

Ian McDonald

SPEAKING TO THE GODS



On the village outskirts, by the water's edge,
where great disaster struck, stands a church,
white, wooden, new, built on sacred ground.
In that place before were modest habitations
in which no one at all escaped the killing sea
when it rose up one night cascading in
to smash and drown every single soul,
dissolving corpses torn and withered by the sea.
As memorial the village fathers chose a church
to honour the dead with prayers and song
so they be not forgotten and the sea not rise again.
Those who planned the shrine did this
to get the Gods to listen: collected randomly,
as Fate is random in what it does not save,
remembrances that survived the mortal wreck
and blessed, anointed, cared and placed
them to fill an excavated place beneath a simple altar.
There they rest forever speaking to the Gods:
tables, kitchen pots, portraits, a fishing spear,
an intact necklace of great beauty, an axe, a bucket,
school uniforms and dresses, caps and shawls,
a fat carved owl which was a toy or amulet,
Christmas balloons of joyous red and green:
miscellany of living before sudden, awful death.
And bells, bells which a few households kept
which whisper still for those who come to mourn
and forever will when all are gone to dust.

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