Fixed

by hangingfire

Summary

"London is being finished," she says. "Like the Lower East Side in New York. Finished and polished, all the seams and patches painted over, and god help you if you can't afford to stay in the place you helped to keep alive."

Notes

Happy Yuletide from one Cayce Pollard fan to another, tetraconta...
“Ms. Pollard,” says Hubertus Bigend, and he takes the place on the bench next to her. A few years ago, Hollis described him as cultivating suits that caused retinal damage; Cayce remembers seeing a photo of him in the Guardian then, wearing the Klein blue monstrosity in question. He’s shifted gears now, tweed and leather, like an English country gentleman, rather than a man who owns the better part of Iceland and, if rumors are true, exerts a subtle and disturbing control over at least two major international stock markets. This grinds at Cayce a little, seeing as how her whole reason for being in the UK right now is to meet with some tweed manufacturers, for a jacket for which she has only the haziest outlines in her mind as yet.

“Hubertus,” she replies, looking straight ahead of her at the market. Looking for Peter, but he’s nowhere to be seen.

“You’re doing well,” he says.

She manages not to flinch. She knows that he noticed when she finally began to emerge from the shadows she’d built around Gabriel Hounds, though he’s made no direct overtures. Aware, perhaps, that she finessed him at his own game. “Thank you.”

“Detroit.”

“Excuse me?”

“You should consider moving there. There’s a company,” he says, contemplating his own pint as if it were a scrying glass, “you’ve heard of them, no doubt. Watches, leather goods. Bicycles. Renewing the America manufacturing sector. Your sort of thing, I’d imagine.”

She knows what company he’s talking about. And she also knows that they’re not the only game in town, either. She’s seen them emerge these last few years, these earnest youngsters selling their flannel shirts, their handcrafted hatchets. Some are doing genuinely good work, she knows, like the one Bigend is alluding to; others seem simply to be invested in peddling their urban visions of a hearty woodland masculinity, or of the idealized factory dirt of a Victorian engraving.

She doesn’t answer, but he refuses to be driven away by her mutinous silence. Instead he just sits there, drinking his pint of bitter. Finally she says, “There was a friend of my father’s. English. Barraclough, that was his name. He always talked about the East End as if it was a part of the city that would always be a little bit broken. But he seemed to think that that was the strength of it.”

“He wasn’t entirely wrong.” Bigend looks at her curiously, wondering where she’s going with this. A young man walks by with a black pug straining at the end of its leash. On the steps of Christchurch Spitalfields, people drink flat whites, bought from a little mobile kiosk at the foot of the stairs, just inside the church gates.

“London is being finished,” she says. “Like the Lower East Side in New York. Finished and polished, all the seams and patches painted over, and god help you if you can’t afford to stay in the place you helped to keep alive.”

“Would you have it be broken forever, then?” he asks.

“No. Of course not. But if this is what it means to be fixed…” She shakes her head. “There has to be a better way.”

“You must tell me if you find it.” He finishes off his pint, rises. “In the meantime—Detroit, Ms. Pollard. Perhaps you can have a hand in fixing in the way that you see fit.”

He puts his glass down under the bench and walks off, and Cayce imagines that she feels her ears
pop, as if she’s just emerged from a deep tunnel below some turbid body of water. She takes a deep
breath and lets it out slowly, murmurs, “He took a duck in the face at two hundred and fifty knots.”
She can’t remember the last time she had to say that.

She sees Margaret now, skipping out under the arches of the market. Behind her, Peter and Nora
emerge hand in hand; Peter has a paper-wrapped bundle under one arm, and Nora is clutching a
paper bag; judging from Peter’s expression, she has found yet another incomprehensible treasure.

Cayce smiles, waves, and stands to meet them. She wants to scoop her daughters up, sweep them to
some place where the Bigends of the world can’t touch them. If such a place even exists anymore.

“Hey,” Peter says, kissing her cheek as they reach her. “You okay?” A tiny worried beetling of his
brow.

“Yeah,” she says. She glances down the street; Bigend has vanished, swept himself away to
whatever moneyed plane he exists on these days. “Just a random Bigend appearance.”

“What’d he have to say?” He can’t keep a look of distaste off his face.

“Still a spider, looking for other spiders to mate with. Tell you more later.” She takes Margaret’s
hand and relieves Peter of his bundle of records as he lifts Nora up into his arms. “Come on, let’s get
some lunch somewhere.”

Margaret tugs at her hand; she’s seen the black pug—returning up the street now with its human—and
wants to say hello. Cayce reminds her of the etiquette around strangers’ dogs, and Margaret
solemnly introduces herself and offers the back of her hand for the shy dog’s inspection. Cayce
watches, her heart suffused with that strange warmth and pain that she thinks must afflict all parents.
There is a way, she thinks fiercely, to build a good world for her daughters. And it’s not Bigend’s.
But she’ll find it. In spite of him and his kind.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!