

In the End Days

By

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Professor, Doctor, Celie, Ali and Nan at the dinner table.

PROF We stuff our bellies while the storm rages.

DOC We're like the people in the caves.

CEL What people?

DOC In the olden days.

ALI You mean our ancestors?

DOC I just mean people. Cave people. Before the world was all built up.

CEL It's crashing down again.

DOC Whose fault is that?

PROF Ours. We're a despicable lot.

NAN I don't know what you're talking about, Prof. I don't consider myself despicable.

PROF I speak in metaphor, Nan.

CEL Easy to blame people for all the messes in the world.

PROF Who else is there to blame?

ALI Systems.

PROF Created by?

ALI Systems.

PROF You won't win the argument that way, Ali.

ALI I'm not interested in winning.

CEL You're always interested in winning.

ALI I'll remind ya: I was debate loser at school.

DOC That was a while ago.

ALI And yet I still have the same diminishing skills.

PROF People had paradise and they tore it up.

CEL Is that your theory?

PROF It's reality. Look around.

DOC I don't think there ever was a paradise.

PROF Not a believer, eh?

DOC No.

PROF Shame. It helps to believe in things.

NAN Soothes the soul. That's right.

DOC Religion preys on people's frailties.

ALI I wouldn't go down that path if I were you.

DOC Why?

NAN Cos you're insulting me. That's why.

DOC Sorry. I just meant.

NAN ...

PROF The power of systems made by people, Ali. We should sit in contemplation at all the damage we've done the world.

ALI I do. I often contemplate what the tiny hordes have done with their selfishness and greed. But they are tied to systems. All sorts of systems that have made the damage possible.

PROF Systems of economic freedom tied to personal and political freedom?

ALI Precisely. Systems that make people into nothing, into disposable beings. And pretend they're giving them the illusion of so-called freedom.

CEL You exaggerate.

ALI I'm putting it mildly. If I were to really say what some of the most brilliant nefarious economic minds have done in their collusion with politicians and governments the world over, I'd be cast off into the wilderness and never be seen again.

PROF We're all complicit, Ali.

ALI And therefore? What?

DOC We can feel good about ourselves. Right? In a strange way. Because in our complicity we also come to understand our blinding stupidity.

NAN Rubbish.

DOC Think about it.

NAN I'm not dignifying this conversation.

PROF We're just talking, Nan.

NAN Making my head spin, that's what!

CEL Calm down.

NAN I just want to ease my digestion. Is that too much to ask?

DOC ...

ALI ...

PROF ...

CEL What's that story?

PROF Hmm?

CEL Paradise is for the victors.

PROF I have no idea.

CEL Something to do with philosophy. A person stands in for a thing. A place stands in for another. We see ourselves in the grass. In the trees. We wonder why they're not speaking to us, when in reality, they are all the time, but we don't listen. To echo your sentiment: we failed paradise. Like we failed a lesson at school. We look at the sometime sea for answers. But it rages back. The sun flares. Burns. We hide in our houses. And eat.

DOC And drink.

ALI And drink. Yeh.

PROF ...

NAN ...

CEL We possess our little things and mourn pasts that were not a part of us. We practice a cruel game of nostalgia. It consumes us. It gnaws at us. It bites our insides.

PROF So, you agree with me. We are despicable.

NAN Enough!

CEL We failed each other. And I mean "we" in the biggest possible sense. Every single person in the world.

DOC The enablers.

ALI Systems again.

CEL And by so doing, yes, we failed everything.

ALI People learn from failure, though.

CEL Do they?

ALI Look at me.

DOC Ali.

ALI I can talk about it. I don't mind owning up to my failures. I had a great job once. I had prospects. As they say. I was climbing the ladder. I was even singled out for my ability to come up with things. On the spot. And then, little by little, one job led to no job led to a possible job and led to no job again. And so, I ended up back here. With Nan and Celie. In an old house that we can't even afford.

NAN Stop that.

ALI I speak my mind. I have no shame. But even so, I think people learn from failure.

PROF And therefore, recover paradise?

ALI I'm not interested in paradise. It's an old concept.

DOC Precisely.

PROF What are you interested in, then?

ALI Calamity.

NAN Please.

ALI No. I think it's important to contemplate calamity. Stare at the ruins. Stare at the damage. Survey all the disasters in the world. As if they were a mirror.

CEL You've been drinking too much.

ALI See ourselves for who we are. Perpetrators of wrongs. Monsters.

NAN I'm not a monster.

ALI Not you, Nan. You are a saint. But the rest of us are.

DOC Speak for yourself.

& CEL

& PROF

ALI We're all monsters. Abusers, even. In one way or another. If you think you're not, I suggest you look in the mirror.

CEL Abuse is a strong word.

ALI I can think of no other. When it comes to the planet.

PROF So, everyone's beyond redemption?

ALI Yes. And we should own up to that.

PROF I'm not sure I-

ALI A catastrophe in one area of the world is linked to another. People profit from disaster. They have done so for a long time. They build up their empires of illusion, and fuel more disasters so that their profit margins go up. One day, it's a war. The next day it's the banks. The next day, it's the air we breathe.

CEL Or the sea.

ALI Pretty soon, we're all staring at the disasters as if they were a reality show. A horrible spectacle. And we say to ourselves "More, please."

NAN I don't.

ALI Not you, Nan. But everyone else - even you, Celie - are saying "More, please." Because disaster leads to fear leads to shock leads to people sitting in a house in disrepair pretending they're protected from most things, when disaster is always at the door, knock, knock, knocking, like that song about heaven. And we've become so accustomed to disaster, we let it in, and give it a place to sit, and allow ourselves to think that if we sit with it, long and hard, it will go away. Poof. Like magic.

But oh, how shocked we are when it's still here, breathing down our necks, slinking into our veins, poisoning our blood while we express our dismay. And it's not until way past the midnight hour when we're barely stuttering ourselves to sleep that we realize we're also part of the spectacle. We're caught up in it. We're as guilty as all those that we point our fingers at. And there's nothing we can do except maybe run away. But where are we going to run away to? Because the spectacle is everywhere. It's consumed the earth. It's eaten through everything. So, some of us, choose to stay inside. To live with the thought of running away and making a new world order. While others march in the streets. And others go to the woods. Like you, Doc.

DOC I haven't -

ALI You're near the woods, aren't you?

DOC I suppose.

ALI In the woods, people make communion with each other. They plant trees. They seek forgiveness. They pretend they are as protected as those of us in our houses. When little

do they know, they're as caught up in all of it as the rest of us. Enabling every single bit of the systems that make the show happen.

DOC You're wrong.

ALI I hope I am. For the sake of the world. But something tells me, it's all a brilliant shit show and yes, Prof, we are despicable people addicted to our little pleasures and little cravings and small worthless desires for a bit of steak or some nice cheese or the promise of a magnificent job one day - one that will truly challenge us to be better than we are, better than what the reality show demands of us, even if what we really want to do is nothing, and just be - take in the last bits of sunlight, the last shards of rain hitting the dirt and call it a day. To end all days.

CEL ...

NAN ...

DOC ...

ALI ...