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An Assyro-Babylonian Pregnant Goddess: An Excerpt from: The  
Saint Of Incipient Insanities

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# An Assyro-Babylonian Pregnant Goddess

An Excerpt from: *The Saint Of Incipient Insanities*

*The Saint of Incipient Insanities* is a comic narrative about a group of young people, mostly foreigners in Boston, and their never-ending quest for happiness and belonging. The two central characters are Ömer and Gail who come from utterly different cultural and religious backgrounds and yet attempt to fly together. They resemble the great mystic Rumi's lame birds—the stork and the crow—who paradoxically find the strength to fly in the very union of being lame. The author explores the themes of love, friendship, religion, nationality, belonging, xenophobia, homophobia, culture, and exile. As the story unfolds, the characters in the novel will constantly challenge each other's preconceived identities, and in turn, find their own prejudices contested. As a newcomer, Ömer is not supposed to feel at home in Boston, yet he displays uncanny skills of adaptation, thanks to his hyper-exposure to American music and popular culture while growing up in Turkey. On the other hand, Gail remains unhoused in her native Boston not only because of her gender politics and her unquenchable spirituality but also because the contexts in which she seeks to affirm her being are themselves made of shifting sand. In the course of the novel, the author seeks to render a lucid critique of “deracination” as a terminal, existential condition—underlying the paradigms of personal identity in this period of pervasive globalization.

★ ★ ★

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Inside, the building had a funny smell. Surely not a pleasant one but not necessarily bad either. A sharp smell of its own which meant that it possessed, Gail claimed, a sharp story of its own. She liked that kind of story.

They'd moved to this place three months ago.

Three months ago, they'd moved in with their books, CDs (Ömer's mostly), clothes, coffee machine (Ömer's definitely, although only as a tribute to the past), incense (Gail's), cats (Gail's), bundles and bunches of plants-spices-herbs-teas (Gail's), a silver-framed picture of a bearded Goddess (Gail's definitely), a Turkish public notice from Istanbul in the 1930s, forbidding ferryboat passengers to spit (Ömer had slightly distorted, poeticized, and venerated the notice as his life-long motto of coruscating wisdom: *oh passenger, do not ever spit on the ferryboat that carries you!*), a collection of premonitions (chestnuts, pebbles, all sorts of useless items collected from hither and thither—Gail's definitely), miscellaneous possessions of functional value (Gail's and Ömer's) and plans concerning the yet-to-be-possessed. Weeks before moving in here, they'd decided in unison to take no thing, meaning *nothing*, with them, just their humble mortal selves and those of the two Persian cats (though until the very last minute Ömer had not lost hope that they, too, would be renounced).

They had stoically agreed to move to a completely empty house, and once there, make a fresh, brand new start. It was a great feeling, simple but exalted. Ömer had unleashed a scintillating speech on the Turks' long-dead ancestors scattered somewhere in the steppes of Central Asia, where they used to live a happy, nomadic, shamanist life, long before they arrived at the land that would become modern day Turkey; concluding how deeply he regretted somewhere along their history they had lost that wanton spirit and chosen to settle down instead, only to lag behind in the nutty race of civilization. Nomads were noble and restless. They were neither infatuated with the doctrine of a "better future" that kept gorging on the insatiable lust of capitalist consumption, nor entrapped in a good-old-days-fetishism, that required to pile up sentimental relics of an unsentimental past. On the saddle of a nomad's horse there was no room for *memento mori*, family albums, childhood photos, love letters, or adolescence diaries—each and every one of which long vapid but never allowed to rest in peace. No, none of those sappy shackles. Only freedom that merits the name, so pure and plain, could gallop a nomad's horse.

Accordingly, as they'd move into their new, grimy, empty house on Saturday, they had agreed to take no thing, meaning *nothing*, with them. Only the two of them, reckless and carefree, plus the cats, to Ömer's dismay.

"What's in that?" wondered Ömer as the door banged open and in came an amorphous box on wheels followed by Gail followed by the female cat followed by the male cat. That was sometime on Tuesday morning.

"Oh, nothing much. Soaps and things like that."

Though he found it hard to grasp why such a large box for a thing as small and squashy as soap, Ömer had made no objection. Nomads carried a bar of soap with them, didn't they? And if they could take soaps, there was no harm in taking a few CDs too, portable and peripatetic indeed. Before the day was over, there followed other cherished items, things that were too dear to be left behind, slyly sneaked into the box of exceptions, and when there was no room in it anymore, they simply made another box. As the list of exceptional items expanded, so did the number of boxes to move into their brand new life. On Friday they were looking for a moving company. They took the first, smallest, cheapest company that offered itself. Fortuitously, its name was *Galloping Horse Van Lines*.

The first weeks were simply wonderful, fully enjoying the liberty of making love with no concerns about being heard by housemates. Living with Abid and Piyu for ten months had its own gratifications and joys for sure, but did also entail a series of restrictions, the weight and scale of which they realized better now. Marriage did not necessarily mean a curtailment of individual liberties, they'd discovered. Moving to a house together brought, first and foremost, freedom of decibels—the freedom to moan, come, cackle, coo, and quarrel loudly, sonorously, deafeningly.

"Mrs. Basu is complaining," the concierge declared one evening as he blocked the entrance in a droning voice and with a brooding look that could most probably be decoded as: 'I couldn't care less about the thing I'm going to tell you but I will tell you anyway.'

"Who is Mrs. Basu?" Gail wondered.

"Your neighbor next door," came the answer.

Hence, they had to curtail the volume of the liberty of decibels. But they still retained other liberties. The liberty of cooking whatever you want and eating less couscous, of not hearing horror movie screams late at night, of brushing cat hair from your clothes rather than brushing both cat hair and

dog hair, and the liberty of rambling the house entirely naked, at least in theory. No, they concluded, marriage was not necessarily a curtailment of liberties, not necessarily.

And yet within this laguna of liberties that he had just began to splash around, there remained many moorings still connecting him to his pre-Gail days, to the life he used to lead with his two housemates much before she joined in. From time to time he caught himself acuminately missing parts and pieces of that life, like longing to get a handle on something familiar and informal, if not vulgar, amidst all the erudite accouterments whirling out of his grasp now, no matter how love-sparkling each might be. Speaking of informality, he badly missed that alliaceous smell anchored in the kitchen, for instance, and the credo Abid and Piyu had built around it, in their *garlic & co.* For “coming out from the garlic closet,” as they had once told him, bestowed a one-way ticket back to the nature, as unpretentious and pure as the day we were born, untainted by the civic codifications of courteousness as to what is proper and what is not. The first time his ex-housemates had come to visit them in their new house, Ömer had made sure everything on the table had oodles of garlic in it, hoping to make them feel at home here, to assure them not much would change in their lives henceforth just because Gail and he had moved elsewhere, but they all knew it wasn’t only about that, it wouldn’t be the same anymore.

Ömer had never revealed to Gail how giddy and uneasy, whirling and falling, he felt at the times he caught himself longing for his former life. Guilt, he supposed. It wasn’t that Gail wouldn’t understand what Piyu and Abid meant to him because she did, and it wasn’t that he couldn’t go and stay there (though he wouldn’t be able to stay in his room anymore for they had already started looking for a third to replace him) whenever he wanted, because he could. Missing the bachelor brotherhood of those days, in spite of being merrier and married now, was, somehow, more obscure than that—it felt like keeping on with the same old constant pace of masturbation though you now had the super, steady sex you’d always craved. Actually he was keeping on with the same old constant pace of masturbation though he now had the super, steady sex he’d always craved but that didn’t make him feel guilty at all. Missing behind closed doors the life he used to live on Center Street 8, definitely did.

But there was more to it than that. For one thing that might even be

worse than hiding from your wife how much you missed your pre-marriage life was that in the meantime she might be missing hers, too. Missing and thereby, hiding it. Could Gail be longing for her life with Jane Ellen Thompson? Because if she did, in that case, this could mean more than that.

At the outset, Ömer had reckoned he didn't care about it, and when he'd found out that he actually did, he'd decided not to think about it anymore. Not only because these were acerbic matters, acerbic and acidic, and it thereby seemed better not to touch but also because he simply was in love with Gail, and as she had once whispered to his ears, "we tend to resist to be changed by our lovers for fear of losing them but maybe, the alteration that comes with love is our only saving grace."

Ömer was ready to let her remold his habits, views, and beliefs, if he had any left. But getting rid of the suspicions chiding his thoughts had proved to be more difficult than all of that perhaps. After all this time he couldn't help still wondering, could it be true that it was more than a house they'd shared? Was it some kind of a Boston marriage as hounds of rumors traced back? Were Jane Ellen Thompson and Gail lovers once, and if yes, how had it ended, or even worse, had it ended undeniably, irretrievably, absolutely? Half of him craved the answers, while the other half simply wanted to avoid them. Better take your hands off. Though despondent they might have been in the last days jointly, still a sunny marriage they had. Better not upset.

*Do not spit on the ferryboat that carries you, oh passenger!*

Not that he minded her past affairs as long as they were past affairs. And that was precisely how he wanted to perceive Gail's bisexuality; as some thing that had flickered out and did now definitely belong to a remote past—somewhat like a childhood illness that left no trace behind, similar to measles or small pox, though probably less nasty—whatever the analogy—in any case, as something she hadn't included in the boxes of exceptions *Galloping Horse Van Lines* had grubbily carried into their brand new life.

He took out his keys, and stopped in front of the mailboxes on the wall. A tiny brown box for each apartment, and on each box, an even tinier piece of paper for the names of the households to be written on. It looked quite egalitarian, but like most things that looked quite egalitarian, only on the

surface. The size of the paper alluded to each household was the same, and yet not every household demanded the same size of paper. For some surnames, unlike some others, happened to be long, too long. As such, the overall mail boxing system in the apartment favored people with shorter surnames and disfavored those with longer ones. Mrs. Basu next door was one of the favored, though probably she didn't know this. Inverse are the bonds between having knowledge and knowing what you have. In order to know how privileged you were, you had to be disprivileged first, but then, paradoxically, you wouldn't be privileged anymore.

The whole building was, as Gail called it, a Spice House. There was a Mr. Cumin at number six, a talkative cheerful Ginger at number twelve, an Irish couple who'd recently adopted a Vietnamese girl named Thyme, a Mrs. Mintha who didn't mind to be called Mint, and a certain Mr. Sage nobody had met yet. Whatever the spice in question, this small, white, rectangular piece of paper on each mailbox seemed to provide enough of a space to write it down. Same with other surnames, Bohn, Taft, Yates, Katz, Kin, and even the dreadful Mr. and Mrs. Salt . . . all fitted nice and trim inside their frames on the mailboxes, facing no problem of accommodation.

That was not the case, however, with mailbox eighteen. For there it was, his surname, once so familiar, but now turned into a pastel of itself, with letters squeezed towards the end to make it fit inside this narrow frame: OZSIPAHIOGLU. A flimsy sense of continuity in this life of sudden ruptures—a rickety façade of identification he had been glued to at birth, and made compelled to carry around wherever he went all his life, and expected to be proud of, and then even more proud of passing it to his own son, just because some great-grand-grand . . . father of his or perhaps an indolent clerk long-chewed and digested by the bureaucratic machinery, had, in a blurred past for some reason now unknown, favored the sound of it, rather than of any other combination of letters. It was preposterous in a way, for Ömer might be said to have had no affection whatsoever for the block of a surname he had, were it not for his relatively recent fear of losing a teeny tiny piece of that block.

When you leave your country, you leave at least one part of you behind, they said. If that were the case, Ömer knew exactly what he had left behind: his dots!

Back in Turkey, ÖMER ÖZSİPAHİOĞLU he used to be.

Here in United States, he had become OMAR OZSIPAHIOGLU.

Before he knew his dots were excluded for him to be better included. Americans, just like everyone else, relished familiarity—names they could pronounce, sounds they could reverberate—even if it didn't make much of a sense either way. Yet perhaps, few nations could be as self-assured as Americans in reprocessing the names and surnames of foreigners. When a Turk, for instance, realizes that he has just mispronounced the name of an American in Turkey, probably he will be embarrassed and in all likelihood consider this his own mistake, or in any case, something to do with himself. When an American realizes that he has just mispronounced the name of a Turk in the U.S.A., however, most likely, it won't be him but the name itself that would sound responsible for that mistake.

During the reprocessing of names, be it a dot, a letter, or an accent, something is always lost. For taking your name with you to another country is similar to what happens to a voluminous pack of spinach when cooked: some new taste can be added to the main ingredient but its size shrinks visibly. It is this cutback that a foreigner first learns about. For the primary requirement of accommodating in a strange land is to estrange the hitherto most familiar: your name.

Playing with pronunciation, curbing letters, modifying sounds, looking for the best substitute, and if and when you have more than one name, altogether abandoning the one less presentable, the one less likable by native speakers . . . Likewise in his case, he had substituted the Ömer he had been for so many years, with the less fastidious and more presentable Omar or Omer, depending on the speaker's choice.

He searched for his fountain pen. He was sure he'd put it back to his pocket before leaving the bar. But now that he thought about it, he wasn't sure of even the name of that bar. He found another pen, Ion Aztec Orange Gel Ink Roll Ball that he thought he'd long lost.

*When the diligent O wears his reading glasses, it becomes an Ö; when the mischievous I goes out for a walk and wears a cap, it becomes a Î; when the gorgeous G lets her hair flutter in the wind, she becomes a Ğ . . .*

Ömer definitely had no idea how or why this syrupy silly tune had all of a sudden dashed into his mind. The last time he'd murmured it, he must have been a seven year old secretly suffering at the hands of a fortyish teacher whose idea of education was enjoyment, which was fine, if only her sense of humor had been more mature. As they learned the alphabet, the



kids were forced to sing and expected to enjoy a stupid song personifying every single letter. That the alphabet contained 29 letters had been a painful discovery for all.

And yet now, twenty years after, and miles away from Istanbul, he came home drunk and dog-tired late at night, and beyond his mind's ouzo-intoxicated rim, suddenly found himself watching the dimpled arms, meaty nose, and droopy mouth of his first teacher on this planet. Teachers, especially those early ones, are mere mortals with God-like tasks. Only they can destroy the yet-to-be-created.

After all the dots were put back in their place, returning to the diligent O his glasses, to the mischievous I his cap and to the gorgeous G her gorgeous hair, subject Ömer took a step back and looked at his surname again: ÖZSİPAHİOĞLU.

With or without the dots, such a surname was nothing but a shackle in your feet; too much of a burden for a nomad, or at least someone with the pretensions of being one. It compelled you to belong to somewhere, to settle down, to have a traceable past there, a family and a future worthy of the name, all preferably within the same location. Since that wasn't the kind of living he craved for, to tell the truth, Ömer would rather possess a shorter surname; light and genteel, flexible and portable, one that you could easily carry along wherever you went, like perhaps the one Mr. and Mrs. Salt had.

If Gail, doing who-knows-what upstairs on the fourth floor now, knew he was here spending some of his post-carousel time pondering on the problem of his surname not fitting into the tag on the mail-box, she would have bitterly mocked, and interpreted the whole scene as another vivid illustration of fear of castration. Men, she argued pompously, were much more frightened of losing their names when compared to women, who had to learn the skill in losing theirs time and again.

Was that why she didn't want her surname to be written on mailbox eighteen, Ömer Özsipahioğlu didn't care to investigate. He jingled the keys in his pocket, took them out, unlocked the mailbox and pulled out a handful of mail. It was always the same junk; sale ads, flyers, credit card offers pouring from everywhere. Among the pile there was also a catalog from a bookstore nearby, the second issue of *IF AIN'T IN PAIN, NOT ALIVE ENOUGH*, an ultra-nihilist journal by a hyper-confused bunch of DJs with incredibly antagonistic musical preferences but hip-hop in common that

Gail had subscribed to annually though they both knew too well the journal wouldn't survive a year. Because the chances of its survival were so slim, however, the journal had a spontaneous stimulating effect, for every new month it made you feel good to get the new issue, to see they had made it again.

Under the journal there were more and more ads, and an envelope for a certain . . . a certain Zarpandit . . . ?! Normally he handed misplaced envelopes to the concierge but this one had Gail's surname on it.

"Gail!" he hooted as he opened the door and took a groggy step inside.

Just like the migrant trying to appropriate another self via another name, so too a lover attempts to appropriate the beloved's self by appropriating her name. Falling in love is an appropriation of the names of the beloved, and so is falling out of love their reappropriation. Names are the bridges to people's castle of existence; it is via them that others, friends and foes alike, are able to tiptoe into. To learn someone's name is to attain to half of her existence; the rest is a matter of pieces and details. Children know this deep down in their soul. That is why they instinctively refuse to answer back to a stranger asking their name. Children comprehend the power of names, and once they grow up, they simply forget.

History of religions is a roll call of the names of power, as well as a testimony to the power of names. Jews professed the arcane tradition of naming, particularly at the moment of death. They changed the names of those on their deathbed, to give them a second chance to live. Muslims professed the tradition too, particularly at the moment of birth. They whispered into a newborn baby's soft ears what her name would be, echoing the name three times to ensure it sank deeply onto her soul. And the Orthodox Christians who never forgave Constantinople for becoming Istanbul professed the tradition too, for just like falling out of love, the conquest of a city is a reappropriation of an appropriated name. That is why even after five centuries, those who reject to fall out of love for the beloved city that was once theirs still don't call her Istanbul. The infatuated desire to regain the heart of an ex-lover and the desire to reconquer a city share a common ground. Both are about refusing to accept any changes that the name of your beloved might have undergone after your departure.

"So you have started drinking again?"

There she was, sipping a late night herbal tea, the female cat attached to her, the male cat attached to her female.

“Maybe, yes,” Ömer beamed with ouzo pride, “maybe no. I decided to treat myself to a drink, but I don’t have the foggiest idea if I have started drinking anew or not.”

An uncanny smile flickered across her lips as she headed to the kitchen, followed by the female cat followed by the male cat. It was pathetic. Besides, it was totally at odds with the cats-are-fond-of-their-independence-whereas-dogs-are-not myth.

“Gail, do you know of anyone . . . ?” Ömer muttered as he looked pensively at the silver spoon hanging from that extra-black-ultra-Afro bush that she called “hair.” In rational moments he’d wonder why on earth did she keep on attaching a silver spoon to her hair. But this being not one of those moments, he went on hollering: “Of anyone named . . . Zar-pan-dit?”

“Yes I do”, roared the answer from the kitchen. “That’s me.”

For though names are the welcoming bridges to the other’s castle of existence, they are not necessarily the only way to get in or out of there. There might always be, and usually are some other routes, too buried to be noticed at the first glance. Some other names, or nicknames, monikers, appellations most definitely from another time and of another consciousness, unofficial, undocumented, unrevealed names, part bygone forever, part eternal, each a hidden subway in the labyrinth of love through which the beloved can walk away before the lover has even realized her absence. That is how it is with names, the easiest to learn about human beings, the most difficult to possess.

She walked out of the kitchen with a glass of milk, followed by the extremely thick coated smoke-gray female cat, followed by the even thicker coated tabby male cat, seized the envelope on the way, and without losing time to open it, directly headed to the bathroom, once again in a mind-numbing wagon walk.

“That wacky thing is your name?”

Ömer chased her to the bathroom, without realizing that in doing so, he’d become the fourth element necessary to complete the chain of a procession inside Noah’s ark: female human, followed by female cat, followed by the male cat, all followed by the male human.

With a quick move, Gail pulled her pants down and sat on the toilet seat. Ömer’s eyes slid across her and focused on the mirror behind to avoid the discomfort of watching her. He scanned the horde of bottles and pitchers in front of the mirror, the towels, every single octopus design on the

shower curtain, and the mat below -everything in the bathroom but her. How and why she insisted on publicly peeing in front of the cats, in front of him, he'd never understand. Not that he was ashamed of or bothered by it but how come she wasn't ashamed of or bothered by it?

As she went on peeing, Gail reached down to rub the female cat's stomach. She instantly started purring in an absurd echo, with the male cat purring next to her, as if they were one single body and his pleasure depended on her pleasure. Ömer frowned at this chunky creature with a flat nose and a flat face. He had never managed to like him. He had never managed to like the female cat either but the female cat didn't seem to be in the business of being liked. As she never demanded love from anyone, even a simple caress rewarded her with more than she'd asked for. Unlike her, however, the male cat solicited more love from every organism around, particularly from the female cat, and did thereby always end up getting less than what he'd initially wanted.

"Are you talking to yourself? Why do you keep calling them male cat - female cat? They have names," Gail repined tonelessly.

Ömer blinked twice, one for each name. *West* and *The Rest*. The female cat was named *West*, coined by Gail as a critique of the constant feminization of the East by Orientalist discourse, which was fine, had the male cat not been named respectively, *The Rest*. It was he that annoyed Ömer most, with his insatiable hunger to be adored by the female cat. By the time he had completed his second blinking, his fury had slid from the male cat to his wife. If she was as carefree, daring, and self-confident to pee publicly, why did she conceal her name and *Godknowswhatelse* from him? The implications were subtle and edgy. Once again, part of him wanted to probe the answer now, *right now*, while the other part preferred not to spit on the ferryboat that carried him, and do instead something more worthwhile, like going into deep, delicious slumber *right now*.

"Why didn't you ever tell me?" he groused when he'd figured out which part of him won over the other.

"Probably because you never asked."

The female cat gazed fixedly and frighteningly at some invisible company on top of the basket of dirty clothes; Ömer stared uncouthly at a graceful bottle of tonic in front of the mirror and wondered if it was new, the male cat watched his own tail move; and Gail looked at no particular thing.

"And what was I supposed to ask? By the way Gail, do you happen to have a most ridiculous name? Or should I've asked instead, what was in your parents' minds when they named their child that wacky thing?"

"You know what," she muttered placidly and yet stiffly, "in the past, people have mocked so much and so badly, I have had my tank full. So if you too want to taunt my name, go on, take your time. I really don't mind anymore."

"What about Jane Ellen Thompson?" Ömer caught himself yelling. "Is this funny name of yours going to shock her too or does she already know it? You and her were very close in the past, right?"

There followed a minute of embarrassing silence, as Gail stared at him in astonishment. "Are you trying to ask something?"

"Like what?" Ömer squealed, still frowning at the nerve wrackingly graceful bottle, then at the nerve wrackingly hilarious octopuses on the shower curtain, then at the nerve wrackingly male cat itself . . . basically everything in the bathroom except her.

"Like if we were a lesbian couple or not?"

Gail stood up, flushed the toilet and squinted as she leaned close to inspect him. "Because if that's what you are asking, you will have to go through a memory-restoration! You are the one who told me that you wanted to know nothing about my past, unless I wanted to tell it myself, that we were making a fresh new beginning, we would be living just like nomads, and nomads had no history because the past was not portable, and that whatever my personal history, it was fine with you, as long as you knew that I loved you . . . bla bla bla. And look at you now. You start drinking again and fog your brain with Abid, come back home intoxicated and lost, and all of a sudden you realize your most tragic distress in this miserable mortal life is whether your wife and some Jane Ellen Thompson had a lesbian affair in the past. So tell me, what happened to that pretentious progressiveness of yours? Did you leave it at the counter of the bar?"

Ömer looked at her with pitiful, fawn eyes he could barely keep open. He sure had a counterargument but couldn't remember what it was. Besides, there was too much light around. It hurt his eyes. Before he pulled his eyelids down, he saw the female human walking away furiously followed by the female cat walking away arrogantly followed by the male cat, just walking away. When he reopened his eyelids, he was alone on the bathroom floor, rolled in a fetal position. It was warm and comfortable down

here, the only problem being some nasty smell from nearby. Somebody had vomited on the mat.

The required link between happily-lying-on-the-bathroom-floor stage and the one in which he found himself clean and in pajamas in bed, was missing. He had no idea how or when Gail had brought him here. A smile cracked his stern face as he watched her taking out the silver spoon from her amazingly thick, frenziedly wavy, ravenly black hair. After sixteen months of intimate company, how she managed to attach that spoon in her hair every morning was a question Ömer still found peculiarly baffling and how she took it out every night without spoiling the shape of her hair was even more so.

"Tell me, does that name . . . Zarpandit," he mumbled vaguely, near oblivion, "does it have a meaning?"

"Yes it does," she said as she lit her reading lamp, which was supposed to illumine only her half of the bed but was never pleased until it invaded the other half too. Trying to avoid the light and look at her at the same time, Ömer caught a blurry glimpse of her face focused on a book whose title read: *Did Somebody Say Totalitarianism?*

"The name belonged to an early Assyro-Babylonian pregnant goddess who was worshipped each night as the moon rose. It means silver-shining."

"Really? It is poetic!" murmured Ömer, a sullen compassion creeping into his voice, as if poetic meant that which was no longer here. He suspected having said this before, exactly in the same way with the same connotation but couldn't remember when or where. He felt ashamed of all the fuss he'd made tonight. As relief swapped shame, bit by bit everything connected to every other thing, and startlingly, all made sense. Glasses of ouzo on a bar counter, the missing dots on the napkin, an early Assyro-Babylonian pregnant goddess worshipped each serene night as the moon rose, laughing magpies and the ghastly face of a small child alone in a taxi late at night . . . everything made sense in pure harmony. He got the impression that if he managed to wait long enough, quietly and patiently, all the wonders of the cosmos would be connected into a momentarily meaningful whole, and then altogether offered to him.

"If it surprises you so much, I better tell you I have some other names too."

"Like what . . . ?" Ömer asked automatically but before he could reach

his own question mark, let alone her answer, his body plunged into the silky slumber it had been longing for.

Down here it was hot, very hot. His mouth went dry, very dry, and longed for a drink. A few steps ahead he noticed the glitzy entrance of a bar. The light was annoying but he entered nevertheless. As he watched him coming, the Puerto Rican waiter who had now become the bartender gave a reluctant smile. All the shelves behind him were empty, but there were countless jars and boxes on the counter.

“Are these all coffee in these boxes? What are they named?” Ömer asked as he sat on the nearest stool.

“Oh, it depends which one you are asking. There are so many different names . . . .”

Ömer turned his head to avoid the sunlight intruding from the huge windows.

“This one, for instance, is called *coffee latte*,” the once-waiter now-bartender continued plaintively as he put a frothy cocktail decorated with slices of pineapple on the counter. “But I definitely recommend . . .” he twirled and scampered back to the bottles on the shelves pulling out three or four glasses of cocktail at the same time, “. . . *coffee mocha* or also this one here, our specialty, *coffee Zanzibar*.”

Zanzibar . . . ‘Remember this name,’ Ömer thought to himself. Zanzibar . . . ‘Remember this . . . name . . . .’

Outside the windows the day flickered out, and all of a sudden it was night, but still hot, too hot. As he served Ömer new coffees from the empty shelves behind, the bartender’s hand gestures became tremendously swift, as if he were tricking him into something.

No matter how hard Ömer tried to follow him, each cocktail put on the counter was no more than a glimpse in a carousel of ever-changing mirrors, and every name uttered along remained a sprinkle in the air, vanished before it appeared.

Next morning when he’d wake up in the land of nasty headaches, he would remember no coffee cocktails, no empty shelves, and no particular names.