

Rapture

"I went looking for you"

"I know. You said."

"I went looking for you and I couldn't find you. I was worried"

"Well, I was there. You just didn't see me."

"I couldn't find you. I thought maybe you wouldn't come. Maybe changed your mind. I get worried, you know? Like you changed your mind. Or maybe something happened. Like some accident, you might be hurt. I think these things."

"I know. I was there, you just didn't see me in the crowd. You shouldn't worry so."

"Yeah, well."

"It all worked out. We found each other, found the stuff we needed, it all worked out, right?"

"Ok, right. You're right. You know. Sometimes I worry. Waiting. I don't like crowds."

"You don't like people"

"I like plenty of people!"

"Like who? Name two."

"There's Gary. I like Gary. And Christine.... Philip! I like Philip."

"Oh come on, you barely tolerate Gary. And you like Christine's tits, that's all. And remember how much you went on about Philip after that party last fall, when he cornered you and held you bored to tears with his endless blathering? Your words."

“Ok, ok. So maybe I’m grouchy sometimes. I like you well enough.”

“I’m relieved.”

“Oh, don’t get that way. You know I do. And I’m nice to people, I am. I always try to be nice.”

“Alright, alright. Forget it. Let’s get on with it. Do you have the thing?”

“Yeah, it’s here, in this box. You bring tools?”

“Yep, right here. So, you have an idea how to put this together?”

“Think so. I read the instructions. As much as you can read wordless pictures. So, see here, I’ve laid out the pieces. Just gotta put these things here, those pieces there, screws go here, these other things here, fastened with these bolts. “

“What about the thing in the box, what’s it called?”

“The agitator pump.”

“What’s an agitator pump?”

“Fuck if I know. But after you put all of these other pieces together, the agitator pump goes here, connected with these little hoses and cables.”

“But you don’t know what it does?”

“It makes the whole thing work. When you plug it in and turn it on, it makes the whole thing work.”

“You mean like a motor. Why don’t they just call it that?”

“Because it’s not a fuckin motor, it’s a pump. That agitates.”

“You’re the boss, I’ll trust you know what you’re doing. Here, you take the screwdriver, give me those bolts and nuts.”

“Right. Ok. So, I line these guys up here, get the holes straight, screw should drop right in then, see if we can get it to catch with the screwdriver, maybe wiggle it a little, come on, I know you can do it...”

“Maybe a little less play by play?”

“Oh, sorry. Hey, did you hear what happened to Fred?”

“No. what?”

“He was pulled over last week. Broken taillight. Cop asked him for ID then had him step outta the car. Stood looking at the ID then looking at him, took a long time doing it too. Fred starts sweating like a motherfucker”

“Cop suspect something?”

“I don’t know, I don’t know how he could. Fred didn’t have it in the car. Cop gave him his license back and told him to get his tail light fixed. Didn’t write him up or anything.”

“Not even a warning?”

“Nope. Just told him to be safe and on his way. Strange. Sure shook Fred though.”

“Well, it was probably nothing. Fred’s like that, little things put him off. A worrier. Like you.”

“How you coming along there?”

“Just fine. Bolts and nuts. Bolts and nuts. I hate bolts and nuts. Especially sticky bolts and nuts.”

“Say, speaking of sticky nuts, how’s Janet?”

“Very funny.”

“No, really. How is she? Have you spoken to her?”

“Nope. She doesn’t want to speak with me. Can’t say I blame her, guess I was sort of mean.”

“You were kind of an asshole.”

“Hmm.”

“You can be all charming, big smile, life of the party, but then you’ve got this temper. And you have the great good fortune to land a girl like Janet, who’s sweet to you, really likes you, then you go get angry over some little thing and fuckin drive her away. If I had a woman like that...”

“You wouldn’t have a woman like that.”

“All I’m saying. I may be a little grumpy, stand-offish sometimes, but if I had a woman like that, I’d treat her nice, bring her flowers, make her dinner. Take her out. Take her to Paris. Build her a house, with a shed out back. And a barn. She could have a horse. She could have a garden. I’d take care of her, treat her nice.”

“Right.”

“Just saying is all”

“Got it. Ok, I’m done with mine. You finished yet?”

“Yep, there. Good. So let’s get this thing put together with these thingys”

“What are those?”

“Clamps, more cables, then these wires here, plug into this plastic piece here, this connector thing”

“Ok, so, do we stand it up yet, to do this?”

“I think so. Yeah, that would be the way to go. So, help me with this, yeah, that’s it, now, over here, little more, good that’s it. There.”

“What about the agitator pump?”

“It goes right here, at the top”

“And you still don’t know what it does?”

“It agitates, you fuckin moron! Now here, let’s plug it in, give it a spin...”

Starting as a low, barely audible hum, the sound began. Objects on table surfaces, saltshakers, vases, cups, started shifting, trembling. The walls vibrating. The sound grew, timpani’s slow rolling, cellos bowing low quavers, bases and trombones beginning to growl. The room began to glow. A red wave washing the couch, the chairs, the windows, obscuring the view of the world outside. Turning blue now, the color thickening the air, then a burst! A burst to Yellow! Then a White! A White blinding all sight! And the orchestra explodes in a deafening scream, a cry, a blare! Jubilee trumpets, the angels of heaven, all singing to the Glory of Creation!

“Woa. Fuck.”

“Motherfuck.”

“You alright?”

“I think so. What the hell? What the motherfucking hell was that?”

“I don’t know. Glory of God or some shit. I didn’t know it did that.”

“I thought you read the instructions.”

“They were pictures, alright? There weren’t any fuckin trumpets or angels in the God-damn pictures. Fuckin IKEA.”

“So, where the hell are we?”

“I do not know. Seems like we’re in a boat. On a lake. I can’t see the shore, it’s foggy, can’t make it out.

“Well, let’s start rowing or something. Where are the oars?”

“Hmm. Don’t see any by me. Any over there?”

“Shit. No. Great. Stuck in a boat with no oars in the middle of a lake we don’t know, with no shore in sight. Great. Just great. Whose idea was this anyway?”

“Initially, yours, if you recall”

“Me! Me? You were the one that brought up all this shit about a wonderful machine that would do all these wonderful things, you went on and on and on about it...”

“Yeah, and then you got all enthused and said let’s do it! Let’s go for it! You had me order it right there!”

“I was drunk!”

“Well maybe I can’t tell the difference between you being drunk and you being sober! All I can say is that you were very insistent, very excited, it got me all excited. Something we could actually build together, really together, for a change.”

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You know what I mean.”

“No, tell me.”

“Look. We hang together, we talk. We go drinking. But we don’t ever *do* anything unless it’s your idea, then I’m just tagging along, your wheelman, your backup. You do the fun. But when it’s my idea, something cool I want to do, to make, to build, you just sit and stare, never help. You never lend a hand.”

“Hey. I was lending a hand today and look what happened.”

“That’s beside the point. I’m making a general observation here. About our relationship.”

“Beside the point! Look where we are! What could be more to the motherfucking point?”

“This is just an anomaly, a little glitch. I was talking about our relationship, our friendship, how it usually goes, how I wish it were maybe a little different. Bigger picture.”

“I never knew you were so unhappy with me.”

“I’m not unhappy with you. You’re great. I like being with you. I just wish it was a little more.”

“Maybe we should try rowing with our hands.”

“Like how?”

“Like this. Kind of cup your hands, dip your hands in the water and move your arms like oars. Like this.”

“Like this?”

“Yeah. No. We gotta go in the same direction, turn your hands around, no that doesn’t work, here, face the opposite way, your back to me. There, there you go. Now we try to row.”

“It’s working...”

“Keep going...”

“The water’s cold.”

“No shit. Keep rowing.”

“Are we moving? I don’t see any shore. Can you tell if we’re moving?”

“Just keep rowing”

“Can you tell if we’re moving? I don’t think we’re moving”

“Just stay with it.”

“This isn’t working. I don’t think we’re moving.”

“Just keep going”

“No. It’s not working. We’re not moving. Stop. Just stop. Let’s think a minute. Let’s figure this thing out.”

“What’s to figure out? We’re stuck in the middle of a lake in a boat with no oars.”

“Yes, but how did this all happen? There has to be an explanation. We just have to think it through.”

“I don’t know what there is to think through. We built this contraption of yours, plugged it in, then KA-BLOOEY!, and our God-damned reality changed and now here we are stuck in this boat and unless we have another contraption to turn on and summon the fuckin angels, queue the mother-fucking New York Philharmonic, I don’t see another way out. Unless we can somehow get this boat to move. Come on let’s try rowing again.

“I told you, that’s not working. Something else is going on. Like maybe this is some sort of collective hallucination we’re both having at the same time and if we wait long enough, it’ll go away and we’ll wake up. You know, like from a bad trip.”

“So what do we do?”

“I dunno. Sit quiet and think. Close our eyes and imagine we’re back at the house.”

“Right. Close our eyes. Close our eyes. OK. Eyes are closed. Thinking we’re back at the house...”

“Shhhh. Concentrate...”

“Hmm...”

“Are you concentrating?”

“Hmm. Yeah....I’m starting to see....”

“What? What do you see?”

“A big piece of chocolate cake with vanilla ice cream on the side, oh yeah”

“Damn it! Would you get serious! “

“Hey, just a little levity here, don’t get all worked up, just trying to lighten things up a bit. Wait, look over the side there.”

“What? What are you seeing?”

“The water looks different. Wait, I can feel the bottom, the bottom of the lake! Look out there, the lake has drained! It’s like fuckin low tide or something!”

“You’re right! But it doesn’t feel like sand or dirt or whatever would be left of the bottom of a lake. It feels smooth. And hard. Like porcelain.”

“Can’t be.”

“It is! Feel it!”

“Well fuck me up sideways on a Sunday. We’re at the bottom of a bathtub.”

“Have to be a pretty big bathtub ‘cause I don’t see any sides. Still can’t see anything out in the distance.”

“Yeah, well, at least now we can get out of this thing and walk and maybe what’s out there will get clearer as we get closer to it. Find out maybe where we are.”

“Ok, but I think we should bring the boat.”

“Are you fuckin kiddin me?”

“No really. We might be able to use it, break it up into pieces. Use it for firewood, or maybe even build something out of it, another contraption that will transport us back to where we belong?”

“And how do you figure we go about doing that? You got anymore IKEA picture instructions for building an interdimensional time shifting reality changer out of wood scraps?”

“Maybe an idea will come to me. Look, there is a rope in the front of the boat. We can take turns pulling it.”

There was no color, everything was white, or a greyish off- white, or just plain grey. There was almost no sound, save for the scraping sound of the boat on the smooth ceramic ground. From time to time, there seemed to be a distant cry, very faint. Maybe a bird of some kind, or a lost child. Sometimes, there was the smell of cedar chips. Other times, the smell of burnt cookies. There was no wind, or even the slightest breeze. The air felt dense but neither cold nor warm. If a clock could have been seen here in this place, it would have been observed that the hands of the clock would not have moved, not a tick or a tock. Time was dead.

“It feels like it’s getting harder to pull, like we’re going uphill, or on an incline. Or something.”

“Yes. Yes. You are right! We are climbing, climbing out of this basin, we are getting somewhere. Soon we’ll be able to rest, and I’ll think of what we can do with this boat. I’ve thought all along this boat is important, that’s why I wanted to bring it.”

“That’s why you wanted me to pull it you mean.”

“Hey, I took my turn pulling!”

“Somehow my turns always seemed to last longer”

“Nah, it always seems that way when you are the one doing the pulling.”

“Always the optimist you are. Did it ever occur to you that we might never get back? Like, maybe this is heaven or some shit like purgatory. You know, like maybe we’re dead?”

“Pretty strange afterlife if you ask me.”

“Yeah, well, what would a normal afterlife look like?”

“I dunno. Maybe seeing your loved ones again. Maybe reconciling with them, spreading some love around, angels playing harps, golden light...”

“Loved ones. Like who?”

“Like my parents. My dad. Like maybe I’d be at last able to really know my dad, connect with him, like emotionally, you know?”

“Go on”

“Dad was always so distant, kind of stern. Never mean, but he was strict. And things had to be done just so, it could be very oppressive. Still, he showed me how to use a saw, how to use tools. Showed me how to make things. I was always wanting his approval, tried to do my best, to make him proud of me. I never felt that I did, not really. After he died, I found out that he always wanted to be an architect when he was young, but that the Depression and the war and his family being poor just never made that possible, for him to go to school to study that. I think now that’s maybe why he was always so somber, just always carrying that regret in his breast pocket.”

“Shit, I wouldn’t want to be stuck in heaven with my dad. Once in life was enough. That miserable finking drunk. Mean. He never hit my mom or anything, but he would needle her. All the time. And he was strict as hell with me and my brother. Beat the living crap out of us if he thought we were getting out of line. “Out of line”, that was what he’d always say. God, I couldn’t wait to be outta there and break that fuckin line.”

“Hey, look. Up ahead. Looks like a forest or something. And it’s leveling out. “

“Well OK. Maybe we can figure out where we are. Any of this familiar to you?”

“Not really. Strange trees though. Bare. No leaves or needles. They look like the kind of fake Christmas trees you get at Home Depot. You know, the way the fake branches are attached to the trunk ‘cept these have no needles.”

“But these aren’t plastic. Definitely wood. They break off, see?”

“Right. Ok. Let’s stop here. I’ve got an idea. Let’s break off more of these branches, they’re very strong but flexible, see? Then we bust up the boat, use the planks to make it solid, so it will stand”

“What for?”

“I want to build a portal. Big enough so we can both get through.”

“I think you are fuckin out of your mind”

“No really. I have an idea. I have a feeling this is the right thing to do. We need to break the boat completely apart, then using the thinner branches, weave it all together.”

“I have no idea what you are talking about. I can’t see it”

“Here, I’ll show you. Trust me. I’ll bust out this plank here, there.... bust out another one....then with these branches, kind of twist them together, make a kind of web with them, then... kind of thread the planks through to make it sturdy. Like this. There it works! See. We can do this!”

“I don’t really get it. But you just show me what to do.”

“Break off more of those branches, and I’ll start busting up the boat. Looks like if I use my foot to smash it...yeah, that works...they come off pretty easy. Kind of surprising really...”

“I’ve got a shitload of branches. So how do they go together again?”

“Let’s switch, you finish breaking up the boat. I’ll start weaving the net.”

“So you just smash kick the little fuckers. Ok. Yeah, that is pretty easy. Reminds me of my old man, the time he actually started kicking my brother for something he did, like hitting him wasn’t enough. Actually kicked him down the stairs. Shit, what an asshole he was. Never kicked me though, slapping me hard across the face, his preferred way of punishing me. Such a bastard, such a bastard. I never understood him, what made him so mean. I was by his bedside when he died, you know? I don’t know if I ever told you that. It fell to me to look over him when he was in the hospital that last time. My brother didn’t want anything to do with it, getting him in hospital, fell to me. At the end, it was just a lot of waiting, he was mostly unconscious, me sitting there, waiting for the poor old shit to die. Funny though. I remember just before the end, his eyes popped open, like they hadn’t in days, they popped open wide and he’s staring straight ahead, like he’s seeing something, but instead of being terrified, like I’m thinking to myself this is it, grim reaper time and shit, like I don’t know if I really want to see this but I have to look, like it’s somehow important, and I’m expecting to see terror in those wide open eyes, but instead, he starts to smile, a really warm, happy smile, and I had never seen him smile like that before, his old face actually looked kind, like fucking full of grace. And I remember I wanted to know what he was seeing, I wanted to ask him, but then it was like the light went out behind his eyes, his smile faded, didn’t completely go away. Then with one big sigh, he was gone. And that was it.”

“Man, no, you never told me that story. Shit, that must have been intense. But no matter how awful he was, it was good you there, you got to see that. I was with my mom when she was in hospice, same kind of thing, waiting for the end, making sure she’s comfortable, the nurses doing all they can. But I fell asleep sitting there. I fell asleep and when I woke up, she was gone. She passed and I wasn’t awake to be with her. I didn’t see the end. I could have held her hand, but I fuckin fell asleep. Always felt bad about that. I always kind of took my mom for granted. Dad was the one who called the shots, the one I always wanted to please. My mom was just always kind, always had this half smile. Always encouraged me in the most optimistic way. Just always showing me her love. I don’t think I ever showed her enough love back. And after she was gone, I wish I had, I really wish I had. I do have this really fond memory of her and me. My dad was working out in his shop, it was winter and it was cold out there, and I wanted to be inside. I guess I was like ten or something. And I came inside, it was all warm, mom was in the kitchen getting ready to bake. And I asked her to show me

what she was doing. And the thing I'll never forget was how she showed me how to knead dough. And I remember her hands, dusted with flour, rocking and turning the dough, just like this she would say, and then she had me do it, and the dough felt so good, how plump it was, firming under my hands, my mom saying that's it, that's it. I don't know why I keep thinking of that. Maybe because it was one of the few times that I really appreciated her, her kindness, her love.."

"Life. Fucking life. But you keep that memory of her now, you feel her now and that's a good thing. Maybe that's all we can do, just hold on to some good things. Salvage what we can from this shit hole of a life, whatever good memories we can. Just keep going."

"I think we're ready to put it all together. See, we've got the sides, the top, we kind of lash these last big pieces together, there, like this, kind of an arch, then let's stand it up, help me here, that's it...OK, OK. There it is! We got ourselves a portal! A beautiful portal! I told you, just like I imagined it."

"So, yeah, OK, but now what? We just walk through it or what?"

"I guess so. Let's try it."

"Nothing happens."

"Uh, maybe we have to hold hands or something. Try it again"

"Nope. Nada. Maybe we need to click our heels together and chant "there's no place like home, there's no place like home..."

"Wait I have an idea. We got here when there was a blinding flash, all those trumpets and shit, remember?"

"Yeah, so?"

"So maybe we need to create a dramatic situation of our own, make going through this door something spectacular..."

"What do you have in mind?"

“We set fire to it. We get it blazing and then we walk through, like walking through a raging ring of fire! That should do it!. Do you have your lighter?”

“I think so, yeah. I do.”

“Ok, now take off your shirt, I’ll take off mine.”

“Ok.”

“So, we tie them around one of these branches we have left over, and we set them on fire. Good, that’s it. Then we hold them against the sides, you do that one, I’ll do this one. Ok, good, It’s doing it!”

“Damn. Look at that! The fire is climbing up the sides, its going to join at the top.”

“It is! Fantastic! Ok, get ready now, get ready to go through.”

“Look how beautiful it is!”

“You know it really is. It really is a portal of fire. Beautiful!”

“You knew what you were doing. It is just fucking beautiful.”

“God-damned beautiful.”

“God-damned beautiful.”

