

. The Mezuzah Thief .

He stood in the doorway and watched. They were insane, obviously. Insane with grief and longing, with the terror of death and hungry to tear at the heart of life with their teeth. They stood at the altar as if at the end of a pier and rocked, completely covered by white shawls, striped with blue and fringed, moaning and lowly singing down into the books opened in their half-offered hands, not looking across the railing at their hips towards their shrine, yet their entire beings, seen from the back, seemed to lean into this shrine as if it threatened to crash down on top of them, and they shouldered into it, to prevent its crash, to preserve it, and to protect their own lives from being flattened by its huge weight.

Now the threat of the shrine seemed to be gone. A pressure was removed, leaving a wake of vertigo in its upward disappearance. He realized these covered men were making love to the empty air before the motionless shrine. Rocking at the hips, back and forth, lowly moaning and singing softly into the books held gently before them, breast-height. "My beloved," they told the book, and wept. "Oh, oh, my beloved." The shrine before them now stood silent and open, made absolutely empty by this outpouring of reunion, love and grief. It stood as an entranceway into the calculated endless moment of hesitation that is the universe. Sex energy poured from it in a small but furious tornado into him, into his low belly, and he got hard. The forms of women moved behind a thin white woven screen, near the door at the back of the room where he stood, watching. They were dissolved. There was less pleading in their voices. He saw a pair of feet beneath the screen, toes pointing towards each other in low black shoes, the instep swelling over, green skirt tight around the calves, pressed by the heels turned out. They might have been the feet of a young girl or an old woman. This erased the presence hovering in the screen. It was like seeing a boom mike sticking down through the top of a movie. Canceled. The small tornado slowed and died, leaked weakly out of him. He had the impulse to stomp on those feet, to pulverize them. He began to feel faint, and leaned his right arm high on the doorjamb. He looked again towards the shrine, the covered men and foreign alphabet and candles and scrolls and books and they were on another planet, a lifetime, someone else's, away.

“Fucking Jews,” he thought. And under his right hand he remembered why he’d come.

He’d fasted for Yom Kippur and was fast starving. And he was fast getting sick now, fast. His brain had started to play that game where the music stops and you have to scramble for a seat. All the seats were taken now, and the music was starting and stopping every three seconds. Everything and everyone was in his way, and he could see his seat, in short, perfectly focused glimpses behind the disgusting clutter of the world. It was an offwhite molded-plastic cafeteria chair, cheap and greasy and carved in with initials and hearts and profanity, and when he sat in it it became a throne, it glowed, it raised him and the world, the jagged cluttered crashing world to that place of endless hesitation, the heart of the universe, the infinitely split second of retroactive silence before God spoke. He would get there. He always did. Blow himself back to the softly vibrating rooms in the palace of chaos, where he could sit, upon his chair, and multiply. A single candle in the endless fingertipped rooms. How the air devours itself. *That is why the book starts with the second letter. Why they have commands commanding that command. Why they put their brains on their sleeve and their hearts on their head. Why I will not allow them to accept me.*

He tore the Mezuzah off the doorjamb after putting his fingers to his lips and kissing them, and felt the yamakah lift straight up off the top of his head as he jumped down the stairs. He heard a muffled, covered commotion of chairs and voices in the distance behind him as he ran, and he imagined a circustent-sized prayershawl collapsing in soft capture upon him, being finally caught by his own wild arms as they struggled with the fabric of a ghost.

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