

Dust storm in Jericho

Then the Lord answered Job out of the storm, out of the whirlwind.

My ears ring with the howls of the winds,
the fury that rips down the spine of Jericho.
Is it from here—possibly the lowest point on earth—
that the east winds are stored
to be summoned, scattered over the ancient earth?
Is it here in this mortar of stones
that the living, the dead, the alien
are ground to nothing by unseen pestle?



Nomads struggle with herds; their black goats are mere dots.
Broods bleat; bells blast in gritty hysteria;
shepherds slant, wrapped in wind, trapped in swirling robes,
feet falter. The way out of Jericho has been concealed.

My face cracks like a potsherd; my tears evaporate;
my matted braids knot and tangle in my red bandana.
This earth does not belong to such as me.
Far-flung and barefoot, I push the weight of my entire being
in vain. Trumpets blast in my ears
while into the vortex I go spinning spinning spinning
Soon I will be dead.

Have I brought the end to myself?
Or have I been escorted to this very moment of truth,
to this end of the beginning, or this beginning of the end?
Is it for purpose or revenge that this precipice, this edge is before me?
Is it true that the only way out is through a house on the wall?

Some wager. He holds all the cards.
The winds he holds in his fist; there is nothing I hold in mine.
My flesh? Dust. His clouds? Vapor. His feet? Somewhere above my head.
I cling to a palm tree. Eyes? Slits. Tear ducts? Stone.
Body? Clay wrapped in rags. Strength? Vanished.
Pride? Never had any that wasn't false.
Spirit? Like all the others, scythed in Jericho.

Life is mashed by cudgel, ground to its essence:
grain and stubble, wheat and chaff.
The good and the useless, the sheep and the goats
stand saved or damned in the valley of dust.
I can almost feel the walls of Jericho coming down, coming down.

Fighting for your life gets you packing,
and suddenly I am a Bedouin with satchel
looking for Rahab's house on the wall
where the stacks of flax and roof tiles are flying.
Where is that red cord in that damned window?
Where is that blazing red thread hanging from a whore's window?

No one has ever seen the wind, and my ears only vaguely heard of *You*.
You I have yet to see.

Well then. Prepare the battle. The last battle will be my flesh:
Climbing, fighting hand-to-hand, gasping, clawing, choking,
crawling, screaming bloody murder to the end of my self
until bloody I grasp for Rahab's scarlet cord,
and latch on to *You* with the full weight of my being
and grab *You* with my stained and calloused hands.
I lost. I am ready to die in your everlasting arms
so the alien can be reborn, be found at home, and fed with text.
For the alien has lived to see the wind in the storm.

In every dust storm in Jericho it happens all over again.
To make a lasting point, I suppose, to keep the story from getting too dusty.
Your walls come tumbling down, down, down.
Fires crackle in the swirling howl
over the edge and down below
in the dust clouds, in the broken bowl of your own Jericho.

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