

The Half-life of Angels

"Abracadabra"

A voice calls out from the fireside as the damp kindling is finally brought to a golden life. The crackle and spit summon the crowds fleeing attention. Yet it was the word not the fire which wakes Josh from his half dream. You see in the beginning there were words. Like great ships on a cosmic sea they buffeted all of this to life. Or so he just dreamt.

Josh is huddled and cold like the rest of them he cups his hands. Following instructions from the one he calls Ransom to fend off the autumn chill he beats them together. A vain attempt to generate a friction and some warmth. He has always since a boy gone off into the strange trances. An undisciplined meditation that got him through being a junior doctor and nights in A&E.

Yet there is more to it than a rush of feeling. More than a shake into the waking world. You see he knows that word. Josh knows it as one of his words. One of those he has just found under all his sadness and contempt. From under the memories of family, yeshiva, Shoshanna, Medical School, Anna and all those labs they hid him away in. To find a cure. To find and answer. To free them from the coming dark age.

It is a word of power. A word which can change worlds. Bidding life into the universe and snuffing it out if said with the right diction. The right force of will. The right meaning. The right kind of conviction. The right kind of practitioner. It was a word he knew how to use. In the dread places of his mind he was concerned the only one that could. That no one but him in a wet cop of trees somewhere in the East Midlands. A word full of fear and doubt and rage. If that mattered much to the quick or the dead.

"You know that means to make in the image of him"

Josh says and somehow they are all listening. Since that Saturday night when he turned back the dead. When he stopped them rising with a pen and paper. He heard the day before this one, some of them talk about miracles and look at him with the same wishful action. Or was it horror. Is it because they think he has the answers. Or that there are any answers. He isn't sure.

He thinks there are no answers. There is no cure. There is no cavalry. That their children will die young. That long before that they will be poisoned by the many distresses the natural world has birthed. A world where modern human reason is no better than the logic of Bronze Age man. Every avenue, every area of medical and human biology vanishing as quickly as they were conceived. Beyond all of them with their 21st century technology.

"In the image of god"

He continued without thinking to stop. There is a pause. The pop of the timber is all that can be heard over their breathing. It is Trish that breaks it with a folk song. Grace joins not long after. The air thins around the campsite and Doctor Josh is called away because someone has opened their stitching. He does not talk about the dreams.

You see at this point the dreams had gotten worse. There were still lines of greying dead flesh walking the earth and behind them faceless things. A great tree that stretched to the heavens everlasting. The same tree over and over again. Some vast oak ringed in flaming Hebrew letters that he did not want to read. Of numbers, endless number making impossible equations. Lopping and surging and blistering into Joshes mind. Of a place without borders. Where Space and time is moving

beyond what is understood. A poetic nightmare which he could not escape. Or maybe did not want to escape.

Other things as well. Stories of a boy and his father. The child bound upon a mountaintop. A ram's horn and a convenient. Familiar yet the child dies this time. A third son. A forgotten son. He dies not at the hand of his father but someone else. Someone Josh knows. Someone Josh should not know. A woman that was not his mother. Not any of their mothers. Not even the Djinn, yet they may want it to be. For she is a woman with a sea serpents tails and eyes which eat young men's souls. She knows Josh sees her. She has not picked a side. She is watching and judging all.

In another he sees dancing Hasid's in a wooden hut. Deep in a lonely forest praying for thunder and lighting. He sees them like ghosts see the livings. Moving around to the songs as it drift up to be ferried to the host. Yet there are none. The voices are unheard. The angels are not about to listen and the demons to mock the supplication.

You see there is something else. Something vast. Something trying to tell him secrets. It is a fool's errand. It is not meant to be this way. Yet it will keep trying in hope that creation will yield if only for itself. Not just a word. Not just a hundred words. Something that has a story to tell. A secret to surrender. One not worth the blood it costs.

He thinks about this when he dresses a new bandage on Simeon. He think about it whiles he disinfects a wound on one the BBC crew members. When he asks Harvey to clean the scalpels before he returns. About how he wakes up from all of them the same. A rush of light. Trumpets over a black pool. A blast of sorrow in the chill of the moment. He remembers all of them. They stick to his mind's eye like burnt food on a badly scrubbed frying pan.

Time passes like a torrent and he returns to the laughter. He is back when the fire is roaring and his spot has not been taken. Just outside the smoke but right by the flame. To be watched? To be thanked? He doesn't know. He thinks he may never know. Yet we know better. We have been watching.