DISASTER DIALOGUES
representations of catastrophe in word and image
You understand their language: understand that ‘traum’
is the German word for ‘dream’.

You value your dream holiday, a ‘traum’ in time
and place. You gain rosary understanding of cathedrals
and culture.

What you don’t understand is Dachau.

Dachau. Where your ‘traum’ distorts to ‘trauma’
and your rosy dream warps to purple...

‘I am really purple’, you state with drunken authority to
your portrait in the mirror. You know this because the
towel on the floor is purple and your feet, merging in
its folds, are the same colour. But it is night and, really,
everything is grey. The towel, your feet; the grey of
granular night. ‘In the daytime that towel is purple. So
must my feet be. So must I be,’ you keep on, ‘it’s only
logical.’

You grin stupidly at yourself, looking foreign in
the mirror. Looking purple, and not only because it’s dark.
The mirror is just a twelve-inch tile, stuck randomly to the
wall of your confessional bathroom. And you are blurry
and shrouded.

‘Christ,’ you say.

‘No such thing,’ your reflection smirks.

You steady yourself with a left-hand thud against
the wall, studying your right hand as it grasps a green
bottle by the neck and swigs it towards your mouth. You
focus on the face watching you from the mirror. Too much
guilt. Too much sickening stink of dust and powder; of
holy frankincense and myrrh; of taste of ash and grape
on your tongue.

‘Fuck.’ No profanity can do justice.

‘F...U...C...fucking K!’ you spell.

‘I heard that.’ Your image is catholically
judgemental.

‘They’re only letters, just a herd of letters’, you
retort.

Like cows, or human contusions; purple disciples
of nothing, decaying under darkening skies.

DEBORAH DE GROOT

‘Herded together. But not heard’.

‘So what now, you think you’re clever? Just
because you’re purple doesn’t mean you’re clever. I know
you’re not. You might be purple, but you’re not clever
enough to see the light, the answers, the logic’, you make
so much sense to yourself. In your burgundy truth, all you
can see is line after line. All you can do is count line after
line of numbers and letters and chalky tiles on the walls.
Line after line of excuses then and humiliations now for
cries not committed. Line after ... line up the bottle once
more to your gaping mouth. Suck in the blood-coloured
wet. Slaughter the rigid control and rigor mortis of linear
thought, like the torment of wrong and of right.

‘Right? What rights? What is right?’ you ask your
gaunt image.

There is no answer.

‘It’s just not logical’, you sob.

But your cinder reflection can no longer see you.
You are a dirty white tangle slumped on a hard floor,
heaped in disjointed contrast to the deep grey stripes of
rigidity, and the black and white of your faith. Conscience
murdered in the sentinel of forced normality. False and
smelling foul. You crease yourself to your knees and crawl
to the blackened white of the ceramic toilet bowl. Chuck
up your guts and your religion in the purple grey of too
much wine.

The pale finger of dawn points accusingly through the
small window.

‘How can it be so cold?’ You are purple and the
spotlight is on you. You have seen Dachau and now
everything is bruised.

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