

THE POINCARÉ SUTRA^{*}

Anil Menon[†]

I, Zulaikha, mutant, inconvenient and sixteen-point-two miraculous years old, declare myself Eve of a bold and brilliant species. I am Singular. Protoplast. Odd. In short, fucked. I am besieged by fallen apes, hairy and quarrelsome. I am besmirched on the neighborhood's limestone walls. I am virginal, insolvent and oppressed. Says Zulaikha: bring it!

#

Note On Rejecting Modesty: Should a comet apologize for its blaze? I will bellow my existence, even though I'm motherless, solitary and desolate beyond human imagining. Unnatural Zulaikha, doomed to be a thinking angel amongst quarreling beasts. Unnatural Zulaikha, doomed with ocular excess in the Country of the Blind. Unnatural Zulaikha, doomed to love YUSUF!

#

I am the only child of a Coptic Christian man in Heliopolis, Egypt. Technically, that makes me Christian and an Egyptian. But that's merely an accident of geography and biology. To what country does the Opposable Thumb belong? Under what species' haunches does an America crouch? I imagine myself free. I must imagine myself free.

#

Imagination is the name of a river in Egypt. All things exist, absolute and immutable, in its incarnadine waters. Did I not fish my world from its sunless depths? Through imagination have I achieved freedom, escape velocity, solace. I imagine I am not Copt. I imagine I am not Egyptian. I imagine, therefore I deny.

#

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Father says imagination is a form of denial. If so, there are many who would imagine a world without Copts. The Pharaoh denies them political representation. The Pharaoh denies the Copts permits to build their churches. The Pharaoh denies them licenses to start businesses. My father's God kept a close tab on the Pharaoh's denials.

#

There are all kinds of Gods. Gods who begat. Gods with thunder-throats. Gods lost in desert lands. Gods who court frightened swans. Gods who turn grief into pearls. Gods who giggle at funerals. Gods who pooh-pooh and Gods who march ahead. Gods with winter-faces and Gods not quite dead. There are all kinds of fathers.

#

I once asked Yusuf whom his God preferred more: the chaste or the virtuous. He thought about it, a smile playing about his shy lips.

"The virtuous seek to slay themselves, Zulaikha, but the chaste seek to slay the lover. Yahweh certainly prefers the virtuous."

Hai Allah, how do I get Yusuf to plough me!

#

Additional Note on Rejecting Modesty, Sexual: I was born without webbed thighs, and so I infer I'm intended to spread, with a modicum of the infinite benevolence and generosity, that which Allah, praised be his name, hath left so delightfully hinged. Why won't my Suleyaman grant this Hurrem a shoulder to rest her henna'd foot!

#

I have battled Life these sixteen-point-two miraculous years, and though the exterior of my corpus is without blemish, the interior – alas! My interior is Guernica. My interior is Soft Construction With Boiled Beans. My interior is engaged in two ruinous wars:

Enemy #2: Yusuf.

Enemy #1: Father and Arch-Villain: the Moody Djinn.

#

There are all kinds of fathers. Fathers who wilt in the sun. Fathers who cry in the rain. Fathers with desolate beds. Fathers with forbidden wings. Fathers lost in Egypt. Fathers who plot dreadful things. Fathers who are Moody Djinn. Fathers who will soon be dead. Fathers beloved beyond measure. My father is many fathers.

#

Yusuf, being of Adam-kind, has both a father and a navel. He's a tall, loose, rumped fellow. Such long fingers! I like the way he eats tomatoes. I like his gray eyes that once saw me naked; gray eyes that looked once and then twice. I like his smile when I make our eyes meet.

#

Yusuf, being of the tribe of Manasseh, has no foreskin. No, I have not verified the absence of the fact directly. The sense of an absence, I have read, can often substitute for the absent. Phantom limbs, phantom roots. I wonder if Yusuf has a phantom foreskin. I can't get it out of my mind.

#

Dear Yusuf,

How's it hanging, bro? Check this out:

"In conclusion, circumcision removes the most sensitive parts of the penis and decreases the fine-touch pressure sensitivity of glans penis. The most sensitive regions in the uncircumcised penis are those parts ablated by circumcision." (Sorrells et. al., British J. Urology, 99, pp. 864-869, 2007)

Hugs,

Foreskin

#

The removal of the foreskin is an optional maneuver for Coptic Christians. I asked the Moody Djinn if he had exercised that option.

"No," he replied, with unnecessary irritation.

Good, good. But my relief was temporary. The Moody Djinn turned melancholy, even remorseful.

"Not everyone is as righteous as Yusuf. He's a true tzaddik, Zulaikha."

#

Yusuf, a tzaddik! A teacher to those black-hatted, forelocked, Talmud-toting, Yiddish-speaking, Zulaikha-ignoring Hasidic Jews? Impossible! I hurried to query the Righteous One.

“No, I’m not a tzaddik,” says Yusuf. “I’m a Bnei Menashe. And I’m far from righteous.”

Exactly! Besides, what would a righteous soul be doing with the Moody Djinn? Some fathers are liars.

#

Tidbit: In the land of Hindustan, where the plausible is a malnourished sibling of the actual, Jews have long been welcome. There’s the Cochin Jews of Kerala, the Telugu-speaking Bene Ephraim, the Bene Israel of Maharashtra, the Kolkata Baghdadi and the Bnei Menashe of Mizoram. Bnei Menashe imagine they’re descendents of Manasseh, son of Joseph.

#

About Joseph: Abraham begat Isaac begat Jacob begat Joseph begat Manasseh, whose name tombstones all that Joseph has had to forget, namely: sold to Midianite traders by his own brothers, the decade of salt and slavery, the brush of Potiphar’s nipples on his back, the screams in Pharaoh’s prison, the rat-nibbles of other people’s dreams.

#

Manasseh’s mother is Asenath, mute daughter of Potiphar and Zulaikha. Asenath is clever, slender, and full of orgasms. When Asenath smiles, Potiphar imagines strange things: that she’s not his daughter, but a foundling, a secret given flesh. Othertimes, he imagines parenthood: his daughter, an hour-old, nestled in Zulaikha’s arms. Fatherhood is compatible with both explanations.

#

Old Potiphar has a wife. Zulaikha is her name. She perches on his shoulder, nibbles his ear. When she is bored, he opens windows and lets her out. She returns in minutes, days, sometimes weeks. She returns; bruised lips, folded wings. Then he buys her gifts: pearls, perfumes, salves and slaves. Let’s imagine him happy.

#

When Joseph's lips meet Asenath's mute lips, he forgets things. He forgets a desert God perched on his shoulder, whispering in his ear. He forgets a boy in a well, a boy in a splendiferous coat, a boy in a slaver's grasp. These Josephs, Joseph is certain, differ from the Joseph kissing Asenath's soft lips.

#

When Joseph's lips meet Asenath's lips, he imagines strange things. He imagine a little house with yellow slats on a cypress-scented hill. He imagines not being righteous, not being chosen, not being an exemplar, not knowing the meaning of dreams. He imagines being Egyptian. These Josephs, Joseph thinks, are also the immigrant kissing Asenath's lips.

#

Joseph is an immigrant. An immigrant is ninety-percent imagination and ten-percent trace minerals. They are one solution to Kafka's psychograms: the waiting-list, the penal colony, the courtroom, the burrow, the absurd metamorphosis. These moral instruments are categories of containment and cannot hold immigrants, for imagination devours all categories. Thus did Joseph ben Jacob become Zaphnath-paaneah.

#

What Asenath said: When my lips meet his, mother, and when my dust mingles with his, mother, and when I make him forget, mother, and when I seize what father seized, mother, and when I demand what you demanded, mother, why does Zaphnath-paaneah say: "It's not you I love, beloved, it's what you are not."

#

On some cold and braziered nights, as the slave Amen plays the flute, opium entranced, and Asenath dances naked in front of Zaphnath, her up-raised arms fluttering like the flame's forked tongue, Zaphnath unlocks his burdened chest, shrugs on his imagination, luxuriates in the coat's whorls, colors, and pockets, and then joins Asenath, dancing, dancing.

#

When Zaphnath, rich and powerful, brought Joseph's family to Egypt, they dare not comment on his splendiferous coat. The guards wait, hands on swords.

“I use it to imagine,” says Zaphnath, smiling. “I imagine justice. I imagine forgiveness. I imagine happiness, family. I can imagine anything.”

Smiling, he insists they try his coat; smiling, smiling.

#

Their wedding is a noisy affair. Such laughter!

“Quiet, quiet,” mutters Zaphnath. “If I could but quiet the lord’s mouth as the lord silenced yours, Asenath.”

“Then let’s rename our first-born,” signs Asenath. “We’ll call him Manasseh: made for forgetting.”

It’s cold in the desert. Zaphnath dons his splendiferous coat, but the infernal cold endures.

#

Of Manasseh, son of Egypt and Israel, son of Zaphnath and Asenath: loyal, strong, married to a Syrian concubine, serene, responsible, and by tradition, a role-model for future Jewish kids. His tribal banner has a prancing unicorn against a black background. Over time his tribe spreads out of Canaan, perhaps into Asia or even: Mizoram.

#

Tidbit: Mizoram is a mountainous North-Eastern state of Hindustan. It has bamboo forests and bandicoot rats. The bamboo flowers every forty-eight years, the rats gorge on the seeds and multiply, the bamboo seeds run out, the rats turn to the food grains, people starve, the rats retreat, the bamboo flowers over and over and over.

#

In this land of bamboo forests, bandicoot rats and famines, nineteenth century British explorers came across a small Mizo tribe who had a harvest song about a divided red sea, a terrible desert exodus, pillars of cloud and fire, and about water that sprang from a rock. It’s true. Yusuf has sung me this song.

#

The people of Mizoram are short, stocky, nut-brown and have almond-shaped eyes. Yusuf is tall, slender, fair and has no epicanthic folds. He believes nonetheless that his ancestors were chased out of Canaan, two-thousand

and seven-hundred years ago, by short, stocky, nut-brown Assyrians. The Moody Djinn agrees. He says Yusuf is as Jewish as Manasseh.

#

When the Moody Djinn and I had gone to pick up a tall, slender, fair, boy with no epicanthic folds in Neveh Dekalim, I caught my first glimpse of Yusuf's people, the Bnei Menashe. They beat their palms against the tinted windows of our Mercedes. Chanting. Cursing. Spitting. Weeping. Wrinkled faces like old leather slippers.

#

Neveh Dekalim is one of the nineteen Jewish settlements in Gush Katif, a pretty-postcard place wedged between the blue Mediterranean in the north-east and the Negev. The settlement was being demolished, and the Jews forced out. This time, there were no plagues or pillars of cloud and fire. Just brother against brother. Just politics.

#

Moody Djinn greeted Yusuf with the warmth he reserved for the trusted. Yusuf was not much older than me, a few miraculous years at most, but Moody Djinn talked to him as an adult. Plotics. Giraffography. Horrorstory. Atrocity Theory. The car's interior was very cold, but as the Moody Djinn talked, the desert crept in.

#

How to make Copts feel Somewhat Unwanted: Why do they take public safety for granted? Abduct their women while they're shopping (Ingy Helmy Labibe, 01/04/2004), while enroute to work (Marianna Attallah, 05/2005), or just like that (Ingy Nagy Edwar, 09/27/03). Launch futile investigations. Insist they must have been asking for it. Deny the events happened.

#

How to make Copts feel Strongly Unwanted: Torture converts (Yousef and Mariam Suliman, 10/20/2003, Alexandria). Set them on fire (06/17/81, El-Zawia El-Hamra, Cairo). Murder Coptic monks (04/11/94, St. Mary's Monastery, Asyut). A tender act of randomness (the slaughter of a dozen Sunday School students, 02/12/97, Abu Quorcas). The possibilities, as the advertisements say, are endless.

#

How I miss my mother. There are two types of mothers: Takiti and Maluma. Takiti is jagged, ragged, raven-beaked, the splint in Oedipus' eye. Maluma is milk-heavy, curvy, cuddly, the feel of a soft thigh. Takiti mothers make good altars. Maluma mothers excel at making altar boys. These two X chromosomes are found in all women.

#

Yusuf: What's the matter? You look sad.

Zulaikha: I'm trying to imagine my mothers.

Yusuf: Mothers? How strange. You have a child's imagination.

Zulaikha: Yes, I'm a child. Leave me to my childishness.

Yusuf: No, no, dear Zulaikha. I envy your imagination.

Zulaikha: It's contagious. Beware. Don't sit so close.

(Space & Time)

Close. Kissing-close.

#

Isaac Newton on Space & Time: "Absolute, true, and mathematical time, of itself, and from its own nature flows equably without regard to anything external, and by another name is called duration. Absolute space, in its own nature, without regard to anything external, remains always similar and immovable."

Zulaikha on Space & Time: What bunk.

#

I've discovered why Yusuf wouldn't kiss me this afternoon. I'm HIDEOUS!! A pimple the size of the Bedou crater adorns the tip of my proboscis. Any further out, and it could issue Visas, print currency, compose national anthems. How can he ever sleep again! Burnt into his synapses is this... pimple. I've slapped myself twice.

#

"We have come to think of the actual as one among many possible worlds. We need to repaint that picture. All possible worlds lie within the actual one." Nelson Goodman, 'Fact, Fiction & Forecast,' 1983.

This is Djinn's favorite quote. I've never understood it, until now. Pimples and princesses are not mutually exclusive. Fucking universe.

#

The Moody Djinn has not stepped out of his office for days. Yusuf rarely leaves his side now. Strange men come and go. So it is going to happen again. Linear time, encircled. This time I must stop it. This time I must act. This time I must teach Yusuf to imagine a different ending.

#

I begin with an easy question. Time: Lunch; Venue: dish-washing; Situation: elbows touching, hips touching.

"Can robots kiss, Yusuf?"

"Let's talk about something else. What colleges do you intend to apply--"

"If you were a robot tzaddik, is that what you'd counsel?"

"A robot tzaddik..." Yusuf smiles. "Theologically, I suppose robots could kiss."

Wrong.

#

Question: Can robots kiss?

Answer: No. Though robots have identity, they lack individuality. Without individuality, robots might as well kiss the mirror. It is why robots can't do jokes, hold conversations, or imagine a world where choice, not necessity, brings lips and hips, thighs and sighs together.

Conclusion: Student has misunderstood the question, perhaps willfully.

#

Time: Lunch; Task: dish-washing. It is very soothing: water, suds, the simple sounds of making things clean. Yusuf hums quietly, looking cow-happy. We could do this forever.

"Yusuf! Yusuf!"

"Pretend you don't hear him," I say. "Just pretend."

He hesitates. Only for a second, true, but against a God, a whole second! O frabjous day!

#

Yusuf has offered to read the Bible with me, but there are such difficulties. Such parallels. Such brutalities. Time's loom has folded and re-folded us, but here we are again, revenant, immutable: Joseph and Asenath.

"I remember a cold night," I say, "when the fires fell low, and you showed me a coat. Remember, Joseph?"

#

Then spake Yusuf, the Righteous One: You blasphemy, dear Zulaikha. The gift our Lord God offers is *linear* time. We are crooked, true, and the past doubles back upon us, mottled and serpentine. But accept my God, your God, your father's God, and we partake of his gift, for our Father's world is our world.

#

"So this world is just a fantasy," I say. "Incest, child sacrifice, genocide, murder... all shadows on our Father's eternal face? Eternity allows everything to be imagined away?"

He considered my question as if it mattered. As if I mattered.

"Not everything," says Yusuf, slowly. "There are unimaginable things. Some things even the imagination resists."

#

Imaginative resistance. I looked it up. Professor Gendler defines it as the unwillingness of people to imagine morally deviant fictional worlds. I was in the bathroom, post-shower, so lost in wondering if readers could be so perverse, somehow I accidentally flashed Yusuf, who happened to be passing by. Damn unknotted bathrobe!

I hope he saw me.

#

Dinner consisted of roasted red-pepper strips, golden focaccia, lemon wedges, and filleted slices of white haddock seasoned with Moroccan spice. I told them about Dr. Gendler's paper.

"Gendler merely named one of Hume's puzzles," growled the Moody Djinn. "Hume claimed that moral imagination had its limits. Rubbish. People can be made to imagine anything."

#

It's his tone. It's the tone that bothers me. It makes me nothing. It flicks me away like lint. Yusuf smiles and compliments me about the food; he's playing umpire, as always.

"I don't know, father. Dr. Gendler's stories are convincing."

"Naturally."

"How about an example, Zulaikha?" asks Yusuf.

Such a knight, my dear Jew.

#

"Okay, here's one: In killing her baby, Giselle did the right thing. After all, it was a girl."

The Moody Djinn frowns. "And?"

"Make that story morally acceptable!"

"Please. Let's say Giselle has some terrible disease, peculiar to women. Alas, it's transmissible and incurable. Why shouldn't she kill her baby? After all, it's a girl."

#

"Imagination is not a choice," says the Moody Djinn. He has the air of a man nursing a personal sorrow. "Necessity is God's confessor. What must be done may always be forgiven, Zulaikha. Must be forgiven. Who will not forgive a robot?"

"Truly," said Yusuf, in a quiet voice. "Truly, truly."

False. False. False.

#

I found Yusuf in the garden, between dusk and a cypress tree. "So you're leaving."

"Aren't we all? Sit, Zulaikha. Let's sit here forever. Just you and I in this little house with yellow slats on a cypress-scented hill. So small a dream should be imaginable. Even for me. Show me how, Zulaikha. Come closer."

#

The first kiss: With Yusuf, in the cypress-scented garden. I remember our teeth clickety-clicking as we kissed. We were so eager we kissed air a couple of times. I remember the flickering thrust of his tongue. Such wet urgency. His gray eyes *ate* me. God bless Yusuf, bless his dirty, pure soul. I am so Maluma.

#

We broke off, breathless (as I'd often read happened). Stupid, grinning, happy mammals. I was ready to sprout placenta then and there. I began to open my blouse, but he stopped me.

"Why not?"

Because.

I placed his trembling hands on my breasts. He suggested instead that we try kisses from the Kamasutra. Some Jew.

#

Moody Djinn had been teaching me statistical physics, and I'd never seen the point, but now an experiment occurs to me.

"What experiment?" Yusuf sounded cautious.

An equilibrium experiment, my dear mammal. If X = number of times I kiss you, then for what X would kissing you become as uninteresting as kissing myself? (Five points)

#

Tidbit: Vatsyayana's Kamasutra, like all Hindu grammars, conquers by dividing. Kisses are classified into two main groups. The first set is recommended for virgins, the second for experienced sluts. For virgins, there are three recommended types: the Casual, the Throbbing, and the Insinuation. All require a complete lower-lip. Upper-lip kisses are not recommended for beginners.

#

Tidbit: For the experienced, the lower-lip types include the Equal kiss, the Sideways kiss, the Turned-around kiss, and the Impressing. The cynical may attempt the Hard Pressing. The perverted upper-lip kisses are treated separately. There are sleepy kisses, armpit kisses, navel kisses, kissing games. In each, the tongue plays the role of a verb modifier.

#

Conclusion: X is undefined. I could kiss Yusuf till the end of time, and it would always beat self-osculation.

“We’ll leave the Creeping Vine for later,” says my Vatsyayana, smiling. He finger-tests his lower lip, where I had bitten him.

“I wonder if kissing is ergodic,” said I, sighing. “So many boys. So little time.”

#

Ergodicity: it’s one of Moody Djinn’s dark passions. He’d been trained as a physicist, and the damage showed. He saw timepieces everywhere. He’d say “random” but he meant “covered timepiece.” When he says “statistical,” it’s short hand for “lots of timepieces.” When he says “ergodic,” perhaps he means “melting clock.” Absolute time for absolute fathers.

#

Ergodicity equates sequences and ensembles. One coin tossed a thousand times. A thousand coins tossed all at once. Statistically, there’s no difference! Coin tossing is ergodic. Moody Djinn claims no one really knows why. A single boy kissed a thousand times. A thousand boys kissed all at once. Kissing isn’t ergodic. That’s for sure.

#

Poincaré’s Theorem: Take a dough ball and add a blot of ink. Start kneading. Soon, the blot will stretch and spread throughout the dough. But keep kneading, and Poincaré proved that for such ergodic transformations, the original inkblot will recur. Maybe in a different spot, maybe after a long, long time, but reappear it will.

#

My lips are still sweetly sore from kissing. I’m sprawled out in the living room, lying my way through a college application. Yusuf is lost in deep thought. Or perhaps its guilt and remorse.

“It’s asking here for my strongest quality,” I say, looking up. “Virtue? Or is it Chastity? Whom does your God prefer?”

#

Poincaré's Theorem (the formal version): Let T be a measure preserving transformation on a probability space $(\Omega, \mathcal{F}, \mathbf{P})$. If $\mathbf{B} \subseteq \mathcal{F}$, then for almost every point $x \in \mathbf{B}$ (with respect to \mathbf{P}), $\exists k: T^k(x) \in \mathbf{B}$. Roughly, almost every point x in \mathbf{B} is recurrent.

#

Yusuf: That was wrong.

Zulaikha: Yes, so perverted. I thought I'd faint.

Yusuf: It's wrong. I can't – mustn't – fall in love.

Zulaikha: Hai Allah.

Yusuf: I betrayed your father's trust.

Zulaikha: Well, he's got an even greater shock coming.

(Silence)

Zulaikha: You'll tell him, won't you? That you can't go through with it. Not anymore.

#

I think I am going mad. The kiss transformed me. Even now, I feel the weaving magic, sparking along my exhausted nerves, caressing me with the camel-brush of memory. The thighs' wetness, the bristle's brute scrape, lips wounded red – How could it not have made him anew? Cave animal. How can he still contemplate murder?

#

It has begun to happen. I overhear the Moody Djinn test-reading Yusuf's note: "Do not mourn my death. Out of the eater, something to eat; out of the strong, something sweet. It is my time to be strong, to yield something sweet. I, Yusuf, am not afraid. I tread the road walked by my ancestors..."

#

The Moody Djinn is cleaning out the powder residue from the barrel, slide and magazine of his Kahr MK40. He'll test-fire a round and then holster it in the De Santis, now cracked with age. Soon he'll come to say goodbye. He will be very parental, even tender: "Nothing will happen to me, Zulaikha."

Correct.

#

My father thinks: We Copts are a brutalized people. God, I love this weapon. We've been beaten, robbed, humiliated, raped, murdered and desecrated. Wonder if Yusuf checked his vest straps? We've kept our peace, our Word. Our patience has been misinterpreted. The situation cannot continue. Zulaikha loves tilapia; I'll get some on the way home.

#

Yusuf thinks: I remember the jib of her thigh. A whorl of lime and had-dock. O God, I'm so frightened. I need Galilee's sands between my toes. We didn't try the Creeping Vine. I must change my underwear. Did Gideon worry about underwear? I wish Zulaikha were here. Why do I panic? All things pass.

#

Moody Djinn: Let's get you ready.

Yusuf: I'd like to say goodbye first.

Moody Djinn: Better not. It'll only upset you.

Yusuf: Does it matter now what I feel? I'm a robot.

Moody Djinn: Rubbish. This is necessary. You've to avenge our innocents. The Lord will strengthen your arm.

Yusuf: She's here! Kiss me, Zulaikha.

#

I wanted to dissolve in Yusuf, and he in me. I wound my right leg around my lover's waist, threw my right hand around his neck, lowered his head to my upturned face – two statues around a temple pillar – and kissed Yusuf as if I would suck out his life. Ours was the world and time.

#

The Moody Djinn was so angry, his eyes mottled a urine red. Some fathers are demons. Some fathers are bone gardens. Some fathers must be sprung in bear traps and some fathers must be put to bed.

"Go to your fucking room," he says. "Now."

"Kiss me, father." I throw my arms around his neck.

#

The filet knife is sharp. Sharper than a razor, sharper than my hate, sharper than the circumcision of Zipporah. Someone is trying to kill father. He stands so still, my bridegroom of blood. I slice everything in the quarter-traversal around the jib of father's neck. It's nothing like filleting fish. I'll never be clean again.

#

The blot won't stop spreading. My hands, the fallen knife, the fallen souls. It bleeds out of the little house with the yellow slats on a cypress-scented hill, over the green glad Earth, blotting out the sun.

Yusuf: It was necessary, beloved.

I shiver. What a chilly day.

Yusuf: I love you.

I shiver again.

#

What is necessary may be forgiven. Must be forgiven. The choice of love and the necessity of death. I have chosen love, so death shall have no forgiveness. All those stories in the Good Book. Why isn't patricide one of them? Imagine a God of Choice. Imagine a God who dares imagine His own death.

#

I, Zulaikha, a few seconds old, sixteen-point-two miraculous years old, ten-thousand years old, deathless and ageless, unborn and perennial, a smudge in Time's dough. I gaze at my father, squinting to blind the light crowning his head. He is smiling. He cradles me. We are going to be friends, I can tell.

#

In some world, there's a Yusuf; burnt offering, spattered flesh. In some world, there's a Moody Djinn, tribal and vengeful. In some world, there's a Zulaikha, forever complicit and mute. Many worlds, many strange things. But all these worlds are guilty, and so cannot be this world, womb of all possible worlds, this blessed, bloodstained world.

#

Old Yusuf has a wife. Zulaikha is her name. She perches on his shoulder, nibbles his ear. When she's bored, he opens windows and lets her out. She

returns in minutes, days, sometimes weeks. But return she does; bruised lips, folded wings. Then he buys her gifts: pearls, perfumes, salves and stories. Imagine them happy.

– The End –