

The Collapse of Memory and Promise

Jem Noble

His timely appearance from the galley, tray in hand replete with voluminous, vivid cocktail, was a welcome distraction from what had so far been a torpid attempt at reading.

'Listen to this?' she asked, simultaneously taking the glass, leaning back and bringing the book to legible distance beneath the generous brim of her hat.

'If we should write a history of the Ikea riots' she began, 'it would at its centre express the promise that fuelled their realisation. That promise was embodied in a specific form of material culture – a site through which ideologies are potently contested.'

After pausing to drink, she continued 'The influence of pagan resistance to the rational-technical order crept through the cities in a *flat-pack* – a talisman of autonomy for inhabitants and a clear challenge to the totalitarian vision of equality – but something was wrong. Unknown to either side, another promise was collapsed into that form along with pre-fabricated parts, tools and instructions, so similar to the first it was indistinguishable to the excited eye. In these charged conditions, filled with honorable aspirations, individual freedom and individualism were conflated.'

'Very good, dear' he answered.

'Yes' she replied distractedly, turning the book to observe a shadow that had drawn her attention as it moved beneath the water on the port side. In the face that broke the surface, gasping air to a hidden body that struggled to hold its position, a pair of eyes seemed to view the vessel's entire form with an unmoving and suspicious gaze, unaware of the people on board.

'What is that?' she asked with undisguised distaste.

'I don't remember what they're called' came his reply, 'but they lived on land once too. Ever since the floods they go where the currents take them'.

The pitch of the extensive hull sent a wave toward the figure, the unexpected splash prompting it back beneath the surface with a final, panicked gulp of breath. The sight of its shadow dissolving in the blue held the couple's thoughts momentarily.

'Are they dangerous?' asked the woman.

'Everything in the currents affects the flow a little, darling, and enough of those moving together can thoroughly disturb the surface, but it's very rare', he finished with reassuring ridge and furrow of brow.

'Well thank goodness for that' she returned, reclining further into the chair, sipping her drink as she let the book fall.