything about me.”

“She also knows that you’re incapable of transforming the old world into the new.”

“I don’t get it.”

“Let’s just say that fireball isn’t even as hot as a cold waffle.”

“I’m not doing that badly.”

“If I had those kind of skills, I’d be cleaning toilets instead of using them.”

“I’m not fading that badly.”

“This is getting so out of kilter, I’m not following a thing.”

“You have desires, and you have tools. Your tools just don’t live up to their billing with regards to the application of your desires.”

“Are you calling me weak of heart?”

“I’m telling you that you have a weak body.”

“All that I do is point and click.”

“The pointing seems to work. But the clicking is doing very little in the heading in the right direction.”

“There is another alternative. You could admit that you were dead.”

“And do a return job.”

“You tell me that you want to get the job done. But you have nothing with which to do the job.”

“Come back a little later, and we can see what we can do.”

“The world is eventually going to change so much that it won’t make a difference what happened yesterday or today. Money will be worth nothing. We’ll all be on the street. And the

empire that you built with your hands will just be reduced to clay.”

“Where are we going?”

“We are going to hit the road.”

“What did I do wrong?”

“There was a miracle. And you didn’t complete its passing.”

“It’s going to pass again.”

“We just have to wait for the planets to assume their rightful place in orbit.”

“I thought that this was more an effect of the body.”

“The body merely reflects what is going on in the heavens.”

The journey turned inward towards the ins and outs of the body. We plotted the body’s map.

“The light is made flesh.”

“What?”

“The fireball comes and walks among us!”

I imagine that Vanessa had become the image of the world’s transformation. It was all her doing.

“Sometimes, wanting it just isn’t enough!”

If the tremors, that moved the earth, had shaken the body, then Vanessa would have been vibrating with the frequency of the universe.

“The world is going to end, but no before I establish that I am at the apex of my powers.”

“I thought that you quit believing such mythology.”

“I never believed it. But the whole world is reminding me that I must accept my fate.”

“You’re a pushover.”

Vanessa reasoned that all her new pleasures were a result of the coming cataclysm. She was a harbinger of the attended splendor.

“There is no glory in taking one for the team.”

“If you drink lots of water and stay out of the sun, you may be able to avoid any of the detrimental consequences of this unlikely end.”

“Why don’t you talk about our tragedy with a little more solemnity?”

“I thought that the universe was acting in your interest.”

“I know how bad it is for you. But there are so many good consequences from this kind of equalizing of the social order.”

Vanessa had learned her unique lessons from her mother. These included a blind acceptance of a battery of psychological experiments that passed for motherly love. It wasn’t just ballet or swimming lesson that were obligatory parts of her schedule. Mom was going to make sure that the sweet thing wouldn’t have any psychic mishaps.”

“What are you doing, Mom? This is my room. These are my drawers. And you are reading my journal.”

“I kept a journal when I was a kid.”

“What are you telling me?”

“That’s where first plotted all my little mischief.”

“We’re not the same.”

“I have to make sure that you’re not going to head down the wrong path.”

“How can there be a wrong path when it concerns my daughter’s health?”

“You are really being melodramatic!”

“If you don’t get what you want, you can always blame your momma!”

“I just want you to love me.”

No wonder, everyone thought that the world was coming to an end.

“If I ever got caught doing half the things that my mother did, some fireball would fall from the sky.”

“No one is ever going to catch you.”

“I want to hear a people story.”

“Your body can sense all the changes in the world. That is why we come to you. To learn the inner secrets of your body.”

“I can’t last forever!”

After hearing his explanation, I felt that this was the end the world. I was being a bit of a clown assuming I was at the center of some kind of big change in the world. But it was rolling over me like some kind of massive tidal wave. I was trying to listen to my heart, but I could feel the passions of the earth overwhelm me. What powers were the heavens loosening upon us poor souls. What had we done to deserve this fate?

“Let me explain how this game works. There are two parties: one explains the dire consequences, and the other expresses fear and outrage.”

“Which one of the two sides are you?”

“I can serve either ideology. But since I am so assertive, I probably should argue that a catastrophe is imminent. Since I know all the relevant facts, and you do not, you do not have to feign ignorance.”

“Your shock and dismay can appear natural.”

“Is there anything that I can do to avoid a disaster?”

“Disasters are everywhere manifest. And some can be prevented by some simple precautions. On the other hand, there are more severe examples which are too far gone to make any difference at the present. In that case, our only choice is to try to minimize the grave effects. Even with such knowledge, it is ultimately impossible for us to affect the truly massive calamity which is about to occur.”

“When?”

“I’m not sure on when. I think that surprise may be an element. Although we are being threatened from the heavens, there are no particular manifestations at this time. The heavens beat with the vibrations, but the full nature of this event has not reached its apex. There is nothing there at this point.”

“How can you be sure?”

“That is my skill, and why I am so well-suited to making the case for a dark future. I can interpret the conditions that underlie the conditions. The hidden forces. This is happening on the level of creation. Only in this case, it is an extreme destruction. And there is very little that we can do to resist.”

“This touches the heart of our being.”

“You really have grasped the gist of the problem.”

“Don’t you have some kind of special privilege since you have all this knowledge?”

“You can’t really blame me for what is happening. I want to apply my understanding towards making things better for everyone. I have been talking about this for quite some time. Few people took heed. Now it is time to effect an emergency response.”

“To run for the hills.”

“In so many words.”

“So some places will be safe at the time of impact.”

“Nowhere will be entirely unaffected. But there are a few regions of the planet which will not bear the brunt so intensely.”

“We can stop all this from happening?”

“The worst of the worst.”

“We can start anew.”

“The few who remain.”

“It will be that universal.”

“I am only giving you the facts.”

“You are scaring me.”

“That is normal. You’re human. You’re finally coming to terms with you mortality.”

“I never thought that it would be so abrupt.”

“You have a little time.”

“What about miracles?”

“You all gave up on that option months ago.”

“So there was the possibility of intercession.”

“Was!”

“This story is written from the point of view of some proximate future. Does that mean that we will survive?”

“Some records will survive. It may be hoping for too much if you expect to walk away from this.”

“I will be in hiding.”

“This is something most monstrous.”

“Why are you asking me all these questions?”

“You are the one who seems most concerned with questions.”

“Why don’t you just describe the fireball?”

“If it doesn’t yet exist, it may be hard to convince you of its imminent importance.”

“I want to hear the gory details.”

“This is not a disaster film. You have a lot to do. I don’t want you to panic.”

“But you have told me that there is nothing that I can do to stop it. Why isn’t that a source of panic.”

“You may be able to protect yourself from the worst of its consequences.”

“I thought that the intent was to punish us all for our evil ways.”

“That is the reason. Especially those at the top who have craved power for its own sake. These faceless types who can don masks and cry crocodile tears.”

“Why not just punish them?”

“Because people like you have enabled them.”

“What have I done?”

“You have allowed society to degenerate to this level.”

“You are talking nonsense. This is not the same thing as cleaning my house. Or dealing with a pestilence problem.”

“This is much worse.”

“Worse how? You’re only trying to scare me. For all that I know, you’re just trying to scare me.”

“Forget it. Don’t do anything. You’ll just be among the casualties.”

“I thought that the intent was to do in us all.”

“It is. But you have the chance to separate yourself from the rest of humanity.”

“Is this some kind of coup that you’re attempting. Neutralize the majority of the population and then impose your will on the rest.”

“We are trying to use our knowledge to benefit the most number of people. We can only do so much.”

“But you do have a hidden agenda.”

“We’re not in hiding. We have been preaching for quite a long time. No one has been listening.”

“So the catastrophe is working to your benefit.”

“You can’t work a catastrophe to anyone’s benefit.”

“If you let it ride right!”

“It won’t work if you take enough anesthetic.”

“There is inner peace!”

“You have to keep on the move. Don’t let yourself become a sitting duck. As long as you don’t stand still, they won’t know how to track you. The moment that you slow down, they’ll zero in on your location.”

They have their own plan. They want to lure you into their trap. And their trap is a roving location. They use their wiles to make you commit yourself. Try as you may, they have their method. And each step along the way pushes you closer and closer to being entirely boxed in.

It is truly amazing how they use your own actions against you. You think that you are running in a straight line away from them, but you are actually spiraling back towards them. It is almost as if they are tempting you to move in their direction.

“There has to be a reason that things evolve this way. It may have something to do with how you see space. It is not something that is entirely open. Space is constructed psychologically by linking together enclosures. Becoming free is simply accepting more and more these enclosures. It is not a positive gesture in and of itself. It is more like a negative. A negative of a negative. To be free means not to be in chains. To counteract the feeling of not being free.”

So even in escaping your captivity, you leave traces of your former state. And your pursuers are able to observe these traces and use them to follow your progress. As you break away from your confinement, you are preparing ourselves for a more general entrapment. You are your own worst enemy.

The dilemmas that you encounter start to become part of you. You are your own jailer.

As you separate ourselves from your prison place, you become more immersed in its effects. Inside the self, you construct a solitary that allows no other visitors than the self. And you find it more and more difficult to venture out on your own.

Your pursuers are completely aware of your transformation. And in the next phase, you increase your victimization. You draw on incidents from your past to help explain why things are so desperate. That only encourages you to blame yourself for your predicament. And your anguish is a more extreme form of intimidation.

Once you attribute these problem to yourself, you become more haphazard in your strategy. This might throw of those tracking you. But you only confirm their initial suspicions. And they move closer and closer to you. They are closing in.

Sure, you believe that you have been done in by your own paranoia. And as the noose pulls tighter, you recognize how your own weakness of been exploited. But it's not you! You have been deluded by your enemies.

It doesn't stop there. Even though you can feel that they are hot at your heels, there is part of you that thinks that escape is still possible. So you become even more erratic. You backtrack in an effort to throw them off the scent. Even as you find success, you are making yourself less and less untouchable. The trap is finally set.

You think that you have allies. And your immediate environment is your friend. Nothing could be further from the case. You are way, way out there. And you are right in the center of things. An *X* on their map. And then the order is given.

You don't want to believe that things are hopeless. And you take off on your own. This is where they close the circle."

I was exhausted. I didn't know why I felt crushed. There was a great weight on me. I pushed from the outside in. I could hardly bear all this pressure.

"Do you feel guilty?"

"It is worse than that!"

"And you feel as if you can make amends."

"No one can make you feel free. Not me, not you."

"Does that lessen your burden?"

"I wish that I could do something to make me feel better. I can't."

"It's not as if you're at your last resort."

"I'm really scared!"

"Fear could be the beginning to turning your life around."

"If I was starting at the beginning. But this fear has been eating at me for a long time."

"Then it's in your imagination."

"There is too much going on to ever provide me with a moment of comfort."

I didn't think that this was my own doing. But I was feeling down about things. I couldn't figure out what I was doing wrong. Things just wouldn't have come this far without my own doing.

"So you think that it is your fault."

"Truly!"

"You can fight it."

"There is no vengeance. Their wrath has already shaken me at the core of my being."

“You’re sounding so melodramatic.”

“Loss is the most intense form of fantasy.”

“How is that?”

“In fantasy, we think that we are attaining what we truly desire. And even though we fail, our dreams offer us a sense of liberation that is greater than getting anything that we actually crave.”

“You’re letting these ideas rot your brain.”

“I can’t shake the feeling.”

“It has no basis in fact.”

“I’ve heard things. And deep inside of me, I can feel things shaking my confidence. I am weather-vane for what is happening to my world.”

“How so?”

“We are all coming apart. We are trying to keep it together. But the world is weighing down on all us. It touches everything that we do. And it’s going to get a lot worse.”

“What could be worse than what is happening to you?”

“The whole world is about to be destroyed.”

“That is absolutely silly.”

“I doubted it too. But now I know it in my heart. It is coming upon us!”

“Just talking about it in a more convincing way doesn’t make it happen.”

“Not talking about it won’t make it go away.”

“Chicken Little, is the sky falling?”

“A lot worse than that. Why don’t you go buy an umbrella to protect yourself?”

“I could get you a rain hat if that would make you feel good.”

“And some sturdy radiation glasses.”

“What do you want me to do about it?”

“You perceive your economic identity as a political or national identity. In turn, you mistakenly associate your national heritage with race. As such you attribute an intention of the part of your enemies to exterminate you race. From this point on, you can justify any sort of politically-motivated crime!”

I felt as I had almost finished my journey. I had come to no real understanding. But that made no difference. This was all a physical thing. I needed to make the odds favor me.

“How does it feel that you have finally recovered?”

“It wasn’t just the body that came through.”

This was more than having survived. Granted that the conflagration may have been entirely a fiction. I, nevertheless, felt relieved. I look out at the neighborhood where I lived and imagined that I was at home.

“I need to get out more. I need to experience the warm sun. “

The pines reached up to the sky. I stretched out my arms. I was at one with the heavens.

“Not so fast, buddy!”

“What are you talking about?”

“You only came out of this because of your belief. The conflagration indeed did occur. You were one of the lucky ones.”

“How can you say that? There were no news reports of any of this happening.”

“That doesn’t diminish the significance of the event.”

“How can there be an event which shows no measurable evidence?”

“Look at yourself. You have been affected.”

“By something negative. My own fear.”

“You do feel so much better.”

Perhaps, my allegiance to Vanessa had carried me through the worse.

“I can’t help you any better than anyone else.”

“In some ways, you can. I don’t know what it is. It could be how you’re put together.”

“I’m put together like any other girl.”

“It’s more than that. As if you’re a receiver for radio waves from outer space. You attract all this power to yourself.”

She smiled., “You can’t let yourself believe that kind of shit.”

“What are you trying to tell me?”

Something seemed to have drawn us closer together. Something that I really couldn’t explain.

“You believe what you want to believe.”

“You have been touched by a higher power.”

She may herself have been the higher power.”

“All this is written from the point of view of the future. You assume that you have survived. Let’s say that the conflagration occurred after all this was written. Then it really did happen. And all your exhilaration is premature.”