

The Faraday Cage

The rain was easing slightly but the thunderstorm was getting closer. She found herself counting the seconds between the flash and the noise. What was it they said? One second was equal to one mile? She counted five seconds.

Parked directly underneath the pylon they were protected from the electrical storms that were all around them, and if the winds were to bring down the pylon it wouldn't fall on them. That was his theory anyway. She was sceptical but then she hadn't really wanted to come in the first place.

'You want us to go camping on the moors?'

'Not camping, I've told you, I'll borrow a camper van. It'll be like old times.'

In the end she had given in and here they were in a camper van in a thunderstorm. She wished she'd paid more attention to her physics lessons at school. The rain was being blown against the windows and there was a leak around the door. When the wind gusted the van rocked on its wheels. They should have blocked them with stones but neither of them wanted to go out to do it now. It was only early evening but the dark storm clouds made it seem later.

'Can't we just go home?' she said.

'In this weather? We're safer here.'

Catch-22 she thought.

They both knew why they were there. It was a final attempt to salvage something. Anything. Three weeks ago, in bed, they had had the conversation that she had dreaded but knew was inevitable.

'Who is it? Do I know him?' he had asked.

'No,' she answered.

She should have left then. She knew that now but he had played on her sense of guilt and she felt obliged to go through the motions of giving it another go. He reminded her that it had been seven years so she owed him that much. Perhaps she did. What followed was a desperate effort to recreate the past. But of course it didn't work. How could it when the thought of the unnamed was always between them? This trip, an echo of their first summer together, was the one last try.

Another lightning flash. Two seconds then the thunder.

She would leave him when they got back. She was determined on that now but until then there was still this storm to get through. Within the van though everything was surprisingly calm. No ranting and shouting, no recriminations, only a sadness, a sadness that was the one final thing that they shared.

‘It hasn’t worked has it?’ he said.

‘What hasn’t?’

‘This trip.’

‘Did you really think it would?’

Before he could answer a lightning flash and thunderclap came that were too close for her to count the gap.

‘Are you sure we’re safe?’ She was beginning to wonder if he had an ulterior motive.

‘Of course. Provided we stay in here. Trust me on this at least.’

A gust of wind hit the van so violently that she was thrown into him.

‘At least the elements are on my side’ he said. ‘Perhaps the gods are trying to tell you something.’ She moved away embarrassed by the unintentional intimacy.

‘If I didn’t know better I might think you’ve summoned up this storm yourself.’

‘Like Prospero? If only. Then I could trap you here like Caliban. Or is it Ariel? I can never remember.’

She gave him a glance trying to see if he was joking but she couldn’t read his expression.

An intense light filled the van in an instant and currents of blue ran across the windows while the air split with a crack. One of the windows shattered throwing shards of glass over them and when the light had gone they were left in darkness.

‘Christ!’ she exclaimed, ‘what the fuck was that?’

‘Are you OK?’

‘I think so.’ She started to pick fragments of glass out of her hair trying not to cut herself in the process. ‘How come we’re unhurt?’

‘I told you,’ he said, ‘we’re safe in here. Just us two together. It’s outside that is dangerous.’

He flicked a switch off and on to no effect. He found a couple of torches and set them up to provide some light, and then found a picnic table that he used to cover the broken window.

'It's almost romantic' he said.

'No it isn't. Did you plan this?' For the first time she was angry.

'What? Plan the storm? Getting hit by lightning?'

'Sorry. I'm just freaked out.'

He went to put an arm around her shoulder but she shook him off.

'No,' she said.

The storm continued but she was relieved to realise that a space was opening up again between the lightning and the thunder, and slowly the storm was passing away.

'There's nothing we can do until morning' he said, 'we might as well try and get some sleep.'

Still dressed she curled up on one of the bunks and covered herself as best she could, in spite of the picnic table rain was still getting in through the broken window. She slept fitfully and in her dreams she was in a boat tossed around in a storm before being shipwrecked on an island shore. When she woke it was daylight. The storm had gone and she could see the damage that the strike had done to the van. Parts were charred and there was a faint smell of ozone and burnt rubber. A tea-pot lay shattered on the floor but she noted that the lid was somehow still intact.

He was trying unsuccessfully to start the engine.

'Will it start?'

He turned towards her. 'No. It's completely dead. It seems we're stuck here.'

'I'll walk.' She rummaged around to find her boots and put them on.

'It's miles to the next village.'

'I don't care. I'm going'

'But don't you understand? It's safe here. We're safe here together.'

She looked at him and saw only incomprehension. She turned away, opened the door and stepped out from the van.