

The

Humors

by

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First edition.

There was a party in the parliament with every single argument. If I break bread with Bedouins when I meddle in the settlement, then we better be benevolent. I hear eggshells under elephants, and brain cells breaking for the hell of it. A dream can turn the desert green, I swear on my pedigree.

Rebbeinu is seated right next to me, silently reciting remedies, says that We could split the sea if we believe, no relief for enemies. I light a candle with the feather of an angel; me and evil got beef like Cain and Abel. I'm slaying all my demons, I had them lying on the floor. I've done it all before, this is

just the encore. I am not Hindu or Muslim or Christian or Jain, I pray with the souls that have conquered the pain. I slaughter goats in accordance to codes, written in stone by men in black coats.

Rebbeinu, can you pray for me? I thought that they were neighborly, turns out that they were hating me, betraying me, and now they're steady slaying me. I guess that I delay myself, betray myself, when I portray myself as reminiscent of a mystic. The minute hand moves and the clock tick

the clock ticks faster, I sit beneath the moon and commune with my Master. I pray to God in my dreams, it seems that She missed my belief. The absurdity could murder me, it's certainly hurting me. I could paint the porcelain moon crimson, and you would forget my scarlet shades by sunrise. I wish I could cry over

letters to editors, histories, pedigrees, suns setting on Saturn, now what does it matter? I spent my whole life in the bleachers, pent up like pennies in coffer, now what can I offer?

These are the humors;
the earth and the dirt,
the trees and the leaves,
the animals and bandits,
creeping discretely.
Whale bones and pearls
far beneath the waves
washing up to shore,
crush a couple cities,
build a couple more.
These are the Humors.

The subconscious song of primal pain that no tongue can speak, of broken hearts and shattered dreams of peace. Are these the scenes of desert prophecies or something more obscene? An angel planted a reed in the sea, it grew up to be Roman and Byzantine. It seems we will sleep with our sword until the last star slips away like a smoking ember. Bury me where the wind carries me, beneath Lebanese trees and date palms. The mind rules the heart, but whose mind rules mine? I'm tired of being one step behind. I thought the angst and anxiety would end in my teens, but shit hasn't changed since I OD'd on Sertraline. Am I speaking a different language, or can you feel my anguish? I chop off my knees and then feed them to puppies, I know that my demons still love me. I prostrate on pavements, I pray with the asphalt.

The Ancient Art of
comforting the widow,
raising the orphan,
planting seeds in blood
soaked soil. Water her
with salty teardrops.
Blessed is the Name who
releases the bound.
When we look to the
stars, they are the same
as the night of the
Promise.

If I'm only as good as my word, then I'm murmured, slurred and unheard. Muttering, stuttering, frantic and panicked, choppy like waves in the Atlantic. It's my fault, like all of the lines that cover the planet. The ones on my palms are taking advantage. If I'm only as good as my word, then I'm left

on
the curb and
turn profane
when I swerve in
4 lanes. I grew a
couple callouses
from clutching
my talismans. If
I'm only as good
as my word then
I'm a curse best
left unsaid.

I saw the ends of
the Earth; they
never looked
worse. My
mighty row boat
has been tossed
around by forty
40-foot waves,
eyes of the

shadows and the voice of the storm, you can see my talismans washing up to shore.

Karagoz stood at the counter, threw his gaze around at overstuffed bookshelves. Smoke suffocated the room as local intellectuals argued, waxed eccentric next to working stiffs, covered in frayed uniforms, braying and guffawing. They chased their coffee with spirits, generous with cash slipped into my shirt pocket. Karagoz kept a dark room in the back where he read fortunes for some dollars.

And there were girls, too, who hand rolled their cigarettes, offered them to me as I passed by. They would come right before we closed and stayed for a while. I read their palms and their coffee grounds, like Karagoz had taught me. I didn't charge them, which was quite unlike me. "You'll have 18 children, you'll discover a new element, you'll marry the Prime Minister," I would say. They laughed and wagged their fingers. "You're too young to work here, run along and play."

I worked after school for a man named Karagoz, in his coffee house. Filling cups, telling fortunes and crafting conversation, reading papers. Even then, Karagoz was elderly, stooped over, toothy grin plastered on his wrinkled face.

Some patrons went into Karagoz's place ready to complain. Do you have this or that, it's cheaper at so-and-so's, I don't have my ID, give me a drink anyway. One of them screamed at Karagoz and me because of the flag we flew by the door.

"It doesn't exist!" He frothed at the mouth, sweat dripping from his bare scalp. "Take it down!" Karagoz peered at him through his bifocals, gently shrugged and wondered aloud; "Does anything exist?" The man scowled and stormed away. And Karagoz and I both laughed. One

lady asked me where I was from. "Here," I answered. "No, where were you born?" She insisted. "In the hospital," I said and poured her coffee. She stamped her little foot and said "No, what are you?" I looked at her beady eyes. "Today, I'm a barista. Tomorrow, I'm a dishwasher. But every day, I'm Kosiva."

My mom would serve my Grandfather hot water, mint leaves, cardamom. Precious cardamom, no milk. "Precious precious, no milk no," he repeated repeated, eyes on his chessboard. On hot summer nights, windows open, breeze invited in, I read him the paper and held one of his dark hands, rough and gnarled. And his eyes twisted shut, and jaw clenched. "He's remembering," Mom said. I never really met Grandfather, just what he had become; a frail body and soft remnants of his mind, and the pieces of his past that would bubble to the surface. Some nights he was a teenager dressed in old country garb, some nights he was a skeleton tapping his fingers on the chessboard. He always sat in the corner, eyes half open, fixed on the chessboard, in his eternal match against Sultan Mehmet IV.

Once, my Grandfather looked at my face, held my cheeks, called out to me in secret, softly. "Shabbetai, Shabbetai, Shabbetai, Shabbetai." I was not Shabbetai. I was Kosiva. I hope I still am.

I got home late from Karagoz's one night and wrestled with my homework on the kitchen table. The scratch of soft lead on creamy white paper fell into a hypnotic rhythm as I decided which letter equaled which number. It was just another chore, but I wanted to show Miss Clinton that I was really trying. A soft *tock* came from the living room. I abandoned the paper in front of me and crept toward Grandfather's chair, lit by one lonely lamp. Tonight, Grandfather was a middle aged man. A well shaped mustache above his lips, wrinkles beginning to erode his face. It was so rare that he actually moved a chess piece that it warranted my full attention. He looked at me and called me Shabbetai, and said that I killed everyone that night when I accepted the Sultan's terms.

Perfect words are spoken in silence,
like star crossed glances taken aback
by chances. I connect the dots like
Orion when I'm reminded that
perfect words are spoken in silence.
Sweet and somber quiet in between
constrictions and contractions of
shifting shimmering porcelain
tectonic plates.

Perfect words are
spoken in silence
best read in
between the
white fire and
black flame.

Perfect words are
spoken in
silence, never
repeated, thrown
across time,
space and mind
frames. It's like
an earthquake
when the
paradigm shifts
and sound bytes
vibrate into riots
and that's why
perfect words are

spoken in silence. This is the
evidence, these are the humors: 1) the
earth and the dirt, 2) the trees and the
leaves, 3) the animals and 4) the
bandits creeping discretely.
The crossroads is the answer.

Sometimes, it feels like
everyone's waiting for
nuclear war. I look for
some shelter, shook to
the core. I stutter and
stammer and fuck up my
grammar. The train is
crash landing so I scurry
to the back. All of the
acronym gymnastics
blaring on speakers,
history's theater.

I come from a vast expanse of desert
dry land. I've met men who can turn
gasoline into whiskey for weddings, I've
sung at the graves of date palms who
pray in a painless cadence for people in
painted cages. These are the saints and
sages whose bodies rest in dust. I'm
certain I'll see them in Eden when I

quit my
addiction to
breathing. The
more things
change, the more
they stay the
same. If you can
scribble non
sequiturs on a
rice grain then
you can clearly
read my brain.

Sometimes
miracles feel like
dead weight to
me. Maybe You
should let me use
my own two feet
to cross the Sea
of Reeds. If I get
lost then that's

on me. Sometimes miracles feel like
dead weight to me, like yeah as if this
connection could help me slip into
sobriety quietly. But I just crossed the
street peacefully, seems like a miracle to
me.

I stood on filthy moist tiles in front of the wall of espresso machines, hands calloused and rough. I cursed sharply as the steam bit my flesh. My temper had gotten shorter since I started working for Karagoz years before. He trusted me now to run the place by myself, but I wasn't allowed to see my future alone, not yet. Dead people visited the shop to speak to Karagoz about the Other Side and This Side. I could catch some stray words, but they all spoke in the Dead Tongue that I barely knew. They would ask for whiskey, gesture to the coffee grounds and our precious cardamom. Karagoz forbade it. Sometimes, vaguely familiar silhouettes would enter, half tempting me to greet them, but I knew better. Karagoz had warned me, I was not yet ready to speak with the Other Side.

With Karagoz's cards and ingredients, we witnessed future events in the present tense, we interpreted the voices from the Other Side. The most prized ingredient was the cardamom that only grew in the Abyss.

The cardamom grew in the Abyss: the intricate, ever shifting maze. It was submerged in total, absolute, almost physical shadow. The bittersweet scent of the flowers whispered to me. Echoes of distant memories bubbled to the surface as I fumbled closer toward the cardamom. Fragments of myth and history entered my conscience in flurries and bursts from the Abyss's shadows as I plucked pods from the stem. The aroma stirred long lost fragments of memories like dirt in a well, suffocating me as it pushed me through blood stained alleyways, monuments excavated from blocks of granite, gargled forgotten curses and trials gone awry.

The Cavern at the bottom of the Abyss echoes and echoes and echoes. My pleas and entreaties bounce off the walls. My head is so empty and my feet are so sore, my neck is so stiff. Can You please release the grip from my wrist, take the knife from my ribs? These floodwaters are mighty deep, they come up to my knees, filled with empty capillaries, broken promises and forgotten dreams. Know these chemicals kill all 3 of my brain cells, started when I learned that I liked how the paint smelled. If I break out of my cage, will I learn what the chain held? Who dares despair the skeleton left to rust, dust and disrepair? The etches on the windpipe tell me it was a life well lived.

If I catch bubonic plague, bury me where the wind carries me, with the blue bonnets beneath Lebanese trees and date palms. The cage searches for its bird. My fire will burn. These are the Humors.

I could paint the porcelain moon crimson, you'd forget my scarlet shade by sunrise. The mind rules the heart, but whose mind rules mine? Severed hands till tender soil, emerald tendrils suffocate in a lonely space. Primordial orchid, thorn inside my dark eyes twisted shut til I can't breathe. Locked behind cellar doors I can't see because I'm geeked out on battery acid. Memories tend to fade. Guilty daze and a mist of shame, promises I meant to make. Solemn swish of mint, I slept through winter break. I keep a couple cups of coffee on the counter, commune with cardinals and spirits in cabinets, keep my sicker habits concealed til I find a torch.

Karagoz might have seen my cards, but would not listen to them, nor interpret them for me. "It is impolite to tell another Medium their fortune," he once told me. Sometimes, he looked at me as if in mourning. I asked him if the cards ever told lies. "A good weatherman might see a storm approaching, just from what the clouds tell him. Do the clouds ever lie? I suppose a poor weatherman could make a mistake, misread one cloud formation as another. And if he does, he may get drenched. But if a Medium misreads the card, mistranslates the Tongue of the Dead..." His voice trailed off like steam from the espresso machine in front of him. He asked if my shadow still bothered me.

As the years inched past like glaciers, I began to piece together the conspiracy of yesterday's generation, the last of our family to live on the other side of the Atlantic. Echoes of this betrayal, an intricate web of deceit, appeared each time I entered the Abyss.

Once, in his most lucid moment, Grandfather told me about his brother when they were both imprisoned. They had stood in line with the others, all their bodies emaciated, gaunt, shivering, under an unforgiving winter moon and guarded by the wrong end of rusting rifles. His brother suddenly started jumping, dancing, singing, grasped by total ecstasy. He went to each prisoner, clasped their hand and studied their palm. "You'll invent a fantastic machine, you'll catch a criminal and be handsomely rewarded, you'll be reunited with your lover in the olive groves!" Everyone he spoke to, with one exception, was to be shot and buried where they stood. For his survival, Grandfather had been called the Executed One. To this day, he believed his brother's predictions were correct, and that I was responsible for the murders.

