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# Outside are the dogs

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*(excerpt in English)*

MAN

Are you talking about interviews?

WOMAN

I see. I guess you have your sources as well.

MAN

Mutual friends. People who know what you're up to.

WOMAN

Did you know Fatima had died?

*He nods. The WOMAN drinks a sip of wine. She seems to be paying attention to some inner thought she is trying to bring under control. He too drinks some wine and tries to ride his own tiger.*

MAN

I've never enjoyed those bloody interviews.

WOMAN

What did they tell you about me?

*Pause.*

MAN

I've got friends in the press. In the media.

WOMAN

Friends in the media. Right.

*Pause.*

MAN

They told me that you're going to be interviewed in a few days. Not just any old interview. Something the whole country will see. Prime time TV. On that programme everyone watches.

WOMAN

Audiences only listen. That's both the good and the bad thing about them.

MAN

They also give their opinion. They listen to you and then they give their opinion. And depending on what you say, they judge you. They copy you, disapprove of you, admire you, worship you, condemn you. In front of the audience, you become public property.

WOMAN

Every public confession involves some degree of violent scrutiny.

MAN

The need to impose a narrative.

WOMAN

My lips will be moving but I won't be saying anything. Like at a beauty contest.

MAN

There's always been *something* about you that I've really liked.

WOMAN

*Something* about me?

MAN

Your ability to hide yourself. To be elusive.

WOMAN

I'm not sure how to take that.

MAN

It's a compliment.

WOMAN

A compliment? Are you sure?

MAN

The fact that people only know about you to the exact degree you want them to. Not a fraction more. Not a fraction less.

WOMAN

I'm not sure I can really see that as a compliment.

*Pause. Some compliment, she thinks to herself.*

MAN

You're not the confessing type.

WOMAN

I'm not?

MAN

I like that about you. Why the hell should we have to confess? To disclose the most private aspects of our lives. I find it disgusting.

WOMAN

Ultimately, when confessing it doesn't matter what the sin is.

MAN

What is it that matters then?

WOMAN

The only thing that matters is that the person confessing accepts that they've sinned.

MAN

Look, it's a really big interview. The guy who's going to sit down with you, he's interviewed prime ministers, heads of state, important religious leaders. The last interview I saw him do was with/

*She interrupts him.*

WOMAN

Who cares! Why are you even worrying about this? Think of it as a public performance. Another opportunity to play a role.

MAN

A performance. Right, right. Yeah, of course it is.

*Long pause. They look at one another, but don't hold each other's gaze. Perhaps their conversation is also a kind of performance. She breaks the silence.*

WOMAN

Ten years. It made sense, meeting up again. A decade later. Eating some grotesquely overfed duck and drinking wine with some philosopher's name on the bottle.

MAN

A philosopher that I can't remember a single quote from right now.

WOMAN

Have you got your phone on you? *(The MAN nods.)* Google it.

*The MAN takes his phone out of his jacket. He types something.*

MAN

OK. So I typed in "Rousseau quotes". Here's a website giving us up to ninety-five of them. Which one do you want?

*She drinks a little from her wine glass.*

WOMAN

Just pick a random one.

MAN

OK. Let's see. "To be an adult is to be alone."

WOMAN

That's so true. Let me choose one.

*She asks for the phone and he hands it to her. She chooses a quote.*

Mine is longer: "Of all animals, man is the least suited to live in herds. If made to huddle like sheep, he would very soon perish. Man's breath is fatal to his fellow beings."

*She hands him back the phone.*

MAN

What a fucker that Rousseau is. "Man's breath is fatal to his fellow beings."

*Long pause. The MAN brings a piece of magret to his mouth.*

You know, as delicious as this *magret* is, I want to be totally transparent with you. As well as wanting to see you again after all these years, my plan tonight was to have dinner and then invite you for some fantastic G&Ts at a place I know.

WOMAN

You want to get me drunk?

MAN

I'll keep going with the honesty. Honesty as the cornerstone of our conversation, right? We'll be honest with each other. I want you to meet someone. A woman I'm dating.

*The WOMAN doesn't seem too surprised.*

Tell me something. You know who she is, don't you? Be honest now.

## VII

*The WOMAN gets up and crosses the stage. The MAN exits. The WOMAN arrives at FATIMA's studio. She enters and switches a lamp on. There's a large table, a chair, and an easel that is covered by a piece of cloth.*

*There are some books scattered on the floor as well. Through a large window we can see a city all lit up.*

WOMAN

I hadn't been in here since she died. I kept the door shut and would just walk past it in the corridor. Often as I'd pass by, I'd caress the door gently with my fingers, as if giving a sign of affection. As if she could somehow see me. *(Pause.)* We liked looking at the city as night fell.

*FATIMA enters. She sits on the floor. She is not wearing the hijab. Unless it's explicitly mentioned, from this point onwards she will only wear a small silk scarf on her head.*

We would sit here and look out this window. She'd put a little rug on the floor. She'd ask me to go and buy some dates. "I'll get the tea ready," she'd say.

FATIMA

Why don't you like dates?

WOMAN

I don't like them, they're too fattening.

FATIMA

Get half a kilo and I'll make us some mint tea. We'll stay here and watch the sun go down. See the city light up.

WOMAN

She liked to see the lights come on in the buildings.

FATIMA

Lights in people's houses. Those lights remind me that there's life in there. Nowadays, if you open the fridge, you'll definitely have more light from that alone than most houses had in the 18th century. Do you realise that? Too many people have lived in darkness for years. Before the arrival of electricity, they had to make do with gas lamps, or candles. They got used to the dark. To looking around at everything, but seeing nothing. Trying to catch a glimpse of things, feeling your way around by touch, working out what's around you. That's why I love watching the lights come on in people's houses. *(Long pause.)* Dates aren't all that fattening.

WOMAN

Dates remind you of Fez.

FATIMA

I get the feeling that they make time stop. When I eat dates, they take me back to my childhood. For Proust, it was a madeleine. For me it's a date.

WOMAN

I didn't dare go into her office. I don't know. Maybe it was because it would have been like going into some sort of freefall.

FATIMA

I'd like to be one of those people who think that happiness is waiting for them, at some point in the future. Who can keep going because they believe that something good is going to happen. Those people who live as if that's guaranteed. Who follow the trail of happiness like you might follow footsteps in the snow.

*The WOMAN looks at some books on the floor. She picks them up.*

WOMAN

You never really believed.

FATIMA

Neither did you. Everything involving religion is probably toxic, that's what you used to say.

WOMAN

But in her last few days she asked me to get her a Qur'an from some charity shop. It was an absurd suggestion, but I did whatever she asked. After coming back from the hospital, she barely had the energy to leave the house. Why from a charity shop?

FATIMA

Because it's cheaper.

WOMAN

No. Later on you admitted that wasn't the reason.

FATIMA

I want to see if any parts have been highlighted. I'm curious to see which bits people underline.

WOMAN

I couldn't find a single Qur'an in any charity shop, Fatima.

FATIMA

A Bible will do. Or something like that.

WOMAN

The only thing I could find was the Book of Revelation.

FATIMA

The Book of Revelation. Are things looking that grim?

*The WOMAN laughs.*

WOMAN

Don't be silly.

FATIMA

Is it from a charity shop?

WOMAN

Yes. I got it in a charity shop.

FATIMA

Great. I'll have a look at the parts that have been underlined.

WOMAN

There were no parts underlined. That was why, before I got home, I sat in a café and flicked through it. Pencil in hand, I underlined a few verses myself.

*The WOMAN picks up a book from the floor. She flicks through it and then reads a bit.*

“Outside are the dogs, the sorcerers, the immoral, the murderers, the idolaters, and all who love and practice falsehood.”

*The WOMAN closes the book and puts it down on the table. She looks at the covered easel. FATIMA watches her, but the WOMAN, when she looks back at FATIMA, sees only a trace of the person she was. She knows she is dead. She holds her in her memory.*

For a while I was allowed into her office. Bringing dates and mint tea. The door was always open.

FATIMA

We’d sit and watch the sun go down and the city light up. Nobody wants to live in the dark, in pitch darkness.

WOMAN

The dark and the darkness are not the same thing.

FATIMA

Aren’t they? What’s the difference?

*Long pause. The WOMAN is thinking about something.*

WOMAN

That final month before she died, whenever I went to the door of her studio, I’d find it locked from the inside. “Open the door, Fatima. You mustn’t lock it,” I’d say. It made me angry.

FATIMA

I’m fine. I’m painting a picture and I don’t want you to see it until it’s done.

WOMAN

She asked me to give her some time to herself, every day, so she could paint. I would leave the tea and dates outside the door.

*FATIMA approaches the WOMAN. She kisses her. They kiss. They embrace.*

FATIMA

Why is it so difficult for you to kiss and hug me in public? You only do it when we’re at home.

WOMAN

That’s not true.

FATIMA

A few days ago, when we were in that coffee shop. You came in and gave me a kiss. I realised that you felt as if every single person there was looking at us. Then, under the table, I tried to stroke your knee. I could feel how you were inching away. How you moved your leg, so that my hand couldn't reach it. *(Long pause.)* I often think you'd be happier living in the 18th century.

WOMAN

In the 18th century?

FATIMA

Yeah, living by candlelight. People got by at night, in the dark. You know why? Because they didn't know any different. But you and I/ We don't have to put up with such gloom. We mustn't accept living by candlelight, unprotected. Promise me. Promise me we won't.

*FATIMA exits.*

## VIII

*Once FATIMA has left, the WOMAN stares at the covered easel. She then walks across the stage and arrives at a bar. The MAN is waiting for her there. He is sitting on some kind of sofa, next to a small table with two gin and tonics. The WOMAN arrives and also sits down on the sofa. Music is playing in the background. Something jazzy, an instrumental. The WOMAN takes one of the glasses and drinks.*

MAN

So, she would take them? The pistachios and mint tea you left outside the door?

*The WOMAN nods but realises he said pistachios instead of dates. The MAN hasn't paid enough attention to what she's been saying. A sign of disdain on his behalf.*

What did she paint?

WOMAN

To this very day I still haven't looked.

MAN

I don't believe you.

WOMAN

I've no reason to lie to you.

MAN

What I mean is that, if it were me, I'd have looked out of curiosity.

WOMAN

Maybe I just don't want to see it.

MAN

Why not?

WOMAN

Because it would feel like an ending. A complete reset. For as long as I don't lift up that cloth, everything remains on hold. It's left open-ended.

*Long pause. She looks around at the bar they are in. She drinks.*

She once asked me what the difference was between the dark and the darkness.

MAN

Who did?

WOMAN

Fatima.

MAN

What a question.

WOMAN

The dark is the first thing you see when you look inside yourself. There is no light there. But then there's another kind of darkness, more impenetrable. And you have to go into that pitch darkness, into the darkness of yourself, if you want to find freedom and the truth. In what people call 'darkness' lies the possibility of enlightenment. In what the world calls 'ignorance' is where the beginnings lie of the path to discovery and knowledge.

*She drinks. She has something more to say. But she says it using someone else's words.*

"And what you do not know is the only thing you know. And what you own is what you do not own. And where you are is where you are not."

MAN

*(Looking at the WOMAN'S glass. Humorously.)* Are you sure we're drinking the same stuff?

WOMAN

Very funny. T. S. Eliot. *Four Quartets*.

*Pause. He wants to tell her something. Perhaps to make the WOMAN more pliable.*

MAN

She gets back today. She's coming here straight from the airport.

WOMAN

Who is?

MAN

My girlfriend.

WOMAN

You call her that? Your girlfriend?

MAN

What else am I going to call her?

WOMAN

Your partner.

MAN

That's almost as impersonal as some city beginning with the letter B. Given a choice between Baden-Baden and Rome, I'd go for Rome. Wouldn't you?

WOMAN

Agreed.

MAN

She's looking forward to meeting you.

WOMAN

She's much younger than you. So I understand.

MAN

"You're only as old as your heart feels."

*The WOMAN pictures his heart like a fossil.*

WOMAN

You'll leave her when you have to start wearing nappies again. Or you need a pacemaker. In your dotage.

MAN

I guess it'll be her leaving me. But you're getting ahead of yourself anyway.

WOMAN

I've heard about her.

MAN

What have you heard?

WOMAN

All sorts of things.

MAN

People are very indiscreet.

WOMAN

She's very *visible* in the media. Her statements on some issues.

MAN

What issues?

WOMAN

Climate change.

MAN

Oh, please. We're all going to die. Somebody's probably looking for cities to nuke as we speak. The next Hiroshima. A new Nagasaki.

WOMAN

Some city beginning with the letter B.

*They both laugh.*

They say we'll all be down the drain by 2050. That's not so far away. In thirty years it'll all be over. Global temperatures up by three degrees, melting ice-caps, floods, droughts. Game over.

MAN

It doesn't make sense to live like we do. Within a framework that predicts the end of the world, our mission should be to ignore the consequences of our actions. Just let it all go to hell.

*The WOMAN thinks: "Did he really just say 'our mission should be'?"*

WOMAN

I shouldn't do that interview.

MAN

I shouldn't order another gin and tonic.

WOMAN

I shouldn't ever eat duck *magret* again.

MAN

I shouldn't be getting married.

WOMAN

You're getting married?

MAN

Shit, it was meant to be a surprise.

WOMAN

You've been together for 18 months.

MAN

You are well informed. We're getting married this autumn. We'll be sending you an official invitation.