

The second coming

The Devil sat upon his endlessly complaining, thundering cloud. The cloud, a damned and once named soul, was griping about the horny gentleman's overstuffed behind. The Devil dressed in the height of shabbiness. His designer—Woolworth turned out his tweed, four button suit which was frayed by the constant twitching of Satan's restless claws. His perfectly red lips formed into a flapper's beestung pout. His face under his mimic's makeup hid features as ugly as sin—a very tempting ugly. He looked more like a fairy than a damned angel. A transvestite carabaret singer. Yet his mouth held fangs as sharp as a woman's retort. His eyes were as cold as a woman's kiss can be. Hopping about on his damned throne and stroking his tail, he thundered, "Hark! The time is now and The Second Coming has arrived. Even now I hear the Lord's heavy steps treading upon the earth."

Peering down at earth through his opera glasses, he observed a classroom where the drama was taking place. Laughing, he reached down into his snack bag which held a million souls running and hiding trying to avoid being eaten. There was no place to hide. He withdrew two of the pleading shadows and popped them into his greedy mouth which devoured evil, leading it into the inky insides of Hell. That day upon his cloud he watched the Lord die again.

"BANG!" a gun exploded, "Bang!" went a mocking echo.

"Very well done," a dark votch explained to me, his student. "But, next time aim for the heart, death can be made so much more romantic than it really is with just a little help of our imaginations. We'd all like that wouldn't we?"

Such is 2012 A.D. after the plague, after humanity. Resting my still smoldering rifle on the rack, I could feel dagger sharp eyes inquiring about my every move. I turned and realized it was he, the Devil. "Hello," I said, giving him a smug smile. He wasn't a stranger to me. I remembered seeing him before in many different ways. "You missed everything but the end."

"I know," the Devil bitched, "Shit, I was going to give His Holiness a piece of my mind about how we should better the relationship between goodness and evil. How inconsiderate of him to die so early in the plot. I never did trust Him. Too nice, if you know what I mean. Once I tried to reason with him in the desert and he wouldn't even give me a chance. Anyway tell me what I missed, the plot, the players. Oh, do tell me, do fill me in on all the latest gossip."

"OK," I agreed, taking a chair under his hovering cloud. "But first shut off that cloud's lamenting. It's not that sad of a story, so it really shouldn't be crying, besides, it's getting me wet."

"IT ISN'T CRYING for anyone in this story for it only cries for itself." The Devil smirked, he took a pitch fork and poked the cloud in its misty groin causing it to moan, and then pass out.

"The plot and the setting started at the selling market..."

"I know that part," the Devil interrupted. "I could hear the yelping of barkers selling flesh as far as Hell."

"Shut up, or else I won't tell you the story," I ordered. Shutting up, the Devil closed his shadowy blue eyelids.

"We still rule the world. Humans still control it all, but what is the world anyway? Is it worth..."

"It's worth about ten cents of nothing," the Devil smirked.

"As I was saying," I said, ignoring his rudeness. "The earth is controlled by the Amo caste. The rest of the tribes count less than nothing. The plague left man insane. It formed some destinies to become rulers, some to become animals, and all, both the proud and the low, will eventually become food. I am a student. Some day after my seven-year term I shall be a votch owning my own class. As a student I prefer not to spill blood. Today most of mankind spills blood as easily as they would spill wine on a drunken spree. In order to learn about life one must take life, so I take it, but I don't spill it. I don't think life should be wasted."

"VERY NOBLE OF you, I bet he died glad knowing that," the Devil said, opening his eyes very wide, much too wide.

"Christ didn't really come," I told him. "Why should He? Who's left to save? We're all insane except for me, I

have an imagination, so I imagine I'm sane."

The event started when I went to the selling market to buy a slave. The barkers were having a white elephant sale on freshly caught animals. There amongst the human barn smells and refuge I saw a man standing aloof from the rest of the chained herd. He was pretty, and you could tell he was of a very good stock. He had a look of good breeding suggested especially by his long legs. His hair was a honey blonde, and softly waved about his open, sweet face. Baby-fine fuzz covered his chin, chest, and thighs. His body invited petting. Not really in the mood to be in heat, I merely noted these facts as being facts—not as sexy. He was dressed in blue jean shorts and a leash encircled his neck held by a balding, rubber-lipped barker. Every thing about this personage was held captive but his eyes. They darted about the selling market capturing the dumb submission of animals being sold and the arrogance of buyers buying. He understood that his small smile never left his lips even when the barker bragged about his virtues to prospective buyers. His understanding eyes also captured my attention. Intrigued by something I wanted but wasn't sure of, I bought him for thirty dollars, a bargain marked down from thirty-six.

TAKING THE LEASH from his neck, I reached out to hold his hand. I led him out of the smoke-filled market into the heat of a midafternoon.

"Hi," I whispered, stroking his arm to calm down any nervousness he felt. "I'm going to take you to your new home. You'll like it, I'm sure you will."

"I am He!" he screamed loudly into my eardrum.

"What, animal, what are you yelling about?"

"Me, me, I, the Lord," he sang waving his arms in a pleased flourish.

I laughed and turned to face him, putting my hands on his shoulders, and smiling into the bland innocence of his becoming sensuous face, I purred, "Such foolishness, my small one. Lord you say? What are you the Lord of? Child, I'm a doubting Thomas, show me you're cuts."

"You are my cuts, mankind's hurts are my hurts—my wounds," he cried. His voice was loud with honesty and many turned around to stare. Some stopped to laugh, most just gave us a look and a shake of the head, then left to where ever they were going. Then he kissed my cheek and took my chin into his small hand, studying my surprised face, he said, "You know you're much more than just a doubting Thomas. Perhaps you're John, perhaps. You'd like to be John, wouldn't you?"

"PERHAPS." I gulped. I didn't like what he was doing, but I didn't want to end the game yet.

"You love me, don't you? I mean you like me, you're my friend. I'm your friend. Can be we friends?"

"I am your friend in a way, Child." I tapped his cheek with my fingernail with a firmness I didn't feel. "But you're a foot, there's no real men and women anymore. Only humans whose minds and souls died in The Bloody Plague. There's no one to save. You're too late."

In this world, humans not born in the right caste were animals to be hunted down and sold as slaves or food. They made good eating. Their flesh had a dry and sweet taste. White wine complimented the meat to a "T." The slaves in turn would eat our flesh when we grew too old to be useful. That is why my votch is so nervous. He's sixty-nine. He'll celebrate his next birthday in a gas chamber, then on a butcher's block, ending it in a slave's stretched stomach. Old people's meat tasted like the smell of rot. Life isn't valued, to man isn't valued.

"Man's still alive," the animal lectured, kissing my scarred cheek. "By the way, you may call me Josh."

"Lovely, an animal with a name. Well, I'm pleased to meet you, please do call me Jude."

"COME ON, JUDE. Come into the Temple. Come one, come all!" my pet urged, running into the crowded streets towards the church. "Life is a wedding feast, join it, join me!" He ran to the Temple with me in close pursuit. He gained the advantage with his much longer legs, and made it to the Temple before I did. The Temple, marvelously white, stood out from the barren huts which surrounded it. Once I got there I found Josh talking to a Temple whore marvelously dressed in white. "Life is a wedding feast," he was telling her.

"Yes, it is," Moll, the whore, agreed, giving him an eye balling. "Let me show you how good the honeymoon part can be."

Moll was a slut who sold the image of God. But everyone was selling or buying the image of God, so she was considered respectable if lower class.

"Yes," he laughed, reaching for her. "It's fine." He pulled her into his lusting arms, blessing her with long kisses.

I watched feeling rather out of place, thinking, "How is that good? Just a form of reproducing if you ask me, and we have enough kids in this world."

"Excuse me, Josh, but why is that good?" I asked, pulling him out of her flesh trap.

"Because it's life, life," John cheered, swinging me around the room and knocking over the preacher's pulpit which held Moll's money.

"Life? Well, I suppose it's a living isn't it, Moll?"

"IT'S A LIVING at least. What's your's?" she smugly sneered, kneeling to pick up her money that laid scattered on the silver gilt floor. She leaned back on her knees, giving me a smile, then she licked her bright hollow mouth with the soft tip of her tongue.

"Don't talk to me. You're meat, just a physical treat."

She rocked on her knees, laughing. Her laugh sounded like the cold rasp of the coins she picked up and tossed to the floor for the effect the sound made. "Yes, I'm meat, rather tasty meat at that. We're all meat my dear. Some make better eating than others do."

Taking my arm, Josh led me to a corner, "Jude," he pleaded, his eyes reaching into mine. "Let me be free to join life."

"Are you the Lord? Is she the life?"

"Her flesh is of peaches—round, soft peaches formed into a body smelling of rumorous invitations. She's alive, she's a spring all open to life and laughter. You're dead. Your breasts are stapled to your rib cage. Your eyes are sinking ships carrying no treasures. Scars run down across your face to your neck—scars done by your own hand. Done to appease your gods, your dead life, your dead mind. If I stay with you I'm lost, can't you see that?"

IF I WAS ANYTHING less than what I am, his words would have cut me more and left more painful scars than the religious ones I bear on my face to identify myself to the world as a student. I smiled a pretended smile, I told him through taunt lips which twisted like wire, that I could see why he could be set free. He wasn't looking at me. He was watching Moll put coins through her loose lips; she tasted their coolness and then took them out of her mouth, enjoying their wetness.

As I turned and went towards the exit, I had to pause and watch him for a while. "OK, Josh, save mankind, go ahead and try. Good luck."

He didn't say anything; he was starting to make love to her on the gilt floor.

Stopping the story, I eyed the Devil upon his throne. "You saw the ending, didn't you?"

"Yes, Josh was captured by the Temple police. Moll sold him to them for silver. The votch bought him for target practice tonight. You watched him crying behind his chains which held him still to the wall. You raised your rifle to your shoulder and judged the distance. He screamed; you smiled. You waited and he asked you for help. He said your name over and over again. You shot him; he died. You betrayed him. You could have saved him by buying him from your votch. Now the votch is carrying his bleeding body to the butcher's block."

"RIGHT."

"And now," he said, fire caressing his lips. "You will hang yourself from a tree. And Moll, the barkers, and the votch will become saints. And Josh will rise from the supper table to set the world on fire."

"Wrong." I yawned. "I don't feel like killing myself. I'd never kill myself on a Sunday. I wash my hair on Sundays. Moll will still be a whore. My votch will still be the main course on his birthday. The barkers will still sell meats and gods in the marketplace. Josh shall remain on the supper table garnished with carrots and onions. I believe I'll eat out tonight."

Sighing, the Devil poured himself a glass of red, wet wine. He toasted, "To you, Josh, you weren't the real thing..."

"But whatever is?" I said, finishing the toast for him. "Wait till next year and the next for the real thing, Devil."

"Then," Satan scoffed. "To celebrate I'll drink a Coca-Cola."

"And I shall pour it for you."

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second place
fiction