Bhim Nimgade - Luc and Beto at the End of the World

“I’m just not sure, so not sure, not sure at all. Oh Mercy Me, I have no surety. Where this piece comes from, and where it goes, and how it fits in, and where it all goes in the end, I just don’t know. And how it ends, I just don’t know.” Luc looked up into the heavens, and then lowered his head to look at his companion.

Beto said, “Oh, Pish Tosh, the world’s not going to end just now. It just seems so. And if you think of something else, well then, things are right again, things are right as rain. Just hold on, hold on to that caprice, and there you have it. World - not ending. World without end.”

Luc and Beto sat at the flimsy table, careful not to put too much weight on it, not to even let their plates rest on it too long.

“It’s best to hold on to your plate,” said Luc. So they both did. Holding the plate in one hand and wielding the plasticware with the other. It took attention, it did.

“Beto, you’re the lucky one. Always have been. You could get away with putting the plate on the table, if you want.”

Beto had taken a big bite of sauerkraut, and he held up his plastic fork in the air as if to command or request a pause to let him finish the bite, and then speak. He chewed, and chewed some more, and he swallowed; and then he grunted.

Luc had been leaning forward in his chair, balancing his plate carefully, and now he leaned back again. “That’s it, then? That’s it? I thought you were going to say something.”

“Why would I want to say something? I’m eating my sauerkraut, ersatz sauerkraut as it may be, but there it is. Eating and holding my plate. As you said we should.”

“There, you said something. Was that what you had wanted to say, maybe? Your action belies your statement - though I mean your action IS your statement - you stated that you WOULDN’T be stating something - “

“No, I only questioned why I have to speak when you tell me to. I’m not a dog.”

“Dogs don’t speak. Oh, OK, we do say ‘Speak’ to a dog, in the performance of a threadbare parlor trick, but the intent is metaphorical, is it not?”

“Will you let me eat my plate in peace?”

“You’re the one who was going to speak, and I waited, and I waited, and it was like the old saying, ‘the elephant labored, and gave birth to a mouse’. Hardly worth it, I say. Hardly worth it.”

“You would do better to stop the labored metaphors, and leave me to my plate of comestibles. It’s getting cold.”

“It started out cold. If anything, it’s warming up, coming to room temperature. And it’s not that good, is it. Not the delectable viands of a proper House of the Second Order.”

“Proper, Proper. What manner of Proper is this? It’s plastic plates, and plastic forks. Not even plastic knives and plastic spoons - oh no, it’s all forks only, which dig into the flimsy plastic plates, and so the brine runs out and drips onto our table or onto our knees, or worse yet, onto our pants-crotches, which is very disagreeable indeed. No plastic spoons to ladle up the brine, no plastic knives to cut up the kraut, no bread to soak up the brine, it’s all just a big mess.”

“Well, you’re saying a lot, for a fellow who said ‘I’m not a dog.’”

“That’s neither here nor there. It’s true, I’m not a dog. Not by any stretch of the imagination. Would a dog eat from a plastic plate, with a plastic fork, eating these miserable mushy je-ne-sais-quois?”

Luc said, “Fine, fine, who’s belaboring metaphors now? Let go of the dog. The dog doesn’t really matter. We’re at the end of the world, or damn near it.”

“If it’s the end of the world, we really shouldn’t be arguing, should we? And even if we would want to argue, shouldn’t we argue about big things, like portents, and divinations, and art, and death?”

“Who’s arguing? I, arguably, just wanted to hear what you were about to say, or that you looked like you were about to say. One might say, I was in consonance with your thought, or with your pre-meditative thought, however aborted and botched it might have been in its breaching the air in its birthing moments.”

“Okay, now, who’s belaboring what? I just wanted to have my bite in peace. Maybe, we’ll live to tell the tale, and maybe not. You’ve gotten the idea that the world is going to end, or is coming to an end, which I think is the same thing. Luc, I am granting your premise, for the sake of argument - but by Jove, I am not interested in an argument. I would rather have pastries of various sorts, with fine cups of hot seaweed tea. I would rather have fronds of chewy kelp, and roasted carrots. Have you seen that type of guillotine that people have, for cutting bagels, without injuring oneself? I would want one of those, and a toaster, so I could have myself a fine toasted bagel with a thin veneer of marmite. I could do very well with such things, and that would stave off any unpleasant ruminations on the end of the world, which would include our own lives and discussions. Given that the world is going to end - and mind you, I am just going along with your fantasy and fugue in some minor and melancholy vein, though I reserve the right to at any moment spring out of it and go back to thinking that the world will continue as such, and I’ll defend to the death my right to hold on to such a thought - “

“Beto, Beto; for one who wishes to wave others into silence, and then sit in silence himself, you are being remarkably logorrheic. And you think much of food. I can imagine you tucked away in a little hibernaculum, waiting for the end of the world to just kind of blow over, like winter, and then you would stumble out, sleepily, ill-tempered, emaciated, and you would see me and begin to argue that I was totally wrong, and that the world has NOT in fact ended.”

“Luc, I would emerge because I had steadfastly held in my mind the conceit that the world will continue, through the rhythms of the seasons, the tides of life, the songs of the manatees. And you, my friend, would have ceased to exist, because your mind, in its stubborn and steadfast grip on the world-ending conceit, would have caused your own very existence to cease and desist. Fancy that!”

“Your logic is impeccable, at least at first glance, or first rumination; I cannot poke holes in it. So you would exist, and go on without me. I would wither, and dissolve, and blow away in the wind. I am not so enamored of that end. But then, if it is to be, then how bad would it be? I would know nothing of the world going on, once I had departed. So I would scarce miss it, would I?”

“Luc, true, we do not often think of the end of our powers of cognition and perception. Or at least not dispassionately. It may be a meditation that leads to vast insights. Doors into other realms.”

“These chairs, though they be unthoughtfully made, are solid enough, and hold our weight. The table, though, is hardly worth the appellation. Is there a clue, there, as to the nature of things?”

“And where is my plate? My lucky plate? I was not finished with my meal, unsatisfactory as it was. And now it’s gone. I sit here without plate, without fork, without my meal - what the devil was it, I can’t rightly remember now.”

“Ah, Beto, you were so intent on that bite, that you were snapping at me for perhaps interrupting it. What matters that bite now? You could have eaten it, or not eaten it. It is all the same now. One bite closer to the end of the world.”

“Platitude-mouthing Fool! That could be said for every bite, or any bite, from the very beginning of the world, to the end of it. To the bitter, bitter end.”

“Spout insults as you like, it changes nothing. Our food was bland; briny, but insipid. Hardly bitter. What a bland, bland end!”

“I prefer to think of it as a bland… as a bland…. Well, continuation. My way is better. For a bland middle is not so sad as a bland ending.”

“If we are not at the end of the world, then where are our plates? We had our plates, flimsy as they were, but they were ours, they were in our hands, and we could eat off of them. We had our food…”

“And do you remember our food, do you?”

And they sat there in silence, their words suddenly turned off. There had been food, had there not? There had been plates. There had been so much...