

## Great Graffiti -Shame about the Message

*(The scene begins with a group of nobles, wise men and the queen gathered around King Belshazzar, who is slumped on the floor. On a wall displayed: Mene, mene, Tekel, Peres-could be projected with a data projector slide in appropriate ghostly fashion)*

Queen: It's all right. It's all right. Just a tiny panic attack. It'll be OK.

Noble: He's looking quite pale, your majesty.

Queen: Well that's not exactly surprising. It's not like it's every day a disembodied hand appears and writes you a postcard on your own banqueting hall wall.

Noble: Well I've seen plenty of things scrawled on some of the walls round here.

Queen: I'm not talking about that. This was not in the style of Zuph loves Miriam-true. And we did see the hand appear and do it. Just a tad scary, you have to admit.

Noble: I'll grant you that, your majesty.

Queen: I am worried. He does look so pale. Belshazzar Belshazzar. Wake up. Can't any of you men help here? Typical.

Wise Man: Can I be of assistance, your majesty?

Noble: (Sarcastically) Oh great one of our wise men!

Queen: Of Assistance? Assistance? Well, judging by your

performance so far today, I hardly think so.

WM: I have to admit I was baffled, your majesty.

Queen: I mean you are all the same. A whole bunch of astrologers, enchanters and diviners-the so called wisest in the land-and you cannot do a simple translation job. It's not as if the message was particularly long. 4 words

WM: But you majesty...

Queen: *(Getting hysterical)* 4 words. 4 words.

WM: Your majesty, please calm yourself.

Queen: It's not as if you weren't being offered payment. My husband the King would have rewarded you handsomely.

WM: I admit that, your majesty. Indeed I do.

Queen: And all that you had to do was translate the smallest piece of supernatural graffiti. 4 words! And what did he offer you?

WM: Purple clothes, your majesty-though I will say it's not my colour.

Noble: *(As an aside)* Matches your eyes.

Queen: And there was more.

WM: Yes, a gold necklace.

Queen And more.

WM: *(Sheepishly)* I believe the offer was to be made third in command in the kingdom. Very generous.

Queen: Generous, I should say so. My husband is always making over -generous offers like that, if you ask me. But it's all a bit academic in any case because...because *(getting more irate)* you

wouldn't do it. A simple translation job and you wouldn't do it and now it's led to this. (*Points at King's slumped body*)

WM: Ma'am it was more a question of 'could not' rather than 'would not'. We were all baffled.

Queen: Incompetence then. Where has all your so-called learning got you? Is this the reason we have ourselves surrounded by the 'finest' academics in the land so that they can let us down in our hour of need. (*Turning to King*) *It's all right, O King, Please wake up. It's all right.*

King: (*Groggily*) *Where am I? What's happening?*

Queen: Oh thank the gods. He's alive. Praise the gods! It's all right, my dear King Belshazzar.. You had some kind of attack

King: (*in horror*) *Oh ye gods, i remember now. The hand...where is the hand?*

Queen: It's all right. It's gone.

King: And the fingers...where are the fingers?

Queen: They've gone too. Kind of attached to the hand. I know it was supernatural but it wasn't that weird.

King: And the writing?

Queen: Well that's still there...on the wall. (*Points*)

King: Oh no...it's there...it's still there.

Queen: Please don't start all that shaking and knee-knocking business again, your majesty. You've only just recovered. We don't want you set off again.

King: (*Pulling himself together*) *But what does it all mean? Can't anyone tell me?*

WM: Unfortunately not, your majesty. We have all tried, as you know, and frankly we have to admit defeat. But if anyone knows anybody else who might be of use, of more experience, than we shall be glad to hand over to them.

Queen: *(Clicking her fingers in sudden realisation)* That's it someone else. Why didn't I think of it, o King. Belteshazzar.

King: Belshazzar, my dear. How long do we have to be married before you get my name right. (Deliberately) Belshazzar.

Belshazzar It means master of the treasure

B e l s h a z z a r. People have lost their heads for less.

Queen: No Belteshazzar..

King *(Looks angry)*

Queen: I'm talking about someone else-Belteshazzar.

King: Oh. And who might he be?

Queen: Daniel.

King: Now I **am confused. I am not sure I have fully recovered yet. Are we talking about Belteshazzar or Daniel?**

Queen: Both. They are one and the same. That is to say his original Israelite name was Daniel. He was one of the people your father King Nebuchadnezzar brought back from Judah when he overthrew it. He also gave him the new name of Belteshazzar.

Wise Man: *(with some irony)* Much easier to pronounce than Daniel, after all.

King: Oh I see.

Queen: And this Daniel has a keen mind and knowledge and understanding and the ability to interpret dreams, explain riddles and solve difficult problems.

WM (*With more than a hint of jealousy*) *Oh a real wonder child!*

Queen: He is at any rate unlikely to do as bad a job as you. 4 words!

King: Send for this man...this Belteshazzar...this Daniel

*(Nobles, wise men, etc form a line to stage left and alternately call "Call Daniel", "Call Belteshazzar". Daniel eventually appears from stage right.*

Daniel: You called?

King: Yes. Are you Daniel one of the exiles my father brought from Judah?

Daniel; I am, your majesty.

King: I have heard that the spirit of the gods is in you and that you have insight, intelligence and outstanding wisdom.

Daniel: (*Humbly*) *Your majesty.*

King: My wise men were brought before me to solve this writing (*points*) *but they could not explain it. Even with inducements. But if you can I'll clothe you in purple, give you a gold necklace and make you the third highest ruler in the kingdom.*

WM: Not again

Daniel: (*Thoughtfully*) *Yes I'll read it and tell you what it means. But as to the inducements you can keep them. Or give them elsewhere. Yes, it is true that I have ability and gifts given to me. But not as you suppose from the gods-those gods you were bowing down to such a short time ago at your feast. Gods of bronze, iron, wood and stone-they are non -gods. My gift comes from the God of Heaven. The only true God. The God who holds your life in his hand. And He has a message for you and it's on that wall.*

WM: Tell us something we don't know, Belteshazzar or Daniel or whatever your name is.

Daniel :*(Completely ignoring him) King Belteshazzar you have failed to learn the lesson that your father had to learn. Yes, even the great Nebuchadnezzar was brought low by the true God of Heaven. He had to learn to honour the Most High God. But he did...eventually...it does not appear to run in the family. You have not lived in humility before this God. In fact you have lived in blasphemy, even using the sacred vessels stolen from His temple for your feasts.*

WM: Ye gods, get on with it. Can you interpret this graffiti gibberish or not? I'm guessing, no. *(much murmuring building from the others)*

Daniel: *(imposingly)*

**Mene: God has numbered the days of your reign and brought it to an end** *(All murmuring stops)*

**Tekel: You have been weighed on the scales and found wanting**

**Peres: Your Kingdom is divided and given to the Medes and Persians**

*(Complete silence)*

*Pause*

WM: And the good news?

Daniel: The most high God is sovereign and He has spoken

*Pause*

Runner: *Rushing in from stage right) Your majesty, there are reports of attacks by an army of the Medes*

**All freeze**

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