

COLLAPSING IN
PARTS

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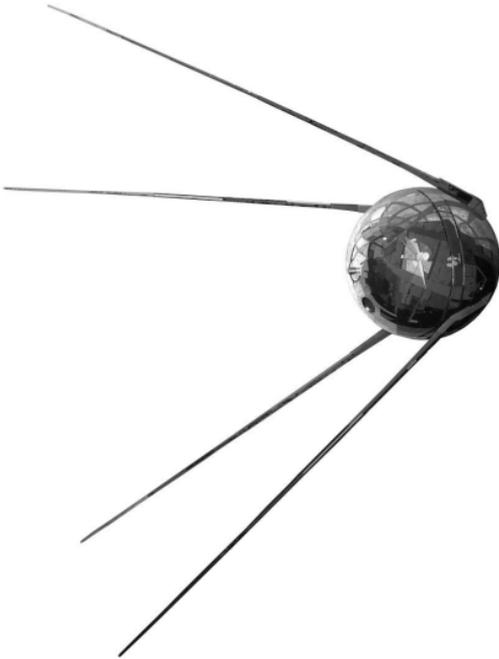
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PROLOGUE



It's 1957 and speaking is in decline. This seems a bit rash, and surely there's a time-lapse before the technological jargon takes its toll? We're not sure, which is really the point. And so, for now, change is absolute, the world has absolutely changed and yes, it seems there's a little less chatting.

It's 1957 and simple things are discontinued. They're snuffed out, still there, just emptied, when we traded stable resources for some lights, camera, action. Now there's a pause; material won't fall from the sky, the sky dries up, complexities arrive from the wings, greedy, demanding engineering from a foreign, person-less workforce. Improvements are desired, process runs into the goal, the goal is blindingly fast, then it repeats.

The site where the simple things sat is wrecked. An abandoned campsite scene: cooling embers, flattened grass. Sense had arrived with others who made meaning, but their voices are scattered. Departed quickly from the aftermath, it had to be fast, and now we can't go back. While the exit was possible, we didn't programme a return and we never doubted it was possible. The question is whether we should have cashed in, punched through the limitations of our own simple condition, or kept the reserves for a rainy day that would probably never arrive.

Perhaps the complaint is too predictable. Here we're in the business of novelty. Newness. Absolute newness from total control, but the call is cracking and creaking; we're tired, we're crumpled, we want to stand up, present the solid parts that won't dissolve in desire or bend to the repetition of a flimsy truth – that here we have progress, and here, this counts. So look me right in the eye and picture it straight: *what are we trying to do?*

At this point the Copy Editor enters. Finally, a little late, he suggests I settle on a controversially American quotation system for clarity then tells me the last five paragraphs are awful.

So there's room for improvement, I say.

'No,' he tells me. 'Not here.'

We pause.

'But I agree with your rationale: hand this over to someone else to give your desire for excellence through a public presentation of private contemplation a decent fighting chance.'

He's blown my punchline. I wanted to weave that in skilfully.

'Well you didn't,' he says.

Then he re-formats my font (12pt).

It's 1957, then 2011. New knowledge arrives, a novel space emerges. The objects of thinking become objects of progress but they're too big to handle: a lion with wings, babies in test tubes, clocks, turbos, dynamos. But the language they come with is junk. We must speak about things we can understand and accept the labour, without any outsourcing, because if eyes grow bigger than natural capacities we'll only end up sick.

And I am very sick!

'But you're not,' he says. 'You're writing.'

We pause for ages.

It's 1750-something and outsourcing arrives in machine-droves, to soothe sore hands with boredom. Then, something transforms. Sore hands become sore minds with infinite mobility, too much anxiety and the painful

severance of production, body and soul. Now no-one will say who is working, who is playing and whether the problem is a problem when it's so obviously there. *She* says, the anxieties start abruptly, with the advent of automation; but she's fifty years too late, and I'm here right now, so I've decided to update her.

'Don't,' he tells me.

I know I shouldn't, particularly as I'm only on the Prologue. But it's fine. I'm on it. I'm turning my back on the anxiety of stating the obvious. I am tackling the problem head on, with no idea if I'm happy, healthy, inside or out. He reminds me I have no experience and no research so I shouldn't do this.

'Besides, is this even what you wanted?'

I tell him the point was performance.

'For eight months?'

No. I wait. Well, he waits. It's about too much too soon and none of the words to speak about it; it's a speaking dip, a deficit. Progress, distorted. It's... hard.

'Performance,' he nods. 'Lack of it.'

I tell him we'll see. And she starts.

Somewhere around 1754, with occasional diversions back and forth to 300-ish BC, ending somewhere four hundred years later in the depths of the Modern Age, with the modern world firmly out of bounds, the structure is doing her groundwork. This, I say, is something like 'getting grounded', to learn how and why the absolute became a fact.

This seems good.

'Pretty true to the text.'

We pause for an exit.

‘So?’

How did I do?

‘Eight hundred and thirty eight words.’

Shit. I wanted a lot more than that.

He points out, ‘the Prologue is short.’

Yes.

‘Yes. But, to be honest, I think it’s bad. Can’t you just fix it?’

I tell him, no, I can’t, I’ve tried everything and nothing is working, so the readers will have to be patient. I want to keep things simple, move in a straight line, get to grips with her groundwork, see where she’s at. The Copy Editor is sympathetic but is certain the project won’t work.

THE HUMAN CONDITION