

It is cold, even for summer, this night in Jericho. The oldest city in the world, the tourist sign in English claims. I wish for some comforting arms or at least a cardigan as I wait. The stars are heavy and low in the sky, slung like a hammock, lazy that way. I crouch among the round white stones and wait, draw spirals in the powdery dirt with a stick. I told him not to leave me by myself here. He said he'd be right back. I wait and look at my red toenails shining through the confection dust.

A shadow flickers in the moonlight. "Peter says to come." He blocks out the moon and all I can see is his silhouette, the drape of his kafia and skirt. It is Habar. How could he know where Peter is? Standing up, dusting off my jeans and shaking out the pebbles from my sandals, I ask, "Where is Peter?" "Peter says to come," he repeats.

This really is intolerable. First he leaves me here all by myself and then he sends this teenage Arab boy I hardly even know to Come! "Where is he?" Habar does not answer, just turns and walks down the alley. I watch him go. He glances over his shoulder and gestures once. "Peter says to come." Resentfully I follow the boy. He stops at a blue bicycle propped up against the wall, steadies it and motions for me to get on. "Where?" He pats the handlebars. Gingerly I perch on the edge, make myself small, try not to touch his hands. He grins at me, a white-spaced grin, and shoves off down the cobbled road.

Unwillingly I slip back against his shoulder and laugh at the absurd picture we make. He peddles faster, the bike rattles furiously, my laughter echoes off the white plaster walls. The streets are empty, except for this Arab boy in skirts peddling as fast as he can with an American

woman in blue jeans on the handlebars. Our laughter going out to the stars.

the road gets smoother as it stretches out of the village into the country. i stop laughing and straighten up suddenly. the bike wobbles, almost falls over. where are we? my question just a whisper. habar puts his hand on my shoulder and says softly, come. peter. it's so dark there is no difference between the road and the night sky. no laughter now, just the swish of the tires on the pavement and the even, pumping breath of habar. he leans in closer and sniffs behind my ears, my neck. i can smell his spicy breath. cayenne and cloves. not unpleasant. the air is cool. i am floating, in a dream, no thought, no fear, just this.

my daddy says wait here sweetie i'll be right back it's hot in here i can't turn the handle only this triangle push it my face almost fits big cloud grey stink pee yew fat man with a cigar holding yip yip dog under his arm passing by my triangle filling up my air makes a mean sound growly sound looks at me fills my only triangle with smoke and growls

the bicycle stops at a hut by the side of the road habar gently takes my arm and helps me down a breeze lifts my hair and blows his white kafia we say nothing he motions for me to wait with the bike as he walks to the stone hut the door is open red curtains blouse across the entrance a man steps out of the billows smoking a thin graceful pipe habar speaks to him their faces are very close maybe they are brothers they are about the same height they have the same eyes habar sweeps his arm toward me and they stop talking

come i am confused should i bring the bicycle there is no kick stand should i lay it down habar looks at me impatiently pries the handlebars from my grip lays the bike down takes my elbow steers me to the door the other man holds the curtain back bows slightly
as i pass through