

Eucatastrophe Poem

by Jo Walton

Now everything is over and the triumphant procession winds into the Capital.
The handsome, if slightly vapid, king is about to marry his beautiful elf maiden.
The wise old wizard has pushed back his hood and dared to crack a smile.
The elves will return to the woods, and the dwarves to their underground cities.
The survivors of the valiant armies will be dispersed across the land
And best of all, the intruders will go back to their own world
Secure in the confidence that Darkness has been utterly defeated.
Even here in this sea-cave, the cheering is deafening.
Or perhaps that's just the retreating tide.
You must allow me my cynicism.
It is all I have left, after all.

Picture, then, that procession, the young king, the new queen,
The heroes who beat my armies, tore down my stronghold, slaughtered my body,
Reduced me to my present, somewhat compromised, last ditch position.
Do you notice anything missing?
The common people are smiling and throwing flowers,
The unicorns, and those with good voices, are spontaneously bursting into song,
They have vanquished legions of Shadow,
Who seem to them to have existed only to throw their deeds into relief.
Still nothing? Look closely at those prancing horses, beaming faces.
No grief for those, and they were not few, who died to get them here?
True, true, but that is none of my doing.

The sun is shining as if she too joins the procession.
The sky is clearest, highest, brightest blue.
A band strikes up as they pass the gates, one hanging crooked from the siege.
The kindly wizard looks at the intruders,
Who, having nothing against me personally, came here expressly to defeat me.
By sunset they will be home, where they have longed to be,
And will never again be comfortable.
It is a small satisfaction,
Even after losing my corporeal form.
You still haven't noticed, no more than the cheering crowds,
So I will do my oldest job and underline -- they none of them have shadows.

Yes, my vast armies, in their black and stylish uniforms,
My great city, with its twisted spires and looming bulk,
My whole war in which I seemed invincible,
Before this final and inevitable defeat,
Even my body, which was, quite frankly, hideous,
Were all of it a feint. In causing them to oppose me,
To take arms against the Darkness, to put the whole world's will,
And those they dragged in from outside our world,
To vanquishing Darkness itself.
Ironic really, and this is my revenge,
There are no shadows. And there will be no night.

One solitary spot of darkness remains.
I cannot, after all, change my own nature.
When my mortal form was slain I rose as a great shadow,
Darkness personified. I fled for this refuge.
Here, in this sea-cave, I lurk in an old sea-chest.
When the time is right I shall return
When they are crying out and perched for darkness, ambiguity

