



# THE BEACH

THE BEACH gets smaller, the waves higher. The tide urges. We two are alone, cut off – desperate, I turn to her – she’s slight and terrified – the sea will hammer us against the rocks: – ‘I don’t swim strong,’ I say. Fearful and lucid, too aware of death.

‘I can’t carry you,’ she says: ‘You’ll have to save me.’

The wind screams in our hair. The water covers us – I lift her high, over my head, the sea submerges me, pulls and twists: – but here we are! Around the point – another beach, still dry. I land her, like an Aphrodite: a juicy seafruit on a shell .... cockle-shells, I think, and giggle.

A pretty maid and silver bells .... down among the dead men, the wrecks all in a row, the captains sleeping, the semi-precious matelots, unfathomable – pearl-fishers hooking out their eyes...

‘What’s the joke?’ she asks, still in panic, angry too ... briefly saved from nature, that bitch inescapable ....

‘Relief,’ I say. Who knows?

She’s well-tended, a silvery belle, out of my league, even if she gives the fairy’s kiss in gratitude. ‘Tasha’ her name, on a label round her neck, like a port.

We watch a screen in an arcade. There’s no one else. ‘Look!’ she says: ‘The money!’

It’s true – the value’s dropping, like sand dropping through the hourglass. No explanation’s being given.... ‘The cash!’ she shouts, ‘It’s going! Where?’

‘No one can tell, it seems. A panic,’ I say: ‘I don’t have cash, but this means there will be no jobs ... It isn’t sand; it’s the future running out.’

She’s been hit hard. There’s no one round, she cries, quiet: – ‘The people,’ she says: ‘They’ve all been carted off, they all had that sickness we didn’t know we had until they told us afterwards.’

‘I used to be quite critical,’ I say: ‘Wanting novelty, a change. Now we hope in any way we’ll carry on. Look at the sea ...’

It’s tall as houses, full of struggling things.

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‘Don’t try making out with me,’ she says: ‘I’m wooing someone really old – it’s very hard ....’

‘I don’t think of it,’ I say: ‘I’ve given up. My friend was sleeping over, when she was with me, with all her exes. It’s stupid, but when I found out, I was quite disturbed ...’

‘Yes,’ she says: ‘It’s stupid. There’s no sense in ranking people by their intimacy, or your sense of competition ....’

‘The guy you’re striving for,’ I ask, ‘Was the money his or yours?’

‘Oh,’ she says, ‘He’s a magician. He can make it multiply on sight ...’

‘I saved your life,’ I say: ‘What is it worth to you?’

‘Oh,’ she says, ‘I fly high, much higher than you can. You want a gift? Here, there’s nothing we can buy. I’d sing, but I can’t hold a note.’

‘Let’s just expose our deepest thoughts,’ I say: ‘Our convictions. We’ll remember those.’

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