

Fall 2015

# Symposer's Dream

Mehdi Taifi

*Rollins College*, [mehditaifi@yahoo.com](mailto:mehditaifi@yahoo.com)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.rollins.edu/mls>



Part of the [Arts and Humanities Commons](#)

---

## Recommended Citation

Taifi, Mehdi, "Symposer's Dream" (2015). *Master of Liberal Studies Theses*. 73.  
<http://scholarship.rollins.edu/mls/73>

This Open Access is brought to you for free and open access by Rollins Scholarship Online. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master of Liberal Studies Theses by an authorized administrator of Rollins Scholarship Online. For more information, please contact [rwalton@rollins.edu](mailto:rwalton@rollins.edu).

# **Symposer's Dream**

*A Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment  
of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Master of Liberal Studies*

*by*

*Mehdi Taifi*

*December, 2015*

*Mentor: Dr. Jana Mathews*

*Reader: Dr. Matt Forsythe*

*Rollins College*

*Hamilton Holt School*

*Master of Liberal Studies Program*

*Winter Park, Florida*

*Whatever comes to pass comes to pass according to laws and rules which involve eternal necessity and truth; nature, therefore, always observes laws and rules which involve eternal necessity, and truth....” Baruch Spinoza*

---

## **Chapter One**

### **The Storm**

I felt a sense of panic and excitement as I ran barefoot on a gravel road across the countryside. The scenery changed from a rolling meadow to a lush tropical forest on my right. It was dark, humid and buzzing with insects, birds and animals. On my left was a sub-Saharan desert, dry and desolate. Giraffes and elephants ran beside me in pairs of two. Strangely, I was not afraid of being trampled. As I looked around, I saw Claire running beside me. Her presence was comforting. As I reached out to her, she slowed her pace. She gave me a knowing smile that made me feel like everything was going to be okay. Somehow I knew I needed to take this journey alone. Claire gradually fell behind. I tried to slow down with her but I couldn't stop running. There was a driving force that pushed me to keep up with the animals. My movements felt robotic as I ran at an inhuman speed. Claire started falling farther and farther behind until she completely faded from view.

Everything was happening so fast – too fast for me to even fully grasp what was happening. I wondered why we were running. I asked the animals around me, but they were not responsive. I immediately felt silly. How could they understand me? I'm human and they are

---

animals. So I continued running silently. The loud trumpet of elephants startled me as we slowed down. I figured we were close to our destination. Two pigeons flew above and joined us on the road. As more animals appeared, I realized they were all in pairs. It was getting more and more crowded. There were bears, horses, and tigers and more. Eventually, there was one of every pair of animal or creature in existence. It was a sight like no other, there were some creatures I've never even see before.

Suddenly, a huge wooden ark appeared in front of us. As we boarded the ark, I realized why we were running. The Earth was going to cleanse itself of all the wickedness and corruption in the world. The deluge was coming. Ostensibly, I was going to be saved with the rest of the creatures on the ark. But only the righteous were saved from such things. Was I one of the righteous? I must have been forgiven for all of my sins since I was allowed to get on the ark with the rest of the animals.

I felt Claire's presence on the ark. I searched around amidst all the chaos, hoping to see her beautiful face somewhere, but she was nowhere to be found. A wave of anxiety came over me. I couldn't stand the feeling of being alone. This was the one place where having a partner was a crucial thing. Surviving the storm with your partner meant having a chance to reproduce and thus keeping the race of your people alive. Not being able to do that even though I was on the ark was an eerie feeling. I couldn't stand the idea of being the only creature not able to reproduce. I panicked I felt singled out and incredibly selfish being there without a partner. I should've tried to stay with Claire instead of leaving her behind. Her presence had become fundamental. Now she was gone, and I was emphatically lost without her. By leaving her behind, I felt like I inadvertently orchestrated her death. She was left to die with the rest. Now, I had to start this new chapter in my life without her. My feelings transitioned from hopeful to hopeless. I desperately

---

searched all over the ark. I felt like the animals were looking at me as if I was inept – the one who had failed the race of his people.

The ark rocked violently as a massive storm arose. We were witnessing one of the greatest squalls our planet has ever seen. The torrential downpour was unreal. It was raining like it never rained before. The rain drops were falling hammering, merciless and cold, like an ocean fallen from the sky. It was a wall of water. I couldn't see anything in front of me. The wind blew in all directions. All I could hear at one point was the raw power of the wind that raged around mixed with the cries of the people and the animals. It got cold and dark. Ice formed on the water ahead of us. I thought of the Titanic as I expected the ark to hit an iceberg at any moment. I wrung my hands as panic and anxiety consumed me.

There was nothing I could do as the ferocity around me destroyed everything and everyone on the way. I felt powerless as I looked at the bodies floating in the sea, all of the people who were not chosen. I saw familiar faces in the mass of bodies. Wide and bulging eyes looked up at me like with judgment. Why I was saved and not them? It felt peculiar to be judged by dead people that I once knew. They were friends and acquaintances that I had not seen for years, girls I had dated, former classmates, neighbors and colleagues. I barely remembered the others in this mass of floating death. Some I had met briefly when our life paths crossed. I realized that in some weird way the universe intended for our paths to cross. I felt blessed. I realized how fortunate I was to be on this ark, with or without a partner.

Several hours later the storm quieted down, the sky cleared and the sun came out. A shadow of land appeared in the distance. It was an island – a beautiful island with red sands and high mountains. Bright and glowing, it looked majestic as the sun was shining on top of it. What a relief! The ark finally made it. The idea of getting out of the ark and having a fresh start was

---

riveting. But alas, we never made it to that island as the ark suddenly made a complete stop and started slowly going backwards heading back in the direction of the storm. I started panicking.

“No, no, no” I was screaming. “Why is the boat going back that way? Who is doing this?” I was asking the animals. They were all running away from me. They were panicking too. An elephant was running at full speed in the direction of the island and hit the stem post on the way. The whole post came down causing more chaos.

I started getting more apprehensive. The ark picked up speed as we continued getting closer to the storm. I looked back and saw the island quickly disappearing from view. I’m not going back to that storm, I told myself. The only option I had was to jump out of the ark and swim towards the island. I hesitated for a few minutes until I felt the first drops of rain hitting my face. It’s now or never, I thought to myself. So I closed my eyes and jumped. It was total darkness as soon as I hit the water

---

## **Chapter Two**

### **Wake up**

I woke up restless, breathing heavily and feeling like I was being suffocated.

I just realized all this was just a dream.

The first thing I recalled was how Claire was the only human in this dream. It's hard to get over an ended relationship, a lost love, when that person is constantly on your mind, even in your dreams. But that's what dreams do – pull thoughts and memories from the depths of one's mind and keep them active and alive, whether we want them to be or not. It keeps us questioning and unable to move forward with our life. But how can I restrain the flame of love if I constantly have Claire on my mind and even in my dreams? It's hard to move forward when you're being held back by questions that float spectral in your mind.

It has occurred to me that I may be romanticizing this idea of me and Claire. We had not been together that long. Our relationship ended unexpectedly about a year ago. It was one of many short-term encounters. Yet, I seem to keep women in safekeeping somewhere in my mind, so that when I get bored with a relationship that's not going anywhere – you know the kind, one of those

---



short-term not-meant-to-be relationships, I have the comfort of knowing that I can revisit one of the better past relationships and not find myself alone or without. But Claire was different. Am I romanticizing her? The one that got away? The one that still fills my dreams a year after she is gone? She's still in my dreams, in my imagination. I can still smell her scent on my skin. But she may not, in reality, be what I remember her to be. Memory of her has had time to mellow, to squelch what may have been bad, and latch onto the good and emphasize it, build it up, make it more grand than it may have been, place it on a pedestal and make her the one above all others. Perhaps longing for her is better than actually being with her.

I wonder sometimes if I am the only one with these romanticized memories of our relationship. I wonder if this dream of Claire is trying to remind me that she is the one I am meant to be with. That she is the one above all the others. Perhaps the fact that she was gone in the dream could make me realize how important she actually was to me. Or is it obsession? Or regret speaking perhaps? What was the purpose of what she signaled in the dream? What I sensed from her? That everything was okay. That this was the way it was meant to be? Perhaps my subconscious was telling me it was time to let go, trying to convince me that Claire has, in fact, become an obsession, a conquest that was not meant to be. That Claire was not the one.

Perhaps I am in denial, and have repressed the truth because it's not the way I want things to resolve. What am I not willing to accept? She faded in the dream slowly just like she did in real life, like our love faded. And I continue asking myself what, why and how? How can such a powerful emotion be so easily shaken? How come our love slipped away so easily?

It is startling how the universe operates. It was just meant to happen. It was a simple moment facilitated by a random event that caused us both to end up in the same place at the same time. Our moments merged and formed a bigger moment in infinity. We met on a beautiful

---

October day in Brooklyn. I wasn't expecting to end up in Brooklyn that day. I had no clue I was going to walk into a small coffee shop there, and fall in love with the girl sitting next to me.

She was the girl next door with a beautiful smile, mysterious wide brown eyes, and long brown hair. She was different than the other girls – the way she spoke, the way she smiled. She stood out from the crowd right away. There was something purely genuine about her mannerisms.. She was always happy, always smiling no matter how bad things were. It was that beautiful smile that remained stuck in my memory overshadowing anything else that might be bad or negative.

This dream brought back all those memories of her and made me realize that I wasn't over her yet.

\*\*\*\*\*

Being on that ark was a peculiar mixture of exuberance and disenchantment. Staying there with those animals was even more peculiar. I felt as a complete stranger. I was clearly the outcast. Alas, that feeling of not-belonging is not that unfamiliar. In fact, that whole experience felt like a Déjà vu. It also made me connect to a spiritual side I never knew was there in the first place. It seemed only appropriate that I could connect to my spiritual side since I was “saved”. I was no longer a “sinner”.

But how could I be saved if I didn't even make it to the island? Seeing that island from afar after surviving the storm was a sign of hope, of optimism, light after darkness. But that optimistic feeling quickly went away as the ark started heading back towards the storm. I could see it but I couldn't reach it - a feeling that was yet again a familiar one. It made me think of all the

---

opportunities that crossed my path that I was never able to take advantage of - those auspicious overtures that I could never reach.

This dream was a sign that I needed a change. I've been thinking about making some changes in my life, I just wasn't sure what kind of change. I felt clueless about how I envisioned my future to be, lost in the present and haunted by the past. Indeed, not so distant memories of a distant past were still haunting me. Perhaps it started after Claire was no longer a part of my life. Somehow, she managed to bring balance to it. After she was gone, something was missing. With that void came the colossal responsibility of filling it with something else. Alas that something else has been insignificant and hollow. I had to replace that void with trivial things – Alcohol, drugs, parties, girls, unnecessary trips to lifeless destinations. A part of my human sentiment was gone. Conceivably, the excessive drugs and alcohol made me numb. Relationships became meaningless. Even New York City, the place where I was born and raised, the place that I was in love with, now has become nothing but a concrete jungle. All I saw of this beautiful city were the dark smoky rooms of its bars, and the heavy traffic between Broadway and Wall Street.

I had to escape for a while. I had to escape the recent experiences and memories. Although they might sound alluring to some, to me they only brought more feelings of confusion and guilt. As I closed my eyes, I got flashbacks of sleepless nights, noxious white powder, cigars and whiskey. I closed my eyes and recalled how I was helpless watching Eric, my childhood friend, die of drug overdose. What a senseless way to die. He was only twenty seven years old. I closed my eyes and saw mother crying all night, after father left us when my brother and I were just little kids. No wonder why I grew into those abandonment and trust issues. I closed my eyes again and saw beautiful smiles of superficial girls whose faces suddenly transform into devilish frightening figures. I closed my eyes and saw myself salivating over money – doing business with powerful,

---

ruthless, and ethically questionable men. I have become just like them. I might've thought of myself as being different, but I acted just like them. Many people lost their jobs, were bankrupted and lost their families because of business deals that I helped make - business deals that were made with men who would not hesitate for a second to stab me in the back. The sad part was that I called those individuals my partners.

So is this how I envisioned my success to be? I found myself asking that same cliché question I always loathed hearing others ask. I was giving myself that same customary pep talk that some motivational speaker would give to a group of middle aged men. Men who are too bogged down with life that they need some other middle aged man telling them they're worth more than they give themselves credit for. But as cliché as it sounds, I had to ask myself that question. I might've been more successful in my career and my bank account was getting bigger, but my actual being, my soul, my body was deteriorating. Less than six months ago, I suffered a heart attack. I had just turned thirty three. Doctors said it was due to stress, and that I needed to slow down and to seriously consider taking some time off from work to relax. Instead, a week later I was back to living the fast paced lifestyle I have been accustomed to. I needed to seriously consider taking a break from all this. I had to do something before my health collapsed.

My second alarm aggressively went off. I realized at that moment that I had been staring at the ceiling for the past thirty minutes. I have been doing that a lot lately. My mind unconsciously slips into a different place without any notice. I don't understand it. It makes me feel out of step, out of time, like I'm riding the fringe of someplace else.

I had a clear agenda of all the things I needed to get done today. A million things were going through my mind. From the time I wake, my brain starts working right away. Life is the main stimulant, no need for coffee here. As I got out of bed, I started the day like I do every week

---

day - go for a run, shower, make breakfast, and get dressed. I put a dark blue suit on, and left my Tribeca apartment.

As I was walking in the busy streets of New York City, going through the usual massive crowds and the morning traffic jam, I saw people rushing to make it to their destinations, most wearing expressions screwed-up with anxiety and agitation. Suddenly, everything started moving in slow motion. I got this overwhelming realization that I was nothing but a miniscule creature living in this vast universe. I felt the lack of individuality and uniqueness as I saw the masses of people around me. There were millions of people in the city, yet I felt like I was the only person stranded in an empty Island. I got overwhelmed with a feeling of emptiness and blankness as I saw all those people walking by. I saw some tourists taking pictures of each other next to the famous Wall Street Bull, excited about visiting a new place. They must look at New York in a completely different way than a New Yorker does. For them everything about the city is exciting. I also saw pokerfaced businessmen with suits and ties impatiently waiting to cross the street. The feeling of emptiness intensified as I realized I was just another one of those pokerfaced guys with a suit and a tie.

I often feel like everything has become so convoluted and chaotic nowadays. Some may think I'm just a cynic and a pessimist, but I'm not, I love life, I'm positive, but the harsh experiences life threw my way made me a pragmatist. I like it that way. There is less disappointment that way. But everything becomes more complicated that way. But then again, life is complicated. We can't be naive enough to think otherwise.

I was busy going through all my emails on my phone when I suddenly heard a fidgety voice yelling "Get out of the way" - a customary form of communication for cab drivers in this city. The cab driver though had every reason to express his frustration this time. I was about to

---

cross the street without even looking up to check for any ongoing traffic. As an act of rebellion, I decided to turn off my phone and keep it off the whole day. Being disconnected and unreachable to others was liberating.

As I crossed the street – the proper way, I saw this billboard of an empty island read “Paradise”. I stood there trying to figure out which island it was and why it looked so familiar. Then it hit me - it looked similar to the island I saw in my dream. The island had reddish sands, greenish waters and was surrounded by high pointy mountains soaring upward trying to reach the heavens. The combination of the soaring high mountains and the red sand beach was unique. It was like nothing I’ve ever seen before.

Could it be just a coincidence? The billboard didn’t give any other information about the island. This made me wonder why they would go through the hassle of putting this billboard up if they don’t even indicate what they were advertising. A few minutes went by and I was still staring at it. That picture took me far away to another place, another dimension. I saw myself standing in that island. I could taste the salty island air and feel it hitting my cold face, my eyes on the horizon gazing at the infinite, and my feet firmly still covered under the fine grain. At that point, I realized that all I wanted to do was escape. Leave this place and disappear for a while. Leave the hustle and bustle. Leave the non-stop commotion, and simply put my life on pause.

I finally made it to the office, my second home. But today was different, I felt completely disconnected from this place. I tried to maintain my usual office demeanor and keep my usual social comportment. I greeted people as I made my way to my office, joking around chit-chatting about the Giants’ game from the night before. I got lost in my own thoughts again as soon as I walked into my office. A few minutes went by before I caught myself just staring at the window. My office was on the twenty second floor overlooking lower Manhattan. I was looking at that

---

view like it was the first time ever seeing it. My mind unconsciously slipped into a different place again.

Before I even had a chance to turn on my laptop, something on TV grabbed my attention. It was a commercial showing that same island again. This time an attractive blonde was walking on the shore wearing a dazzling yellow bikini. Similar to the billboard, it only said “Paradise”. This really startled me. Why? I asked myself again. Why do I keep seeing this island everywhere? What’s the purpose of this advertising? Maybe it’s a way to build up suspense first, and then the product will be revealed later. That’s not a bad way to advertise. But the question remained - Where is that island? There has to be a reason why I saw a similar island in my dream as well. I started searching online but nothing similar came up.

I kept thinking about that island and about my dream. I missed several deadlines and meetings that morning. I couldn’t focus. I felt like I was on the fringe of another realm. It was like I took some kind of hallucinogen. I was too enthralled in my own thoughts to be fully cognizant of my outside world.

Widely used expressions such as “Time is Money” often lose their actual meaning when everyone starts using them, but in Wall Street, time is truly money and this was no time for me to take a break, let alone turn off my Blackberry and space out for hours. But here I was, standing in the middle of my office, finding myself staring at the ceiling fan as it continued making the same motion over and over again. What if the ceiling fan was an actual being, how boring its life would be? Doing the exact same thing over and over again? At least there are no surprises or disappointments for the fan; it knows exactly what tomorrow will bring.

---

I spent most of the day unable to concentrate resolutely on any task. I couldn't engage even in the most basic conversations. I was completely useless – just a body sitting behind a desk, my mind, my consciousness was elsewhere.

It didn't take long before others started noticing. Samir, one of the VP's in the firm, stormed into my office unannounced. He immediately started panicking. "Are you leaving the firm? Is that it?" he asked angrily

"What? No I'm not" I responded calmly.

"Eddy, I've known you for a while, and I know what happens next after you stop giving a shit."

He continued panicking, questioning why I missed all those deadlines and meetings today. I had to calm him down, reassure him that I wasn't going anywhere. In the business I was in, loyalty was hard to find. People leave from one firm to another like it was nothing. There were mostly sharks swimming in the Wall Street Sea.

Since I was one of the top producers for the firm, Samir had to make sure that I wasn't leaving for another firm – another competitor firm.

"So what's wrong then?" he asked all confused after I reassured him that I wasn't going anywhere.

"I'm not feeling too good that's all. I'll get better."

"Okay, take some time off then. I really need you on your 'A' game next month for the Air Maroc IPO we're expecting," Samir said.

"I will be," I responded.

\*\*\*\*\*

---



Later that night, I met with my childhood friend Dan for a drink at a bar in East Village. After such an odd day, I thought about cancelling my plans for the night and go home instead, but I figured in the state I was in, a drink or two would do me far more good than bad. In an odd way, being in a crowded place, loud music, shot glasses, bar food, peanuts, drunken people, drunken fights, boasting, swearing, flirting – it all sounded serene and suiting to me at that moment.

“Well you look like shit,” Dan said as soon as I walked into the bar.

“I feel like shit.” I replied.

“What is it? You just got one of those ‘Hey I’m pregnant’ phone calls?” Dan teased.

“Hah, very funny,” I said sarcastically as I sat down and ordered a drink

Dan could tell I was in no mood for pleasantries. “Are you okay?” he asked in a more serious tone.

“Yeah I’m fine, I guess,” I responded hesitantly. I wanted to tell Dan how I felt but I didn’t know how to explain it. “I don’t know. I’ve been out of it today. I can’t focus I can’t think straight, I can’t function.”

Dan quickly dismissed it saying it was just stress related. I just agreed with him. I figured it was easier to label it as stress than try and explain how I was really feeling.

“With your crazy job and all your shenanigans, you need to take a break at some point. I’ve been living vicariously through you, and I’m even tired just from listening to your stories,” he laughed. “When was the last time you took a vacation anyway?”

“Well, I did go to South Beach two weeks ago for the weekend. That was fun,” I replied briskly.

---

“Yeah but that was far from relaxing,” he quickly retorted. “First of all, it was only a weekend. I’m talking about an actual vacation – go away for like a week or a month or something. Second thing, you were drunk most of the time, partying with those lunatics from your job, that’s no vacation man!” he then said heatedly

“Yeah that was everything but relaxing, but man it was fun!” I said with a smile as I started reminiscing about that weekend. I paused for a second and then said in a more serious tone, “Yeah, but I do need a real vacation or a getaway of some sort. I think I just need to exile myself for a while”

“Yes you do!” Dan proclaimed. “You know, my wife and I did this Mediterranean cruise last year. I’m telling you it was great and definitely relaxing. You should do something like that!”

I thought about Dan’s suggestion and got excited about the idea of going to some place exotic. Maybe I can find that Island I saw earlier somewhere in the Mediterranean. After having a few more drinks, it all became blurry and hazy.

---

### **Chapter Three**

#### **Medmelek**

The land I was in, seemed filled with unending possibility. There was newness, an exhilarating unpredictability, an erotic play of the senses that's intoxicating, and addictive. It flirts with one's sensibilities, like a new romance full of desire, teasing one's mind and body into a frenzy of passion. I was obsessed. It was all I could think of, want, taste, feel. Visually, colors were brighter, the grass was greener, and there was more symmetry in the natural world. The water sparkled as though dappled with diamonds, and the weather was clement. The air smelled of mint and lavender. My body burned with a titillating sensitivity like a breath that is light and soft against the skin - that sense of touching without touching that makes the hair on your arms stand on end, makes goose bumps form on the skin, just by the intense closeness yet untouched nearness.

I was surrounded by many unfamiliar things and creatures. I felt like I was becoming one of them. I felt privileged that they were accepting me. Clearly, I was the one who stood out - being the only human there, and the only one without a partner. It was similar to the feeling of hospitality that engulfed me when I went scuba diving and was buoyed by the deep waters and surrounded by the beauty, color, and life of the sea. Different creatures passed by me without fear

---

or judgment. They permitted me to swim around them and enjoy that beautiful mysterious part of creation that is their world.

I felt like my brain functioned differently in this new world. All my senses were heightened. I smelled new smells. Touching and feeling simple things like the fresh grass was an exhilarating experience.

As I was walking around, exploring this fresh new land, I saw a cave in the distance. It was a doorway of thick blackness. The sense of fear or hesitation did not even come to mind – I knew I had to go inside. As I walked in, I watched my own shadow disappear into the surrounding darkness. My eyes slowly started getting more accustomed to the blackness inside - it transitioned from complete to partial darkness. I was able to move around by following the moist wall of the cave. Then all of a sudden, flaming torches lit. In front of me was an old bearded man standing tall.

“Welcome,” he said. “I see your inquisitiveness brought you to this place already. Was it the darkness that attracted you?”

“I’m not sure,” I responded hesitantly. “Something was inviting me in. Maybe it was the mystery of darkness.”

“Darkness sometimes gives you flawless sight,” he said as he waved his hand and suddenly the whole cave became lit up. “I’m glad you’re here,” he then said. “I’ve always been curious about new visitors.”

"What is this place?" I then asked.

"I'll tell you what this place is in due time. But first, tell me something about your customs!"

"Is this a trick question?" I asked.

---

"No, it is the simplest question there is. Who are you and who are your people?"

"Uh, well I'm from New York..."

"No, no. Tell me about your people. About humans!" he said aggravated.

"So you're not a human?" I asked confused.

"Just tell me, tell me something people don't realize about humans,"

"Well there's a lot to talk about," I said. "We are complex beings or at least we think of ourselves to be that way, and we see every other creature as more primitive and simple,"

The bearded man chuckled. "Continue," he said

"We try to promote peace and freedom even if it's by using war and violence. We enjoy capitalism even if materialism takes over. We promote family values even though everything around us promotes sex, drugs and violence," I paused for a second. "Anyway, I can keep going on and on, but basically we are people of contradictions, but we do have goodness in our hearts. Unfortunately, some of us get their hearts corrupted, and they lose that inner goodness."

"Your observations are wise, but you seem to be accepting of these things, you play your own part in promoting these contradictions you speak of. I think the difference between humans and other creatures is that all other creatures' actions and thoughts go hand in hand, there are no contradictions for them, the beast is a beast, a carnivore is a carnivore. Humans on the other hand, have an interesting way of interacting with themselves and with others in nature."

I nodded as a sign of agreement and proceeded by asking him a series of questions. I could tell he was not willing to answer any of my questions. The only thing he told me about himself is that his name was Medmelek, and that he's been in this world for nine hundred years. After a while everything turned dark and Medmelek disappeared with that darkness promising that we will see each other again. I followed the tiny dot of light to find my way outside the cave.

---

As I made it outside, I noticed a huge eagle flying above me. It was as if he was checking on me - waiting for me to come out of the cave to make sure I was okay. He then went on top of a tree at the peak of a neighboring mountain. There, he stood mighty and powerful, very much aware of his impressive posture and strength. He looked over the land as a faithful warden as he was finding seclusion and solitude. For some reason I felt safe knowing that he was there. I felt as he was an ally and a friend in this new land.

I continued walking for a while, thinking about what I just experienced. I then began to hear whispers coming from different places. They were sensual smooth voices whispering my name. I started looking around but I couldn't tell where the whispers were coming from. It was a sunny day, and a little windy. As the wind began to grow stronger, the voices became louder and louder. The wind intensified, and the voices turned into a vibration inside my head. I felt the vibration taking over my whole body. It turned from a sensual feeling to a violent one. I couldn't understand how, all of a sudden, I transitioned from a peaceful and welcoming environment to an aggressive and inhospitable one. Then in the blink of an eye, I ended up back in the ark again surrounded by all the animals. I panicked. We were heading back towards the storm again. I had a glimpse of what that island was like. I was there for a moment, just long enough to meet Medmelek and now that moment has passed. I looked back and saw that island from far away. "Not again" I said to myself. "I refuse to go back to the storm". The ark was aggressively heading towards the storm, so I quickly jumped back from the ark again. It turned to complete darkness as soon as I hit the water.

I heard the echoes of a softer warmer voice saying "Eddy, are you alright?" I opened my eyes and realized Jessica was standing next to me with a concerned look in her face. I looked at her dully as I transitioned back into her reality. I realized I was dreaming again. I was a

---

bit disoriented. I needed a moment to think about where I was and how I got there. I was passed out in the bathroom floor of my apartment. Jessica looked troubled, she was trying to help me as my eyes struggled to deal with the light coming out of the window, and my brain was still struggling to recover from the dream as well as the previous night's drunken state. She continued talking to me which didn't help the waves of nausea that started adding to my anguish.

“What time is it?” I asked, attempting to regain some sort of awareness.

“It's ten o'clock,” she replied

I panicked. I was supposed to be at work two hours ago. “I'm late for work” I said as I got up abruptly.

Jessica looked confused. “But today is Saturday?” she knew I didn't work on weekends

“It's Saturday?” I was puzzled. Last thing I remembered was being at the bar with Dan – that was Thursday night.

“I slept for over twenty four hours?” I asked Jessica who was even more muddled.

No wonder I was bruised and achy. I couldn't understand how I could've slept for that long. I called Dan to see if he knew what happened Thursday night, but all he did was confirm that he saw me get into a cab after leaving the bar. I on the other hand, had no recollection of taking a cab or getting home that night.

Jessica was trying to make me feel better even though her eyes clearly displayed how concerned she was. She and I have been dating off and on for the past couple of months. After trying to call me several times with no answer, she became concerned and decided to come by and check on me.

This was yet again another bizarre incident. Not understanding what was happening to me, I decided to pretend that this was merely a normal occurrence and as such, there was nothing out

---

of the ordinary I needed to understand. We can't have a logical explanation for everything that happens to us anyway, I thought to myself. Humans always try to explain things. Even things that are mysterious and unexplainable - they still try to define it somehow. The words of Spinoza, the Dutch philosopher, came to mind as I was thinking about this. For Spinoza, people label unexplainable events that defy the laws of nature as miracles and as evidence of divine power. However, this is evidence not of divine power but of human ignorance. We become ignorant the moment we think we can explain everything around us. I wanted to submit to the idea that things happen to us which we simply don't understand. If the universe reveals it to us then there's a reason for it, if it's not revealed, there is a reason for that too.

\*\*\*\*\*

Things went back to normal after those bizarre couple of days. A couple of weeks went by, and everything seemed to be going well. In fact, things were going too well - flawless. This made me apprehensive. Things are not supposed to be going that good. There is no such thing as flawlessness or perfection. I've always been a firm believer in the "balance of energies". Some good things happen, some bad things happen, but overall life is supposed to be balanced. In fact, balance is the one consistent thing that continues driving our world forward. Our cosmic world is balanced in such a harmonious way that makes everything in it work seamless. All living things coexist with each other and balance each other's existence beautifully. But once that cosmic balance is shaken or broken, the scale tips over one way or another, causing disarray along the way. An extreme event will most likely occur as a result of that unbalance. The universe's balance is manifested through the energies we experience. Too much good eventually brings up the bad.

---



Too much quickness will eventually cause sluggishness. Too much height and might will eventually cause depths of despair.

Seeing the world this way, I couldn't help but feel anxious. I kept expecting the bad part to unveil itself. Days went by and I started bizarrely getting disappointed when things continued going well. The mind is an amazing instrument – it could turn a positive reality into a negative one. Because of my cynical expectations, I wasn't able to enjoy anything that was good in my life. I couldn't get rid of that feeling - I had an inkling that something bad was about to happen.

---

## **Chapter Four**

### **A New Journey**

For several weeks, I had no dreams. Suddenly, without any stipulation, the vivid dreams started again. They became more intense, more real. As soon as I closed my eyes, I immediately transitioned to a different realm. I transitioned to the same ark again, however, I was never able to reach that island again. I was getting apprehensive every time before I fell asleep. I was sleeping at random times too. People around me started noticing a change in my behavior and overall demeanor. My doctor said that I might be experiencing early signs of narcolepsy, but I knew it wasn't that. This wasn't something that could be diagnosed by a doctor or a psychiatrist. What I was experiencing couldn't be explained by science or cured by medicine.

New York City was a place of constant hustle. My days consisted of continuous struggle to meet expectations whether it was personal or professional. With those dreams intensifying, I had to slow down and figure out how I can deal with my skirmishes. I took some time off from work. I started seeking more instants of solitude and meditation. I tried to do anything that will make me either get rid of these dreams or explain why I was having them in the first place. I even visited a psychic that Jessica had recommended a while back.

---

On my way to the psychic, I saw that same island again on a billboard in Queens. This is a good omen, I thought to myself.

Sitting with the psychic was quite an experience. I felt uncomfortable being there. I never believed in psychics or fortune tellers, but I wanted to see if she had anything to say that would be relevant to my dreams. As I sat down in a dark lit room, she held my hand, closed her eyes and started talking right away. She said some relevant things and some that were not so relevant. Being as skeptical as I am, I took most of what she said with a grain of salt. But she did say something that intrigued me. "I see a part of you in Africa and a part of you in the clouds," the old psychic said. I didn't know what she meant by that. She also emphasized the need for me to get away for a while. "Leaving this place from a new moon crescent to an old moon crescent is the only way for you to find inner peace and harmony. You will also finally connect to something you've been missing in your life so far," the old psychic said.

"Like what?" I asked

"It could be faith, it could be family. I'm not sure. Maybe you lost your faith. Maybe you were disconnected from someone close to you in the past, and this is the time for you to go find them,"

"Well, my father left us when I was a kid," I said

"Yes, that might be it. This might be the time for the father and the son to reunite. This could be the energy you've been missing all along - the energy of fatherly love, feeling of comfort, trust, acceptance," she said with enthusiasm.

"My father left us when we were kids. But I learned to deal with it from an early age. I don't need him at this point. I have no desire to go find him," I said.

---

“You might not realize it now, but the fact that he was missing from your life has a bigger effect on you than you think. Think about your life, your relationships, your commitment issues, your self-destructiveness. You’ve been searching for a home outside your home, an identity outside your identity and this might be your chance to find that,”

Her words really hit home. She was probably right in everything she said, but I wasn’t ready to admit to all of it yet. “I thought I was coming to see a psychic not a psychologist,” I said mockingly.

“You came here to find some answers,” she quickly responded.

“Well, let’s say you’re right. What if nothing comes out of all this? Let’s say I go for my, whatever you want to call it journey, and I don’t find anything?”

“Maybe it’s the journey that you need, not the end result,”

This was not what I expected from some old psychic in queens. Her words were more potent than morphine. Although, I didn’t want to admit it, but she made more sense to me than anyone else I have spoken to in a long time.

As I was leaving, she got up and said “Don’t ignore whatever it is that you’ve been experiencing lately.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“There was something keeping me from fully connecting, I don’t know what it is but I know it’s not something you want to ignore.”

“What should I do to make sure I don’t ignore it?” I asked.

“By going away from a new moon crescent to an old moon crescent,” she said with a smile as she escorted me out. “Good luck finding your inner peace, and remember, family is more important than you think,” she then said before she closed the door behind me.

---

I thought about what the psychic told me. I realized that this anxious feeling will not go away if I don't find a way to put my mind in peace. I can only find peace if I can achieve the balance of energies. Family, friends, faith, health, wealth, it was all interconnected. Whatever I did before didn't seem to work, so I need to just let my own energy flow gracefully with the energy of the universe. But I can achieve that only if I become cognizant of my own energy. We can all feel our energy; we just don't realize when we're feeling it. It's that feeling of excitement, of fear, the feeling we have when we just wake up, when we feel our heart beating fast, our heavy breath, our déjà vu, our inkling and our expectations. We just need to follow that energy. Make it clearly unveil itself to us and speak to us in our own language. Let it manifest itself through our emotions, thoughts and suspicions. We're usually cold when we're in a cold environment. We're hot when we're in a hot environment. We're wet when we're in the water. So we are a part of our environment. Our feelings come to us in a similar fashion. We think we know the source where those feelings come from, but we really don't.

Coming to those types of self-realizations made me more connected to my own spiritual self. I wanted to dig deep and find that spiritual side within me. I wanted to pursue my own self-discovery and I needed to be in an environment that was conducive to this self-discovery. The words of the psychic just hit me. It was the same thing that Dan talked about. It was there in front of me the whole time; I was just too preoccupied to see it. The island! The Mediterranean! The getaway! I am going to do it!

Two days later, I was heading to JFK airport to catch a flight to Malaga, Spain. I sensed instant liberation as the plane took off. It finally hit me as I was heading towards the Atlantic, towards the unknown. Here I was travelling by myself to a place I've never been before, seeking

---

answers to unknown questions, escaping whatever was haunting me from the past. For the next couple of weeks, there were no deadlines, no set schedules, no meetings and no commitments.

I dozed off for a few minutes and immediately started dreaming again. The same dream as usual, except this time, I felt like the ark was getting closer to the island. I was getting more and more excited as the ark was getting closer and closer. But I woke up suddenly before the ark had gotten there. That's a good sign, I thought to myself. Few hours later, the plane landed in Malaga. It was the first time I set foot in European soil. Malaga was a beautiful town with almost a clichéd feel of what a Mediterranean town usually would look like. I instantly fell in love with the place. The kernel, Malaga's city center, was an exceptionally well built historic area surrounded by small bars, restaurants and old-fashioned balconied houses. But the magnum opus was this grandiose unfinished Gothic cathedral located right in the middle of town.

An old cranky Spaniard cab driver took me to the port where a massive cruise ship was waiting for tourists from all over the world to hop on board. The cab driver was mumbling in Spanish the whole time I was in the car.

“Musica!” I shouted to him in an attempt to get him to stop mumbling.

“Pardon?” he asked annoyed.

“Musica! Eh radio por favor,” I said again in a broken Spanish as I pointed to the car stereo.

He then slowly put a CD of Gypsy Kings on. I finally got to relax in the car as I was listening to “Volare”. No more mumbling at last. A few minutes later, he dropped me at the port.

I picked a Western Mediterranean cruise which normally chooses ports of call in Spain, Italy and France. But this one had an unusual detour along the way. Its first stop was the Canary Islands.

---

A few hours later, the ship was well on its way to the Canary Islands sailing on the Mediterranean Sea - a sea of ageless history and unparalleled beauty. The ship quickly transitioned from the Mediterranean to the Atlantic Ocean. It rocked relentlessly. I was constantly reminded of the ark from my dream. I felt more at ease with the animals on that ark than I did with the people on the cruise ship. There were the “cruise people”, those who took cruises regularly. I met this middle-aged couple who had been on over a hundred cruises in the past five years. That’s over twenty cruises a year. No matter how much one likes cruises, twenty times in one year is excessive by any standards. Others on the ship, like myself, were first timers. There was a bachelorette party of about fifteen girls; every one of them looked like a playboy model. Oddly enough, the bride to be was the least attractive one in the group.

I stood in front of the ship staring at the horizon with a drink in my hand waiting to discover what awaits me on the shore beyond. I quickly noticed the shore to the left of us. The ship was sailing parallel to this unknown land that no one was talking about. No one cared to know anyway. Everyone was too busy checking all the amenities inside the ship, comingling and getting to know their fellow passengers. A couple of people tried to make small talk with me but I was in no mood to socialize - an odd mood to be in when you’re on vacation on board of a cruise ship. I was more interested in laying my eyes across the ocean and even more interested in figuring out what that land was. As we were getting close to the Canary Islands, I could see the set of islands ahead to the right of us, each with their own character and own history. But still no one was talking about the land on the other side we were sailing next to. I asked one of the cruise employees walking by what it was.

“Morocco!” he replied.

“Oh Morocco? Isn’t that in Africa?”

---

“Yes, it is in North Africa sir. The Canary Islands are right next to that country.”

“How come they belong to Spain then? Shouldn’t it be Moroccan territory?” I asked

“Yes that would make sense,” he chuckled. “But Spain took control of those territories a long time ago, and they never gave them back.”

“This still happens in the twenty first century?”

“Oh yes, it happens more than you think sir,” he said. “Any other questions?” he then inquired.

“No I’m okay thanks”

“Very well then,” the gentleman said as he started walking away.

“Oh wait, are we going to stop by Morocco too?” I asked

“No just the Canary Islands,” he responded.

He walked few more steps and turned around again, “But you can always take a boat there if you want,” he paused for a second then said, “If you want to check out Africa. A lot of people like to do that. You can always join the cruise ship later.”

The Canary Islands were amazing, a true paradise on earth. It did not look like the island in my dream but it didn’t even matter, I was enjoying being in this new place. I felt alive, connected with nature. There were parties on the beach, nice bars, beautiful girls, exotic cocktails and good music. I was still seeking solitude nonetheless. I wanted to just walk, observe the motion around me. I walked into this quiet piano bar which reminded me of Shake Rattle & Roll Dueling Pianos bar in New York City. It felt like a familiar place. I sat by the bar and ordered a Maker’s Mark Whisky on the rocks.

As I finished my first drink and asked for a second one, an extremely attractive girl took a seat next to me. She looked nervous, overwhelmed with the drink menu that was just handed to

---



her by the bartender. She looked at me, looked back at the menu, looked at me again and asked. “Hey, what are you drinking?”

I looked at her and saw that look in her eye – that ‘buy me a drink and take me home’ kind of look.

“Maker’s Mark!” I said.

“Is that a Cognac?”

“Whisky, well Bourbon Whisky,” I responded.

“Ah ok, such a manly drink,” she said.

Her flirting was evident. Her beauty was remarkable. I was hooked.

I can only attempt to master the art of solitude and self-reflection until a pretty version of the female species walks in. Then solitude becomes detrimental. That is my weakness. It will be my weakness till the day I die. It’s not that I can’t help it; I don’t want to help it. Why deprive oneself from the most beautiful thing in the world. Yes, the female species is undoubtedly the most beautiful thing put on this earth. To me, all females are beautiful in their own special unique ways. I love them all, I love different things about each one of them - their smiles, their curves, their smells. This one had it all, that smile was enough to make you forget all the quandaries in the world.

I offered her a drink, and she happily accepted. Natalie was her name. I got her hooked right away. We talked for a couple of hours. The conversation was flowing naturally going from one topic to another. She was a genuinely nice girl. It was refreshing to talk to someone like that. She was too sweet, naïve even, still untouched by the harsh realities of this world. It was a beautiful encounter. I was watching her soft face as she talked. Her charming smile drew attention to her soft red lips and her gorgeous dimples. She had a radiant skin, a proportionally thin nose,

---

nicely trimmed brows, long eye lashes and wondrous ocean blue eyes. She had sparkly blonde hair, neatly brushed.

She was touching her hair a lot, another sign that she was a little nervous. She was getting more relaxed though with each drink that she had.

At one point, she grabbed my hand suddenly and said, “Want to go back to my place?”

I was caught off guard. “Yeah” I said with hesitation.

“You don’t seem too excited,” she snapped.

“No, of course I am,” I said with more certitude this time.

She started walking in front of me. I was following her blindly. I let her take control and I was fine with that. I was fascinated by her. I could tell she was the unpredictable type who could be wild and crazy one minute, then sensitive and quiet the next. I kept admiring her looks as she continued walking in front of me with her beautiful short summery red dress, her pretty curves and sexy legs. She turned around, looked at me and smiled. She made sure I was still coming along for the ride.

Once in the room, she went straight to the balcony. “I love the view here,” she said in an enthusiastic tone.

The view was indeed amazing. It was a clear crisp view of the ocean, no cloud in the sky, moon almost full shining over us with her bright glow. Natalie stood in front of me admiring the view with her back facing me. It was a windy night. With that wind blowing my direction, the scent of her perfume overwhelmed my nostrils. It was just a natural progression of events. There was no turning back. It was a combination of alcohol, music, and an attraction that was hard to neglect. I got closer to her. She could sense I was close. Still with her back facing me, she reached with her hand to hold mine. Then she turned around to face me. We stood still staring at each

---

other. Everything stopped at that point. It was just me and her on a trance. She then whispered in my ear with an extremely soft voice “Kiss me”. So we kissed, touching skin, feeling the warmth of our bodies coming together, sensing that electrifying emotion. It was intoxicating. She got me intoxicated.

The next day, I woke up naked in Natalie’s bed with a pounding headache from all the whisky from the night before. I noticed Natalie sleeping next to me naked as well. I smiled. Her sight brought back a pleasant memory from the night before. I then quietly got out of bed and left the room. I could still smell her scent on my skin as I was walking out.

Later that day, as I was exploring the island, I heard Natalie calling my name. She was lying by the pool. She looked dazzling wearing a yellow bikini. At that moment, I realized that Natalie was the same girl from that commercial I saw a while back. She was the girl in the island. As I was about to ask her about it, but then I realized that the island might only be a product of my own imagination, so I chose not to mention anything.

“Last night was amazing,” she said cheerfully.

“It was. I had a great time with you,” I concurred

“Too bad you left early this morning. I was looking forward to some morning sex,” she said teasingly as she put her hand on my lap.

I smiled. “Yeah, I had to...”

“Oh you don’t have to explain yourself. I get it,” she interrupted me and said.

“So what are you doing here all by yourself? I thought you came with a bunch of your friends?” I asked trying to change the subject in an attempt to make it less awkward.

---

“I did. Well, they’re more like my sister’s friends. I’m just tagging along. They were all being assholes last night. I didn’t wanna hang out with them, so I stole my sister’s ID and went to the bar,” she said with a smile. “I’m glad I did, because I met you there!”

“Wait, you got your sister’s ID? Why?”

“Uhm, so I can get some drinks, duh!” she said while laughing.

I was confused, why would she need an ID? “So, uh, you can’t buy your own drink? How old are you?”

“I’m seventeen; of course I can’t buy my own drinks. Not yet anyway. I’ll be eighteen next month and I heard you can buy alcohol when you’re eighteen in Europe.”

I was dumbfounded, speechless. One of my worst fears just came true. I just slept with an underage girl. I had no idea she was that young. I assumed she was in her mid-twenties at least. There was no way I could tell she was that young. The alcohol didn’t help either. But still, I should’ve asked about her age. This was yet another reckless decision from my part.

Natalie could tell I was perturbed by this. “Oh don’t worry,” she said in a caring voice. “I didn’t tell you I was seventeen. Plus we’re in the Canary Islands, in Europe, the rules are different here.”

I didn’t know what to say.

“Stop worrying, I’m about to jump in the pool, you should join me,” she then said.

“Eh, yeah, I’m gonna get a drink and be right back,” I said.

“Okay, get me one too!” she asked.

I had to walk away, I was anxious, troubled. Why do I keep getting myself into these types of situations? I felt guilty. I didn’t want to run into her again. I didn’t want to be around that temptation. I clearly made a mistake last night. This was not what I was hoping to find in this trip.

---

I bought a bottle of Jack and went to an empty beach in an attempt to find some kind of peace and privacy. It was time to meditate.

I kept thinking that I needed to leave this place. The cruise thing wasn't such a good idea. I didn't want to get into any trouble after what I did. The only option I had was to leave the island. I thought about taking a boat across the ocean to Morocco. Morocco sounded like an interesting place anyway. I was intrigued by the idea that a completely different world lied only a few miles away. Maybe this was a sign that Morocco was where I needed to be. The psychic also mentioned that she saw a part of me in Africa. Maybe I was supposed to be in Africa instead of a cruise ship across Europe.

I knew I was supposed to do it. When something is supposed to happen, the universe gives you signs, and there were plenty of them at that point.

Without a second thought, I packed my bags, left the cruise ship and got on a boat to Morocco.

---

## **Chapter Five**

### **The Sahara**

As the sun began to set towards the west, I found myself on a stormy stretch of dark blue waters. The Canary Islands were far behind me and Agadir, Morocco, Africa was sitting in the front with all its thrills and mysteries. There in the horizon, I started seeing the layout of the town we were approaching. I was too eager to find out what this new world was going to be like. Lost in my own imagination, visualizing what my new experiences might be like, I didn't realize it until the small ferry had made a complete stop. As I set foot into this foreign country, I quickly realized that this place was different. I was bound to have a unique experience there. I took a cab from the port to the city center.

I had mixed feelings of anticipation and apprehension as the cab driver was driving towards the city center. There was no turning back at that point. I was taking it all in, appreciating the scenery on the way. I could tell we were getting closer to the city center as traffic got worse and I started seeing the old white washed walls of the buildings ahead. The exotic Moorish layout of every house, shop and mosque stood out vibrantly from the distance. Traffic was getting so bad that it completely stopped. I could barely understand the cab driver as he was telling me to get out of his car. "This is stop," he said several times with a thick accent.

---

I got out of the car and started walking aimlessly towards the crowds. It was dark at that point. Some streets were more lit up than others. The loud noise of the crowd had a certain melodic tone to it. It was a foreign sound, a foreign culture. People looked different. Everyone was friendly. I got randomly approached every now and then by beggars asking for money, or teenage kids selling random stuff, Kleenex, candy, even sunglasses and watches.

I sat in a breezy corridor of a small café in a narrow street in Agadir, watching the movements of people around me. I ordered what appeared to be the most popular drink in town – Mint tea with lots of sugar. It was the best tea I had ever tasted. I had a good feeling about this. I knew that's where I was supposed to end up. I could care less about returning to the cruise ship. I wanted to discover what this place had to offer.

After a while, I was getting rather tired of my wanderings, and without a plan or a purpose, I was ready to find a hotel room somewhere and quit the roving for the night. I awoke the next morning to the sound of the call to prayer “the Azan” which was chanted throughout the day. The chant itself was remarkably harmonious. Through the open window of my hotel room, along with the sound of the Azan, came a pleasant breeze that quietly snuck inside. It instantly gave me a refreshing feeling – ready for the new exploits ahead.

This was the first day in this new and mesmerizing country. This was a place of extremes - extreme wealth, extreme poverty, extreme ugliness and extreme beauty. It was a place shredded in mystery, mysticism and spirituality. The ancient meets the new and the traditional meets the modern - a place where East truly meets West. Arabic was the main language spoken, but everyone seemed to speak French too. All signs on the road and in buildings were in both languages. Many spoke English as well. Walking in the streets, I noticed the people to be extremely diverse. There were tourists, both Moroccan and European and even American. There

---

were businessmen, merchants, students, families. Some women were covered up from head to toe while others were wearing very little clothing, short skirts and tank tops. The women were beautiful there. Most young people were dressed in western clothes.

Some people seemed confused; some were westernized to the point they forgot their own traditions and culture, while others were still stuck in a traditional ideology that dated back to the seventeenth century. But no matter how outsiders saw Morocco, or how Moroccans themselves were, no one could deny the amazing and unique aspect of this place and its people. Truly, the people, the smells, the food, the bazaars, the beaches, the cafes, it was all fascinating and different.

Here I was in this new land, seeking new experiences. I researched and researched, trying to decide where to start this voyage. I was still yearning for seclusion and solitude. The touristic places in this town were mostly beach resorts, night clubs and shopping malls. I needed to go somewhere still, quiet and with more culture. The Medinas sounded intriguing. Most cities in Morocco had a more modern part of town and a more ancient one. The ancient part of town was called the Medina. Some of those Medinas were built over a thousand years ago. Some people recommended the Medina of Fes which is a city located in the northern part of Morocco. The other thing that appealed to me was going to the Sahara desert. There was certain meditative aspect of the desert that spoke to me. In fact, the thought of meditating in the desert was exactly what I needed. I decided to go on a road trip. So, I pulled a map of the country and drew an itinerary - drive by the desert first, go through Zagora, then make my way north to the city of Fes.

So, off to the desert I went. The city of Zagora was my target destination. I rented a brand new Range Rover ready to handle all of the desert's harsh landscapes, and started driving east. I put a Gypsy Kings CD on which I had purchased previously from that cab driver in Spain. I loaded the car with water, canned goods and other non-perishable items and hit the road.

---





The natural features started changing as I got closer to the Sahara. Several hours later, as I was driving on a tiny road in the desert, something appeared moving in the distance. As I got closer, I could see it was a shadow of a man walking on the side of the road. It was odd to see someone walking alone in that scorching heat. He looked a lot like Medmelek. Could that be him? Or is it just a mirage? I started slowing down and eventually stopped the car and asked him if he needed a ride. At that point, I realized it was not Medmelek but he had strikingly similar facial features - long beard, piercing eyes and an overall rugged look. He got in the car right away and thanked me.

“Speak English?” I asked. “Me, American,” I said slowly.

“Yes, Yes I do,” the old man responded.

“Oh good! So where are you going?” I asked.

“Well, I was going to Timicha, it’s a small village east of here, but my car broke on the road, no work anymore,” he said with a slight accent.

“Okay, I’m going to Zagora, is that on the way?”

“Zagora? Eh yes, Timicha is on the way”

“Okay, I will take you to your village then,”

After driving for a couple of miles, I saw his smoky car on the side of the road. It was indeed broken.

I started having a conversation with the estranged hitch hiker. Hassan was his name. He told me that he was a scribe. They called him “Hassan the scribe”. His family came from Cairo many generations ago. He came from a family of Ancient Egyptian scribes, or “Sesh” as they called them. A Sesh was an expert in the arts of writing. Historically, the sons of scribes always inherited their fathers’ profession and got educated in the same scribal tradition as their ancestors. Hassan had an interesting profession. He could trace back his lineage all the way to the scribes of Pharaoh. It is said that if it weren’t for the scribes, much of the history about ancient Egypt would be unknown today. They documented most of the tales that were told about the Ancient Egyptians, the social and economic activities of the lower class as well as the high class citizens. The scribes were also part of the royal court so they documented many details about the royal traditions at the time.

He was a very friendly man, and he seemed excited to talk about his life. In fact, he was eager to share all about his people. I could tell he felt a sense of pride and his eyes glared every time he started talking about the history of his people and how they saved Ancient Egypt’s history.

---

The conversation kept going from one topic to another with an exchange of ideas and laughs with someone who had a very different background than mine. I asked him what he did when he wasn't working as a scribe.

"When I'm not working as a scribe, I'm a story teller," he said, "a story teller who ran out of stories," he said in a sad tone.

"How so?" I asked.

"Things are not as they used to be in the past my son. The stories that were once mythical and breathtaking are now old fashioned and tedious. These are different times for different people with different stories. During the time of my ancestors, story tellers were the escape people were looking for. We take them to a world like no other filled with mystical stories of myths and legends, heroes and immortals, villains and beasts. We talk about romance, war, deception, love, beauty, good and evil,"

"I get it. You basically created a fantasy world that otherwise wouldn't exist," I said.

"Exactly, we start with once upon a time and off we go. Travel from one city to another, from one century to another, and from one culture to another. We traveled in our minds, our imagination was rich, and our audience had eyes and minds wide open. But now, eh now is a different time. Those traditions that lasted for a thousand years are no more," the scribe said in a soft depressed voice.

"Yes, these are different times. I see a lot of wisdom from the old days, but unfortunately, we, the new generation, we're oblivious to that."

He nodded his head in agreement.

---

I could tell he harbored so much pain and sorrow. “You know what? Storytelling is a way for sharing and interpreting experiences, and I’m sure you have endless experiences. I don’t think you ran out of stories, you just don’t have the right audience anymore,” I said.

“Indeed, it’s all about the audience. It’s not worth sharing stories with those who do not appreciate it. I am a man of tradition, and I’m not about to change my ways now. Sure, we all have to adapt to our new environments, but people like me are lost in this world. We used to be kings and queens, chiefs and sultans, now we are laborers and followers. Some call themselves conformists,” he then started laughing, “I guess whatever helps them sleep at night.”

“When you say we used to be kings and queens, you mean the Egyptians?” I asked.

“Well, not particularly. But yes I guess you can say the Egyptians, Moroccans too, I guess the Muslims in general. During our golden age, we used to be the cream of the crop. We excelled in different sciences like Mathematics and Astronomy, translated most of the important Greek philosophical works, built beautiful and advanced cities, and now we are perceived as being violent and uncivilized, it’s very sad. We have a very complex and diverse culture. People simply need to understand us better.”

“Couldn’t agree more,” I said.

“But anyway, when I said that earlier, I was actually referring to the ones steeped in tradition, the ones who used to be wise and wealthy, the ones who couldn’t change with the modern times. At some point life started changing, we no longer owned our lands, we were no longer supposed to wear our traditional clothing, no longer used our horses, no longer used our swords. Fearless tribal chiefs and warriors became simple employees. They had to get jobs, modern jobs, and follow orders from strangers. Those chiefs couldn’t conform. How could they? One day they were feared and respected and the next day they were insulted and bossed around.

---

One day they were lords, the next day they became slaves. They called it globalization,” he chuckled again. “Because of modernity they said. Society could no longer function as it did before. Now it’s a time of law, of industrialization, of capitalism. The quality of life was supposed to get better, but for people like me that was when it started deteriorating,” he expressed passionately.

"I never thought about it that way," I responded.

"You know, my uncle, God bless his soul, he never worked a day in his life. He was one of the chiefs in his tribe. Once the colonizers came and took away our lands, they required everyone to start working. Some worked in construction, others in factories, but my uncle, he had too much pride. He couldn't conform. He couldn't survive. He didn't want to survive. Months later he was taken to an insane asylum,"

"That's sad," I responded.

"Yeah, as I said, this is a different time for different people," he said.

I could see the sadness as well as the passion in his eyes. His wisdom was admirable and his English was impeccable.

“How did you learn to speak such good English?” I asked out of curiosity.

“Scribes usually speak several languages. Along with Arabic, I was taught French, English and German as a child,” he replied.

“You need to be working for the UN,” I laughed. “What are you doing in this desolate place?” I asked.

“Well, I actually spent the last twenty years in Rabat, the capital. I traveled to Oslo, Paris, Istanbul,” he said with pride. “I’m now retired, and the only place that appeases my old soul is my

---

small village in the desert. It is the only place that opens my heart and soul to the depth of the universe.”

I could see what he meant by that. The desert was an undeniably mystical place. And if you open your heart to it, it could reveal amazing things. I just wasn't there yet.

---

## **Chapter Six**

### **A Good Host**

After several hours of driving, we were getting closer to Hassan's village. The barren empty world started looking a little more populated with some palm trees scattered randomly around the road - finally a sign of life. The rigid, dry desert wind kept blowing sand from the rolling hills into the car wind shield. The car was covered in sand at that point. The weather conditions were harsh and stepping outside was like getting into a steamed bath. Driving for few hours in the emptiness of the desert filled my heart with humbleness and piety. Hassan has been sleeping for the last couple of hours. I felt at peace in this strange place, driving a complete stranger to his village. This is my one good deed of the trip, it'll be good karma, I thought to myself.

We got to Hassan's village at night time.

"Please accept my invitation to come and stay at my house with my family," Hassan said.

"Thank you but I would rather continue driving to Zagora," I politely declined.

"Zagora is still several hours away and it's already dark out. I want to thank you for your help. You picked up a stranger from the side of the road and you're not even Moroccan. I must

---

thank you. At least let my wife cook dinner for you, spend the night and continue your journey tomorrow morning,” he insisted.

I didn't want to offend him so I accepted his invitation and walked inside. Hassan's residence was a humble but cozy adobe home. His family was very nice and hospitable. He had a wife and two kids. Dinner was delicious – we had goat meat and vegetables. I felt honored being in his house. I was a stranger to them, for all he knew, I could have been a serial killer, a white supremacist, an FBI agent or some sort of spy. But still, he was grateful that I helped him out regardless of who I was. He never asked where I came from or what I did for a living. He showed me what Moroccan hospitality was all about.

It was fascinating to see how Hassan's family members interacted with each other. They treated each other with complete respect and veneration. After dinner, the kids kissed the father's hand and excused themselves. The wife cleaned the table, and quietly left the room, and then one of the kids brought mint tea and cookies to the table. After tea, everyone went to bed. I was not used to this kind of interaction and lifestyle. I came from a place where individualism and eccentricity are dominant, and family interactions are kept to a minimum. Night time in New York is when people take pills to sleep, smoke weed, drink, use social media and watch Netflix. But where I was staying that night, there were none of those things. They had no TV, no bars, no restaurants, but they had each other, and apparently that was sufficient to them. It was all they needed, all they wanted. They seemed content. They seemed happy.

That night as I went to bed, I started dreaming again. This dream was more vivid than usual. The ark was getting closer and closer to the island. I could clearly see the island. It was glowing and luminous. I could see people on the shore. I saw families, kids playing, girls tanning. I then saw myself as a little kid with my little brother building sand castles on the beach. We

---



looked happy, carefree. Then my mother showed up. She looked concerned. I started talking to her but she didn't seem to hear me. She kept telling me to go back, to leave this place. Her screaming started getting louder and louder. "Please leave, why, why?" she kept saying.

The next morning, I woke up thinking about my mother. I was concerned. She was never present in my dreams before. I had to call her to make sure she was okay. After having breakfast, Hassan took me to the nearest pay phone "Tele boutique" as they called them.

After several attempts, I finally got through to her. We made small talk for a few minutes. I made sure she was okay. She then asked how the cruise was going. I told her I left the cruise and went to Morocco instead.

"Morocco?" she was surprised. "Why are you in Morocco? I thought you'd be in Europe?"

"I was. But this place sort of spoke to me, I just wanted to visit," I said.

She was silent for a while.

"Mom, are you still there?"

"Yeah, eh, yeah I am,"

"Okay, what's wrong then?" I could tell something was wrong.

"Nothing, nothing at all, I really have to leave. Call me later okay? Love you," she then hung up the phone.

Her behavior was strange. She was cheerful in the beginning, excited that I called her from overseas, but as soon as she heard Morocco, her demeanor completely changed. Without thinking too much of it though, I went about my day, exploring this new place. Hassan took me to a café nearby and ordered an espresso. His village was really quiet, too quiet even. Perfect for what I was looking for.

"You know, I like it in here, I can see why you'd want to retire here," I told Hassan.

---

“It’s the only place for me. This is where I was born, and this is where I shall die one day.”

“I can see why. I wouldn’t mind dying here either. Where I’m from, it’s too chaotic, too busy. You’re just another human, a consumer. You’re too preoccupied with materialism, capitalism, and all the other fucked up isms,” I was quiet for a second. “Dying here would be a good death,” I said quietly.

Hassan was laughing. “At least you realize that now. Some people never realize this simple truth,”

“Yeah, they don’t know any better,” I responded.

“You know the owner of this café? I pay him a lump sum once a year. Right before he has to pay his taxes. He doesn’t like to take money from me. He’s too prideful for that. Instead, his sons will come by once a month and pick up bottles of olive oil from my house. That is a simple exchange that makes it fair for both of us, and keeps human interaction at its finest,” Hassan said.

“That’s beautiful, no credit cards, no debt, just simple commerce.”

“You should stay for a couple more days before you continue in your journey my friend. You could use another quiet day or two,”

“You know what, I think I will. You have no idea how much I appreciate your hospitality,” I said modestly.

What a serene day it was. I wanted to go on a walk by myself and just sightsee. This small village felt safe, people’s homes had the door open. Kids were playing outside with no supervision. There was very little traffic. Everyone knew everyone. Everyone knew I was Hassan’s guest. Everyone said “hi” as I walked next to them. As the day was unwinding, I walked back to Hassan’s house. One of his sons was outside the house washing my car.

“You don’t have to do that,” I said.

---

“No I want to. This car is too pretty to be sitting dirty like this,” he said.

“Well, let me pay you for that,”

“No no, I can’t take your money,”

“Why not?”

“Well, I would, but my father will not be happy,”

“Okay, we don’t have to tell your father, just take this as a token of my appreciation, you don’t have to tell anyone about it,”

I handed him a fifty dollar bill.

“Thank you,” he said as he took it nervously.

\*\*\*\*\*

The next day, I went back to the tele boutique and tried to call mother again.

“Eddy is that you?” she said as soon as she picked up the phone.

“Yeah it’s me. Mom what’s wrong?”

“Oh thank God you called me back. It’s killing me. I have to tell you something,”

“What is it?”

“It’s something I should’ve told you a long time ago. It’s about your dad.”

“My dad?” she never talked about my dad before. When we were kids, she had told us once that our father was gone and that was it. We never asked, and she never talked about him again.

“Yes, your dad. I have no idea how or why you ended up in Morocco but that’s where your dad is. He moved back there about thirty years ago,”

---

“What? He left us and moved to Morocco? Are you serious?”

“Just listen to me, I didn't know much at the time other than he was moving back to Morocco. So yes, he lives somewhere over there now. I'm really sorry I never told you that before,” she cried.

I was in complete shock. “How come you never mentioned this to us before?” I asked.

“I wanted to, believe me! I used to think about it all the time, I don't know.” She paused for a moment. “I never worked up the courage to tell you I guess.”

"That's crazy. I've always wondered why he left and where he went. I didn't think you actually knew where he was."

“All I knew was that he moved to Morocco, I had no idea where in Morocco. I have no idea if he's even still there. It's crazy, I know. When you told me that you felt like you were supposed to be there in Morocco, I panicked. It was very odd that you felt that way. I had to tell you then, I couldn't keep it a secret anymore. Maybe the universe took you there so you can finally meet your dad. I had no right to hide that from you Eddy and for that I'm really sorry honey,” she said with sincerity.

I lived all my life without a father figure, now all of a sudden thirty three years later, I found out where he went. I had no idea why or how the forces of the universe led me to this place, but I realized at that specific moment that everything up to that point had led me to this place here and now. I could debate whether I should make an effort to visit someone who clearly abandoned me and my family since I was a child, whether I should add someone to my life after he purposefully escaped it, whether I should give him the satisfaction of giving him some sort of closure after he left us with none, but considering the signs, I had to find him. I also couldn't deny the fact that I was now curious to find out who this man was. His blood was running through my

---

veins; he was my father. As far as I knew, he could be only a few miles away; he could be anyone, even a shepherd in this isolated desert village. I had to find out who this man was.

\*\*\*\*\*

That night, as I fell asleep, I was back at the island again. I knew exactly where I was and where I wanted to go. I had to find the cave first. Medmelek would surely be in there. I wanted to seek his advice. I was running on the beach- running towards the mountains. There were many distractions around me. There were all types of parties going on, girls, boats, bars and more. I figured they were only mirages. I continued running towards the mountain. I saw Natalie waving at me. I saw Dan at a Tiki bar with two drinks in his hand “Hey I got you a drink,” he yelled as I ran next to him. I ignored him and continued running. I then saw Claire. I wanted to stop at that point. But then I saw the eagle flying on top of me. He was flying in the same direction as me. His presence reminded me where I was, and that I needed to focus. My goal was to find Medmelek.

After a few minutes, I started seeing a distorted mountain path. It was the only path I could take. Thick, dark green branches were arched over the path from each side making it difficult for me to continue running at my previous pace. I had to slow down as my ankles plummeted left and right as the path warped, snaking around tall oak trees. I got stuck in the sludge, I couldn't run anymore. I started yelling Medmelek's name. He suddenly showed up on top of a rock in front of me.

“I have no advice for you,” he said firmly.

“I just need to ask you something. Just give me your opinion,” I said.

---

“Opinions are useless. You know what you need to do. You might figure out where this place is once you figure out who you are,” he said inflexibly.

“So finding my father will help me figure out who I am, right?” I asked.

“Good luck, Eddy son of Saif,” he said as he disappeared in the darkness.

At that moment, I woke up and it was all clear to me. I had to look for my father. But Morocco was a big country. I had no idea where to start.

---

## Chapter Seven

### The Ratali's

Is it supposed to be this easy? What seemed to be an almost impossible task ended up being nothing but a simple effort. A random conversation with Hassan's son was all it took for me to find out where my father might be. Mother told me that my father's last name was Ratali. Evidently, I decided to ask around and see if anyone was familiar with that last name. It turned out that the Ratali's were a known wealthy family in this country.

"They control half the economy here. They are everywhere, in politics, business, some say they are in the mafia too," Hassan's son said.

"Do you know a Ratali who had lived in America before?" I asked.

"America? I'm not sure. I wouldn't be surprised though, if I had that kind of money I would be living there too,"

Hassan's son didn't know much about that family but he took me to his friend who owned a local radio station in that village. "I'm sure my friend Saad will know," he said.

"Oh, I think one of the brothers, was exiled for a while. Maybe that's the guy who went to America," Saad said.

"Do you know where he went after his exile?" I asked.

---

"I'm pretty sure he went back to the Atlas Mountains. Most of the Ratali's live in the Atlas region,"

That was all I needed to know in order to start my journey. The Atlas Mountains were centrally located. If I couldn't find him there, at least I'd be close to other places in the area.

I didn't want to leave the desert; I've never felt as peaceful with myself as I have been here. But the desert did give me some clues. I got what I needed from it I suppose. Now I needed to go investigate and find out where those clues would take me. I had to go. I was eager to find out who this man was.

I packed my bags, thanked Hassan and his family for their lovely hospitality and started driving up north. Before I left, Hassan approached me privately and gave me a copy of the Qur'an as a gift. "This will protect you," he said.

Having to read an actual map the old fashion way instead of using modern technology was frustrating to say the least. There was no GPS signal in this remote area, so I had to stop frequently and make sure I was going the right way, or like Hassan called it, I had to now use the Moroccan GPS - stop and ask people for directions. Everyone was doing it here, so people were used to it. Everyone was more than willing to help and give directions. In a way, it was more efficient than our modern technology. People would tell you not only which was the fastest route to take, but also which was nicer, with less bumps and curbs, which way had fewer cops on the road, which rest areas to stop. I liked that much better than listening to a British voice on my phone telling me where to go. After all, there is no replacement to human interaction. At one point, there were about six or seven guys debating which road was better for me to take.

I kept driving, thinking, listening to music, stopping and asking for directions, checking out the scenery along the way. From the desert to the mountains, from the small freeways to the

---



big highways, it was all beautiful to me, new and different. I wanted to continue driving because I was anxious, excited. I was more eager to find out whether this was a good idea or not, whether I was going to regret ever coming to this country in the first place. Ignorance is bliss, I was doing fine without a father figure, why would it be any different now after I meet him? I don't need a father figure now. I needed it twenty, thirty years ago.

It was dark. All I could see was the blurry but bright lights of the cars coming the opposite way. My eyes were barely open. It was time for me to stop. There were no hotels and no signs of life. There was only darkness and the occasional cars driving on the other side. I was low on fuel. I only had a couple of bottles of water left. As much as I wanted to continue driving, my body was rebelling at that point; it was all it could take for the day. So I stopped on the side of the road, locked my car doors and fell asleep.

In the morning, I woke up to the noise of the sheep. A young shepherd was looking at me curiously as he was walking by, crossing the road with his sheep. He was probably wondering what this foreigner is doing sleeping in his car like that. I immediately got up, and got out of the car. I had no idea where I was. As I got out of the car, the most amazing view was right there in front of me. All this was dark last night, I had no idea I was driving through paradise. I was on top of a mountain, overlooking beautiful views. From there, I was looking down at the world with reverence. It was probably the best thing I've ever seen. There was no more desert. I was staring at a lush green land with mountains and trees, mostly cedar trees. I gazed in awe at the horizon, with different shades of green, open meadows and scattered homes. These must be the Atlas Mountains!

Luckily there was a town only a few miles away. It was a small town, rundown, with a lot of homeless people. This place gave me the creeps. I just had to do what I needed to do and get out

---

of there. I got to the nearest gas station there, filled up the tank and got some water and food. I asked the cashier at the grocery store if he knew anyone by the last name of Ratali. He looked at me weird, chuckled and walked away. He made me feel silly asking that question.

I decided to do it Moroccan style, everything here seemed to be done in cafés. So I looked for the busiest café in the city center, walked inside and ordered a Moroccan tea. I could tell this place didn't get many tourists, everyone was staring at me as I sat down. It felt uncomfortable. I obviously did not look like one of the locals. Plus, it didn't help that I was driving a sixty thousand dollar Range Rover. This was when humbleness could've done me some good.

"I'm looking for Ratali," I told the server as he approached my table bringing me a tall glass of mint tea.

He was caught off guard. "Ratali? Which one?"

I should've known that question will come up. The Ratali's were a big family. I'll have to be more specific. Mother never told me his first name. I didn't know what else to say about him. "The father," I said randomly. I didn't want to look hesitant.

"The father? Okay, which father?" the server then asked.

"Saif!" I said. I just realized in my dream, Medmelek called me Eddy Son of Saif!

"Oh, yes. I've never met that Ratali before. I don't think anyone knows who he is or what he looks like. But one of his sons, I think his name is Yassin, he comes here on Tuesdays during the local market," the server replied and then walked away.

There was my first clue. I was heading in the right direction. I knew how to meet at least one Ratali, and I just confirmed that my father's first name was Saif. The only problem was that it was a Thursday and I had to wait until the following Tuesday to try and meet with this Yassin guy.

---

I was thinking about what to do until then while drinking my tea. “Damn this tea is good,” I said to myself out loud. My tea experience in this country kept getting better and better.

I didn’t even know what this small craggy town was called. I asked the same server again about the closest big city.

“Ifrane,” he replied. “It is big, touristic, and much nicer than this shit place,”

Ifrane was two hours away. After I finished my tea, I got back in the car and took off. This town I was in was the first place in Morocco that gave me the creeps. The way people were staring was very odd.

As soon as I hit the road, I noticed a car following me. I could see two guys driving an old Renault. This wasn’t good. Last thing I wanted was to be followed. I was clearly driving a much faster car than they were. So I started speeding through the curves on the road in attempt to lose them. It was easier than I thought, a few minutes later, driving closer to a speed of a hundred miles per hour; I could barely see them behind me. I was looking back to assess where they were, I then looked in front of me and realized I was running into an ambush. There were big rocks lined up on the road ahead. It was too late for me to stop or move my car around to avoid those rocks. My Range Rover swerved out of control as it hit the large rocks. I didn’t even have time to realize what was happening before the air bags hit my face. The car had flipped several times. I had become disorientated before I even sustained the concussion that had me drifting in and out of consciousness. All I could remember before I passed out was the two men coming to rescue me out of the car.

---

## **Chapter Eight**

### **A New Family**

I was in darkness, emptiness, nothingness. I was fading in and out of consciousness. I was struggling to understand what my surroundings were. What I was in relation to where I was. Nothingness is still a thing, darkness still fills a void somehow so I must be somewhere – there is no such thing as emptiness. I was filling some sort of space whether physically or otherwise. But this space remained unknown. Time was also unknown. As I couldn't identify a physical location, I couldn't identify how time was moving in relation to the space I was in. I had no indication as to how long I have been here. It could've been a split of a second or a hundred years.

My eyes have been closed, my senses all shut down. I was or I was not – still in existence. Every time I felt like I gained consciousness I tried asking myself some simple questions about my being. I tried to keep whatever sense of awareness I had, but it didn't last that long. I quickly went back to that previous state of blankness.

I saw a bright light. It quickly appeared then disappeared. I heard a noise – a vibration of some sort, but it only lasted for a short moment. I saw the bright light again. It kept getting brighter and brighter. The vibration noise intensified. Then all of a sudden, just like that, I

---

realized that I had my eyes wide open. I was wide awake. I found myself staring at the ceiling. I was panicking – wondering where I was. I knew I was no longer in darkness. I transitioned somewhere else. Last tangible thing I remembered was that I got into an accident. I thought I was dead. I kept my eyes open for a few seconds, and then I transitioned back to darkness.

“Hey wake up pretty boy!”

“Hey! Are you alright?”

That was all I heard as I was attempting to regain my consciousness. My head was pounding, my whole body was aching. I was disoriented.

“We’ll be back, get your beauty sleep homeboy,” I then heard someone say.

I finally opened my eyes after a while. This time it lasted more than just a few seconds. A bright light was all I could see. Then a little by little, as the light started losing its brightness, I started seeing a face of an angel. She had the prettiest face I’ve ever seen. She represented all that was angelic, divine and beautiful. She smiled at me.

“How are you feeling?” she asked.

“Eh, am I in heaven?”

It felt like I was in heaven indeed. Every time I get exposed to such female beauty, I feel like I’m in heaven – like I’m in the presence of the divine, I get to admire God’s creation up and close. What a beautiful surprise it was – to open my eyes and see a face like that. I couldn’t stop gazing, admiring her beauty. Her face was perfect. Her features were small and flawlessly connected - her nose, lips, brows and lashes. She was slim and graceful.

She laughed. “No you’re not in heaven. You’re at a hospital.”

“Oh,” I was disappointed.

“Yes, sorry no heaven here, but you should be just fine.”

---

“I got into a car accident didn’t I?” I just recalled.

“Yes, you did. You will feel a bump on your head for a while, and your body will be aching for a bit, but you should be okay.”

“So you just saved my life? I love you,” I said impulsively. “Marry me!”

She started laughing again, “You are still dealing with some post-concussion syndromes,” she said in a soft voice.

“No I’m completely cognizant of what I’m saying,” I responded. “What’s your name?”

“My name is Dr. Saldi”

“What’s your first name?”

She smiled gently. I could tell she was hesitant to tell me her first name.

“I just want to thank you for saving my life. Where I’m from, it is more personal when I call someone by their first name,” I said.

“Where are you from?”

“New York City. Have you been?”

She started chortling, “Yes I have been,” she said.

“What’s funny? Tell me!”

“Well, it’s a small world. I studied in the Weill Cornell Medical College in New York!” she said excitedly.

“No way! What a small world indeed, I live in Tribeca, not too far from there.”

As she was about to tell me her first name, a couple of guys walked into the room. She got all serious and said “Ok sir, well, that is all for now, you will be getting some medication to take for your pain. Other than that you are all set,”

“Can we get some extra pain medications?” one of the guys said jokingly.

---

She ignored him and kept walking away.

I recognized those two guys right away. They were the same guys who were following me earlier. I was uneasy as they got close to me.

“How are you feeling buddy?” one of them asked.

“I’m okay, considering you guys tried to kill me!” I said.

“What? Nobody tried to kill you,” the other one said as he got closer.

“Back off,” I yelled. “I’m one of the Ratali’s, you don’t want to do this,” I had to say something to get them to step back. I was physically too weak to try and defend myself in case they tried to attack me for some reason.

Their facial expressions completely changed as I said that. They looked at each other all confused.

“But how come you were asking for the Ratali’s earlier?”

“Don’t worry about that, I am Saif Ratali’s son,” I responded firmly.

“Go call Yassin,” one of the guys then told the other.

“Okay, so I want you to understand what happened,” the guys said to me in an apologetic tone. “We were trying to find out why you were asking for the Ratali’s. We did not put those rocks on the road.”

“But who did?” I asked.

“Thieves,” he replied. “That road is known for having a lot of thieves. They put rocks on the road. You, as a foreigner, see the rocks, you stop and try to get the rocks out of the way, and they come and steal your car. That’s it!”

“Why were you following me then?”

“As I told you, we wanted to find out who was asking for the Ratali’s!”

---

“You work for them?”

“Yes I work for one of the sons.”

The other guy then walked back to the room. “Yassin will be here in twenty minutes.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Two hours later, a guy walked into the room. I assumed it was Yassin. There was an odd resemblance between us. In some strange way, I could tell we were related. He was a tall guy, athletic, with dark hair. There was something a little hippy-ish about him, from the way he dressed to his faintly long hair and coarse beard. He smelled like cigarettes, cologne and alcohol – the way people smelled like at bars.

“Yassin Ratali, and you are?” he said with confidence as he reached out to shake my hand.

“Eddy” I responded.

“Eddy who?”

“I’m Saif Ratali’s son. I’m from America. I came here to look for him,”

He didn’t seem surprised at all. “Okay, yeah he told me about that once. He has two sons there right?”

“Where is he? How can I meet with him?” I asked.

“So you just show up like this, unannounced? How can I tell you’re really his son?”

“I don’t have to prove anything to you. I just want to meet this man. If you can’t help me that’s okay, I’ll do it on my own.”

“You know that’s my father we’re talking about. It’s not every day that you get someone who basically says he’s your step brother. I need to make sure you’re the right person.”

---



“I understand, and it’s not every day that you try to meet your father who abandoned you when you were three years old!”

He was quiet for a few seconds. “Okay, fair enough. Get dressed. Let’s go for a ride,” he then said.

“I’ll have to check with the staff here, make sure I’m okay to be released,”

“I already did. Just get ready and meet me outside,” he said as he was exiting the room.

I didn’t like his demeanor. I was apprehensive to just follow without asking questions. But I had to go with it. I needed him more than he needed me. He was my only option at that point.

As I left the room, I asked a nurse about Dr. Saldi. She told me her shift was over and she had already left for the day. I was disappointed. I wanted to see her again. I wanted to at least get her first name. I felt something distinctive during my short encounter with her earlier – I had to see her again. This time, I’m not going to wait and see if the universe crosses our paths again, I will do all that is in my power to make it happen, I told myself.

As I came outside, Yassin was standing by the door wearing aviator sunglasses and smoking a cigarette. He had a certain swag about him. I think I didn’t like him because he reminded me of myself. Or at least he reminded me of how I used to be a few years ago. We were both alphas. A level of competitiveness erupted right away.

“Let’s go, my car is in the front,” he said as he pointed at a brand new BMW.

“Nice!” I said.

“Your rental car got towed after the accident by the way. We called the rental company to tell them to go pick it up,” he said.

“Do I need to do anything on my end?”

“No, we got you covered.”

---

His English was perfect. It sounded to me that he had a Boston accent.

I got in the car with him and took off. He was driving towards the city center. “Where are we going?” I asked.

“I’m showing you around town. Maybe we’ll go get something to eat?”

“Yeah, I’d rather go meet your father.”

“You mean your father?”

“Either way, I’d rather skip the whole wine and dine thing. You can do that next time you find out you have a sister.”

“Ha, okay, okay, I like that. Wine and dine! Hah,” he was laughing.

Traffic was barely moving. Suddenly, out of nowhere, two teenagers rushed towards the car window, one of them reached inside and snatched Yassin’s wallet which was on top of the dashboard. They were so fast, I could barely see the one boy’s hand as he stole the wallet and left. Yassin then left the car still running and started yelling at some guys walking by “Fucking thieves! Get them, don’t let them go!” The guys, who happened to be crossing the street at that time, ended up pushing the teenagers as they ran next to them. This slowed the young thieves down which allowed Yassin to catch up to them. He tackled the one kid who had the wallet. As he got on the floor, Yassin took back his wallet. He then pulled a gun from his back pocket and pointed it at the kid’s head.

“You try to steal from me you little punk?” Yassin yelled as he punched the kid. “Give me your wallet!” he yelled at the kid again.

“What?” The kid responded in a petrified state.

“Give me your fucking wallet!” Yassin yelled again. “You try to rob me, I fucking rob you!” he said.

---

The kid then reached to his pocket and pulled his wallet. Yassin snatched it from him, opened it, took all the cash and threw the now empty wallet back at the kid. Everyone there was silently watching as Yassin returned back to the car and continued driving. I sat there in the passenger seat waiting to see what he would say. He just kept quiet.

After a couple of minutes, he turned the radio on, and started moving his head with the music. He then turned to me and asked, "So! Can we go eat first? And then take you to your daddy? Are you hungry or not?"

"Sure, yeah I'm hungry, why not," I responded.

We went to a Shawarma restaurant in the city center. All the staff in the restaurant seemed to know Yassin. We got some food and talked for a bit. I told him about what I do in New York and how I got to Morocco.

"What a crazy story! So you basically ended up here because you didn't want to get framed with statutory rape? How funny," he said provocatively.

I didn't appreciate how he would try to demean me every chance he got. But I could understand his reaction. It was like a defense mechanism. In addition, it wasn't easy for him to deal with the fact that now he had an older step brother.

He then started telling me about himself. He told me that he handled our father's affairs and that he was the only one who could handle his affairs. "Father doesn't trust anyone expect me," he said.

"Listen, just so you know. I'm not here to take your spot, or to get anyone's money or anything," I told him firmly. "I just want to meet this man, find out what kind of person he is, have a conversation and go about my day,"

"Fair enough," he responded.

---

“So, how come you speak English like you’re from Boston or something?” I asked.

“Eh, well, it’s pretty simple. It’s because I was born in Ann Arbor,” he said while laughing.

“Michigan? Interesting, so how long did you live here?” I asked.

“I moved here when I was seven. Then I went back to Michigan when I was eighteen to go to college. Then I moved back here after college. It’s been seven years now,” he said.

Based on what he just told me, I assumed he was about twenty nine, thirty years old. I found that interesting since he was about the same age as my younger brother. I didn’t want to say anything though, I just continued on with our conversation.

“Which college did you go to?” I asked.

“University of Michigan”

“You have any other brothers and sisters?”

“Nope, I run solo,” he said.

After we finished eating, Yassin got all serious and said. “Alright look, I checked your ID earlier to verify that you are who you say you are.”

“And who did you check with to verify that? The FBI?” I said sarcastically.

“I checked with father, obviously he would know what your last name would be. You didn’t keep the Ratali name so it must’ve been your mother’s last name. Anyway, he said that he’s been expecting you to show up back into his life at some point. He is happy that you found him.”

“Oh, he’s happy I found him? Maybe he should be apologetic, surprised, shaken?” I said angrily.

---

“Hey, easy now! I’m just telling you what he said. Anyway, he is in South of France now. He asked me to take you there first thing in the morning. Meanwhile, we’ll get you a hotel for the night, you can relax and tomorrow, we shall begin our journey.”

\*\*\*\*\*

Next day, we took a private jet from Ifrane to Aix-en-Provence, France. We landed on a small private airport outside the city. It was a wonderful drive through the French country side on our way to Aix-en-Provence. I admired the beauty of the scenery. No wonder this region has inspired artists like Picasso, and Van Gogh. The landscape was simply exquisite. The sun was setting as we arrived at the charming southern French town of Aix-en-Provence.

We walked on curved sidewalks of crowded streets in the middle of the city. Even as crowded as it was, it was still a very different feel than New York City. You haven’t experienced the true crowds until you experience the crowds of the Big Apple. Overall, people were friendlier, more relaxed here – everything was moving at a slower pace. We continued walking around, then we turned on a constricted side street that wasn’t as busy. We stopped by and had few drinks at one of the smaller bars/cafés there. The building in front of us was framed by a series of columns and the picturesque slant roof line had me mesmerized. There was something unique about the ambience – the ambient light, the quietness of the street, a slight breeze blowing the leaves on the little maple tree at the edge of the sidewalk, the sidewalk tables and chairs themselves. This was a still life of an Aix-En-Provence night. I was appreciating this moment, as odd as it was, I actually enjoyed spending time with my young step brother. At the same time, I was more eager than ever to finally meet my father.

---

“So are we doing this?” I asked abruptly.

“Doing what?”

“C’mon, why are we here? Am I meeting him or not?” I asked annoyed.

“Yeah you are. We’re actually meeting him here. Then we’ll all go back to the estate.”

An hour went by. Time seemed to slow down drastically. A minute felt like an hour. I was getting anxious. I kept asking Yassin where father was. The anticipation was the worst part. Yassin, on the other hand, was on the phone for the majority of the time. He would make different phone calls, speaking in French then in Arabic. I kept ordering drinks, one after the other.

He finally got up “Okay, we’re meeting dad for dinner, let’s do this!” he said.

“I thought we’re meeting him here?”

“No, he’s waiting for us in Le Formal, it’s a very nice restaurant you’ll like it”

We took a cab there. Fifteen minutes later, we got to the restaurant. I was getting anxious. As we walked inside, an attractive hostess walked up to us.

“Ratali!” Yassin said.

“Welcome! Follow me please,” the hostess responded with excitement.

She walked us through the restaurant and took us to a private room.

“Father is waiting for us here!” Yassin said.

As the door opened, there he was, at the table, waiting for us to show up. His appearance alone was impressive, his posture, his mannerism. He stood up right away and reached to shake my hand. He was a fair few inches taller than me. He was in a good physical shape for a man his age. His well-groomed moustache and beard were silver-white. The piercing look in his eyes demanded respect from the first moment you met him.

“My son!” he said in a deep tone as he shook my hand.

---

\*\*\*\*\*

That moment was finally here. All my previous experiences have led me to this moment. It all made sense to me at that point - the dreams, the anxiety, the psychic, the cruise, the underage girl, the desert, the accident. It all led me to be standing in front of my father at a random restaurant in South of France. The universe, this hidden energy, this unseen force led me to connect with something, someone that was missing all my life. It might not be the main component that would help me achieve the balance of energies, but I am certainly a step closer.

---

**Framework.**

The story continues with the narrator getting to know his father and his step brother. He goes back to Morocco with them and ends up staying there for several months. During that time, Eddy ends up falling in love with Dr. Saldi, the doctor who was treating him at the hospital, her first name was Laila. He also finds out about his family business and the Symposium. The Symposium is a secret society of an elite group of people that his father belongs to. As secretive as it was, Eddy was able to find out more information about the secret society and that shed some light on the Ratali family business, and why his father left thirty years ago.

There is a resurgence of Claire as well. As the protagonist tries to make sense of his dreams that started reoccurring again. Claire was a big part of those dreams. Eddy was torn between staying with Laila or going back to New York and looking for Claire. He was torn between staying with his father and starting a new life in Morocco, or going back to the United States, to Wall Street and to his old life. The desert gave him clues before, so he goes back there again seeking to find new clues and new answers. As he was able to stay in the island in his dreams, he seeks Medmelek's advice as well. Finally, Eddy makes his decision which allows him to find a way to connect to both worlds. Only by fully embracing who he is that he is able to achieve the balance of energies.

The story ends with Eddy walking in the streets of New York. He is wearing a dark blue suit, similar to the one he was wearing in the beginning of the story. He suddenly stops in the middle of the street, looks up and sees that same billboard of the island again. He has a confused look as he questions whether all he experienced before was real or not. He then smiles subtly and continues walking.

---



Mehdi Taifi

MLS Thesis – Research paper

Dr. Jana Mathews

December, 2015

The Alchemist and Magic Realism

Paulo Coelho's *the Alchemist* is a novel about a young shepherd from Andalusia, Spain named Santiago and his journey through North Africa searching for a treasure. The main character, Santiago, embarks on a journey of a lifetime following the vision from a recurring dream and his personal legend. *The Alchemist* inspired me while writing my novel, *Symposer's Dream*. The one aspect that inspired me the most is Coelho's magic realism style narrative. As a narrative technique, which mixes reality and fantasy, I found it a very effective way to increase the dramatic aspect of my story while keeping a realistic plot that any reader could relate to. This style of writing impacted me even more because I was raised in a culture where certain beliefs and practices echo the very beliefs and practices that magic realist writers in general, and Paulo Coelho in particular, have utilized in order to come up with their idiosyncratic stories. My goal in this paper is to dig deeper into the precepts of magic realism style narratives and to delve more deeply into the way in which those precepts are used by Coelho to create such an impressive story, as well as how I incorporated some of those same precepts in my novel in an effort to produce similar results.

First, it is important to understand what magic realism is. Matthew Stretcher describes this style of narrative in his article *Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki* as "what happens when a highly detailed, realistic setting is invaded by something too strange to believe" (Stretcher, 267). So, simply put, it is a narrative style of

---

writing that depicts magical components as ordinary elements in an otherwise realistic world.

The terms are broadly descriptive rather than critically rigorous. In his article *What is Magical Realism, Really?* Bruce Holland Rogers gives a very encompassing definition of magic realism when he gives the following answer to his own question:

It is, first of all a branch of serious fiction, which is to say, it is not escapist... Magic realism is not speculative and does not conduct thought experiments. Instead, it tells its stories from the perspective of people who live in our world and experience a reality different from the one we call objective. (Rogers, 1)

The main point here is that a magic realist writer grounds his writing in the lives of people who have their own specific world views, their religious beliefs and their superstitions. Rogers goes even further to say that magic realism is always serious and never escapist unlike science fiction or fantasy. This is all the more true because the truth aspect of this style of writing is essential. As it brings up real life experiences and characters, the reader is more inclined to view the story as truthful and thus the events in it more relatable. In line with this view, Alejo Carpentier defines magic realism as:

The marvelous real which comes into existence in an undeniable way when it is born from an unexpected change in reality (a miracle), or from an enhanced revelation of reality, or from an illumination which is unusual or singularly able to reveal the hitherto unnoticed richness of reality. (qtd. in Hart, 306)

I agree with Carpentier when he states that the “marvelous real” or magic realism is not simply a literary fabrication. He further states:

---

As a tool, magical realism can be used to explore the realities of characters or communities who are outside of the objective mainstream of our culture. It's not just South Americans, Indians, or African slaves who may offer these alternative views. (qtd. in Hart, 310)

This is a significant distinction and is clearly apparent in Paolo Coelho's narrative in *the Alchemist*. In fact, Coelho's fiction uses the technique of magical realism as part of telling the story of the protagonist and as a way to foreground the impact of the changes he undergoes in his personality and the way it impacts the people he encounters during his journey. It presents them with a singular quality, thus promoting the notion that each of us is destined for greatness, and that it is up to each one of us to search the reality around us until we finally discover where our fortune is.

In my view, even the title of Coelho's book is quite revealing in both its content and its genre of magic realism. In fact, if we look into the definition of the words "alchemy" and "magic realism" we will find a direct correlation between the two. The Merriam-Webster dictionary gives the following definition:

The defining objectives of alchemy are varied but historically have included one or more of the following goals: The creation of the fabled philosopher's stone; the ability to transmute base metals into the noble metals (gold and silver); and development of an elixir of life which would confer youth.

Both the belief of the alchemist in alchemy and magic reality converge into one end, one goal, which is reached only through hardships, frustration and persistence. The transmutation of

---

“base metals” into gold with a revelation of the elixir of life, in my view, parallels the magic realist’s enhanced revelation of reality.

In both alchemy and magic realism, the blend of the real and the fantastic is so forceful that the demarcation between the two is hard to pinpoint. In *the Alchemist*, the characters of Santiago, Melchizedek, the merchant and the gypsy woman all strongly believe in the effect of magic to transform the real and help the main character reach maturity and pursue his personal legend relentlessly. Therefore, Santiago, the protagonist of the novel, is soon able to interpret objective phenomena, rather than only dreams, as omens of future events. The mere sight of a hawk diving down endows him with a vision of danger and even of war -- he knows that the oasis will be attacked as though he were endowed with a supernatural power:

Suddenly, one of the hawks made a dive through the sky, attacking the other. As it did so, a sudden fleeting image came to the boy: an army, with its swords at the ready, riding into the oasis...he sensed that it was actually going to occur. (Coelho, 105)

Santiago’s vision turns out to be a correct premonition, which intrigues the inhabitants of the oasis who cannot fathom the fact that a stranger who recently came to the oasis would know about the desert more than they do. They wonder why the desert would “reveal such a thing” to a stranger when they have known it all their lives and thought they had always been able to communicate with it. But Coelho’s answer, through Santiago’s words, is: “because he precisely is new to desert life, he can see things that eyes habituated to the desert might not see,” (Coelho, 110). The real is so intertwined with the magic that it takes an unaccustomed eye to depict the magic in the real because the magical has become a fact of everyday life for the inhabitants of the desert. This idea that individuals are often unaware of the magic “staring them in the face and

---

need a nudge to see it” (Hart, 310) runs throughout the novel in various forms. Most significant of all is Santiago’s discovery of where his treasure is.

Like in *the Alchemist*, this blend of the real and the fantastic is very much a part of the *Symposer’s Dream* narration. In fact, many events in the story intertwine fiction and reality in such a way that it makes it challenging for the reader to determine which one is which. A primary example is when Eddy, the protagonist, has an encounter with Medmelek, a nine hundred year old bearded man he meets in his dream. From this first encounter, we can infer that this is a mere coincidence, and that however detailed and vivid this might have been, it is still nothing but a simple dream. But the fact that Eddy seeks to speak to Medmelek again and asks for his advice, and that Medmelek ends up telling him what his father’s first name is, makes us realize that there is more to Medmelek’s character than just someone appearing randomly in a dream. This example illustrates how the use of magic realism in my novel, *Symposer’s Dream*, helps link up the fantasy elements of the story with other realistic elements in such a way that makes it harder to distinguish between the two. I also believe that any fiction story can be more intriguing and more realistic when it is hard for the reader to decipher which part of it is fiction and which part is reality. This element of magic realism is one of the reasons why this style of narrative has become very popular.

Another important tenet of magical realism is that the universe wants one to follow his or her true path. In the introduction to his book, Coelho stresses the necessity of each one of us to be aware of our personal legend and to have the courage to pursue it despite the obstacles that we are bound to encounter along the way. He pinpoints five obstacles: outside pressure, love, fear of defeat along the way, fear of realizing our dreams, and feeling of emptiness as life becomes devoid of that enthusiasm that permeates our actions during the struggle to fulfill our personal

---

calls. Most of the characters in *the Alchemist*, at some point of their lives, do undergo the pressure of these obstacles. Some manage to move on due to the intensity of their awareness of and belief in their personal legend, some do not. The crystal merchant for example in *the Alchemist* renounces his dream of seeking Mecca even when Santiago has helped his business to thrive. He is one of those people who do not have the “the courage to confront their own dreams.” (Coelho, Introduction x)

This fear is also the feeling of guilt at the idea of getting what we want while others have failed to do so. But for Coelho, the more obstacles we overcome the more worthy of the joy we reap at reaching our dreams. Coelho puts his philosophy into an amazing story, in which the magical and the real blend so well. Santiago, the protagonist of *the Alchemist*, exemplifies both Coelho’s belief in the importance of believing in one’s personal calling and of having the courage to pursue that calling despite obstacles. Those obstacles are facts of life but they are enhanced with magical elements that foreground the characters’ s appeal and his persistence to an even higher degree.

At the outset in *the Alchemist*, we meet Santiago as an ordinary shepherd, going about his daily life, tending his sheep, sleeping on his jacket, and using his book as a pillow in an abandoned church, yearning to see the merchant’s daughter he met the year before, and selling his wool. But even the realism of the opening pages is tainted with some mystery, as the girl is intrigued by the shepherd’s ability to read and as her eyes “went wide with fear and surprise” (Coelho, 6) at his recounting of his travels. The description of Santiago’s visit to the gypsy woman is detailed, and as a matter of fact, so is his visit to the market and his trading of his book on a hot summer day. But soon the fantastic infiltrates the real when an old man with strange clothing makes his appearance and claims to be the king of Salem. Ironically enough, he believes

---

in the pursuit of personal legend and rejects the greatest lie “which is that at a certain point in our lives, we lose control of what is happening to us” (Coelho, 6). We are right in the middle of the magical, the inexplicable even, and as the old man strikes the exact note that drives the young boy’s urge to travel, which is to follow that ‘personal legend’ which, by coincidence or “magic”, happens to be the moral of the book Santiago had picked at the market. Shocked, awed and intrigued by so many coincidences coming from the realm of the unreal, the boy is driven to ask for more and more insight into that realm:

None of what the old man was saying made much sense to the boy. But he wanted to know what the “mysterious force” was. The merchant’s daughter would be impressed when he told her about that. (Coelho, 6)

Despite all the philosophical and the incomprehensible comments the boy hears, he remains down to earth with his main concern, which is how to impress the merchant’s daughter, thereby rejecting what could deviate him from that dream and his treasure. The mystery of Melchizedek’s appearance does not impress him even when it is clearly put forth for him as something out of the ordinary: “Sometimes I appear in the form of a solution or good ideas. At other times, at crucial moments, I make it easier for things to happen” (Coelho, 24). It is indeed a crucial moment in Santiago’s life as he is about to abandon his dream. But he finds this strange rather than magical. At this point, Coelho also reveals one of the tenets of magic realism which is that the universe wants those who follow their true path to succeed and when they want something, “all the universe conspires in helping to achieve it” (Coelho, 23). He further explains that, in order for people to succeed, they need to take an active role in pursuing their dreams and act on lessons learnt. This is the function of the old man’s appearance who tries to teach Santiago

---

to speak the language of the world and penetrate its soul. The contrast between the boy's simplicity of thinking, of his life and his concerns of the moment and the complex world Melchizedek wants him to understand is both striking and captivating as it increases our eagerness to see at what point the boy's mind starts to open up to the other world - the world of the heart, the spirit and the soul. For now all he "wants is to travel, or marry the textile merchant's daughter". Melchizedek's role is to do just that. He wants him to learn that everything in life has its price because he sees himself as one of the "Warriors of the Light".

This idea of becoming aware of our personal legend and having the courage to pursue it despite any obstacles that come our way is a central theme in *Symposer's Dream* as well. Eddy, the protagonist, like Santiago, tries to find meaning to his dreams and seeks to find answers along the way. From the very beginning of the novel, we are right in the middle of the magical as the narration begins with Eddy having the ark dream, surviving the storm with other animals and seeing the island. This becomes the catalyst for the change to come. Because of his dreams and his desire for change, Eddy decides to leave and start seeking new experiences in order to find meaning and a sense of fulfillment. Although he doesn't know what he is looking for at first, he realizes he has to go and look for whatever else the universe has to offer. He indeed tells us that he is on a quest for answers to unknown questions: "Here I was travelling by myself to a place I've never been before, seeking answers to unknown questions, escaping whatever was haunting me from the past" (Taifi, 27).

His desire to find answers by seeking solitude and trying to understand the meaning behind all his eerie and vivid dreams eventually leads Eddy to more meaningful findings. He becomes cognizant of the signs coming his way. For instance, seeing that island in his dream early on in the story, then on a billboard and on a TV commercial is a sign that Eddy can't

---



ignore. Days later, Eddy recognizes what he thinks is a good omen as he sees that same island while he is on his way to the psychic, and recognizes it as a sign to continue his quest. “On my way to the psychic, I saw that same island again on a billboard in Queens. This is a good omen, I thought to myself” (Taifi, 25).

Another sign that the universe conspires to help Eddy find answers is when he has an encounter with an underage girl in the Canary islands, which essentially causes Eddy to leave the island and end up in Morocco. Thus, in essence, it is this one encounter which ultimately leads to Eddy meeting his father. It is in fact a blessing in disguise. As we look back at all the chains of events that eventually led Eddy to Morocco, the encounter with Natalie, the underage girl, becomes a crucial part in the story. But at this point, Eddy does not know how this unfortunate event would eventually lead him to something greater and more meaningful. Nevertheless, he still realizes that this might be, yet again, another sign that he should not ignore. So after finding out that Natalie was only seventeen years of age, Eddy decides to leave the Canary Islands and head to Morocco since it is conveniently located just hours away across the ocean. “Maybe this was a sign that Morocco was where I needed to be. The psychic also mentioned that she saw a part of me in Africa. Maybe I was supposed to be in Africa instead of a cruise ship across Europe.” (Taifi, 35)

In this statement, Eddy recognizes that this is a sign that he is supposed to end up in Morocco. The psychic mentioned that she saw a part of him in Africa, and coincidentally enough Morocco is located in North Africa. Whether, he sees this as fulfilling the psychic’s prophecy or simply another coincidence, Eddy still is cognizant of what the psychic had said and considers it to be, yet again, another sign.

---

After making his way to Morocco and eventually meeting his father. The now wiser protagonist realizes the significance of following his intuition and not ignoring the signs that universe has sent his way:

All my previous experiences have led me to this moment. It all made sense to me at that point - the dreams, the anxiety, the psychic, the cruise, the underage girl, the desert, the accident. It all led me to be standing in front of my father at a random restaurant in South of France. The universe, this hidden energy, this unseen force led me to connect with something, someone that was missing all my life. (Taifi, 69)

Now, all the random coincidences suddenly make sense to Eddy. He realizes that he is supposed to end up in Morocco so he can finally meet his father for the first time. He realizes that all the random events and the experiences he has gone through were not so random after all. There were signs, omens, appearing throughout the story, and it finally all makes sense once he stands next to his father for the first time.

As a matter of fact, omens are another important factor of magic realism for Coelho and magic realist writers who have adopted this technique. In *the Alchemist*, Melchizedek cautions the boy that:

In order to find the treasure, you will have to follow the omens. God has prepared a path for everyone to follow; you just have to read the omens he has left for you... Don't forget the language of omens. And above all don't forget to follow your personal legend through to its conclusion (Coelho, 30).

The appearance of the butterflies right at that moment is an element of real life but it also pertains to the world of the unreal as it symbolize the first omen, a good one in Latin American

---

culture that Santiago knows very well. It is then an encouraging sign for him to go on. He will have to interpret the omens he encounters properly in order to move forward at crucial times of his quest. Other omens are the hawks that portend danger in the oasis. Santiago can now speak the language of the desert, and that helps him not to be tangled or killed in the raging wars between the tribes of the desert. He saves himself as well as hundreds of Arabs from death and he is even made counselor of the tribe he helped. The scarab beetle that Santiago finds at the pyramid is also a decisive omen as it shows him where to dig. The ordinary and the extraordinary are constantly blended throughout Santiago's journey and are determining factors in both his ability to reach the end point of his physical journey – The Pyramid in Egypt, and his emotional growth.

The magical imbues the real once more when Melchizedek gives Santiago two simple looking stones with magical powers named Urim and Thummim, one is black and one is white. These fortune telling stones will help Santiago by giving him a yes or no answer to his questions, but they are to be used only once because knowing too much about the future can become an obstacle as it can instill fear and causing discouragement. Santiago uses them only once, right when he is in dire need for it as he starts to be desperate and is about to give up on his personal legend. He is now gained to the cause of Melchizedek and is relieved to know from the stone that the old man has not abandoned him despite the fact that he is no longer with him physically. He now makes his own decisions but in light of the old man's teachings, he continues his journey through unfamiliar lands, which are described vividly with the eyes of a more mature and experienced Santiago. He has now, himself, become part of the chain of things, "the Maktub, that which is written" (Coelho, 61), the blessing and the omen of prosperity to the merchant on whom he has imposed himself. Coelho tells us that "he {Santiago} was proud of himself. He had learned

---

some important things, like how to deal in Crystal, and about the language without words... and about omens.” (Coelho, 67)

So, the mere sight of an old man complaining about the lack of places to have a drink at the top of the neighboring hill is recognized by Santiago as a good omen and, therefore, as part of the mysterious chain. In fact, from this simple fact, Santiago finds an opportunity to change the merchant’s life as well as his own. He urges the merchant to expand his business by selling tea in crystal glasses and manages to go a step forward in his pursuit. The magic of his appearance in the life of the merchant, right when he has given up all hope to expand his business is, I believe, parallel to that of Melchizedek in Santiago’s life earlier. The merchant’s reaction is however more revealing of his standpoint - he remains reluctant to put in any kind of effort to move forward despite all the possibilities laid out for him:

Today, I understand something I didn’t before; every blessing ignored becomes a curse. I don’t want anything else in life but you are forcing me to look at wealth, and at horizons I have never known ... I don’t want to do so. (Coelho, 60)

The final section of part two of *The Alchemist* is replete with examples of magic realism. Santiago meets the alchemist, is able to speak to his heart, the desert, the wind and the sun, and penetrates the soul of the universe. Following the alchemist’s directives, he convinces the sun and the wind to conspire to help him escape the wrath of the Arab men who take them for spies. He manages to convince the tribal chiefs that he is an alchemist. The episode where he is transformed into the wind undeniably belongs to the realm of the magical.

These examples are all vital components for any magic realism narrative. Similar to *The Alchemist*, the narrative in my novel *Symposer’s Dream* attempts to take on similar techniques and adopts a similar narrative style. In addition, like Paulo Coelho himself, I come from a society

---

where many cultural beliefs and fantasies echo the same fantasies that realist writers use in order to come up with their stories. In fact, I come from a culture in Morocco that is heavily influenced by other neighboring cultures such as Spain and Portugal. Having similar cultural elements to Latin American cultures, I find it that both Coelho and I share similar cultural views and beliefs about the magical and the fantastic. As such, the existence of fantasy elements in such cultures can certainly offer the basis for magical realism. This, in turn, can be reflected in the style of writing an author would choose. As Dr. Clark Zlotchew states in *Varieties of Magical Realism*: “Writers do not invent new worlds but reveal the magical in this world.... In the binary world of magical realism, the supernatural realm blends with the natural, familiar world.” (Zlotchew, 15)

Magic realism writers indeed do not invent a completely new fictitious world, but take elements from their real world and add more to it. Not only the fantasy aspect is reflected, but so is the socio-political aspect since an author’s writing can also be a reflection or a statement about his or her country's reality.

In short, I find magic realism to be a very effective way to increase the theatrical aspect of any fiction story while keeping a more lifelike, realistic plot. This, in turn, helps the reader relate more to the actual story and be more engaged in it. Having read many magic realist novels, I have adopted a similar style of writing while working on my own novel, *Symoser’s Dream*. In addition, similar to other Latin American writers, coming from a culture that is filled with fantasy elements helped my resolution to use magical realism. That is why one of my favorite magic realism novels is Paolo Coelho’s *the Alchemist*. Like Santiago, the protagonist in *the Alchemist*, Eddy, the protagonist in *Symoser’s Dream*, goes through a journey where the ordinary

---

and the extraordinary are constantly merged. Notions like omens and pursuing one's personal legend are very much a part of the journey that both Santiago and Eddy undertake.

Both stories are filled with components of magic realism, which, I believe, is a reflection of the author's upbringing and beliefs. In *the Alchemist* for instance, Coelho's philosophies are beautifully articulated in a thrilling story in which the magical and the real blend perfectly. Santiago, the protagonist of *the Alchemist*, exemplifies both Coelho's belief in the significance of believing in one's personal legend and the importance of having the courage to pursue that personal legend regardless of the difficulties that one may face. Those difficulties are drawn from every day facts of life but they are heightened and intensified with new magical and supernatural components. In this paper, I attempted to dig deeper into these magical components, and dig even deeper into the way in which Coelho specifically was able to create such a remarkable story by using the principles of magic realism. I have also attempted to use these same principles in my novel *Symposer's Dream*.

---

## Works Cited

- Coelho, Paulo. "The Alchemist" San Francisco: Harper San Francisco. 6<sup>th</sup> edition. (1998)
  - Taifi, Mehdi. "Symposer's Dream". Rollins College, Hamilton Holt School. MLS Thesis – Creative project. 2015
  - Hart, Stephen M. "Cultural Hybridity, Magical Realism, and the Language of Magic in Paulo Coelho's the Alchemist" *Romance Quarterly*, Volume 51, Issue 4. (2004)
  - Dr. Zlotchew, Clark. "Varieties of Magical Realism" New Jersey: Academic Press ENE, p. 15. (2007)
  - Rogers, Bruce H. "What Is Magical Realism, Really?" *Speculations* article, writing-world.com. (2002)
  - Stretcher, Matthew C. "Magical Realism and the Search for Identity in the Fiction of Murakami Haruki" *Journal of Japanese Studies*, Volume 25, Number 2 pp. 263-298 (Summer 1999)
  - Bowers, Maggie Ann. "Magic Realism" New York: Routledge. (November 4, 2004)
-