

# **ROUTE OF FLOWERS**

**A Collection of Parables**

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## Parable of the Flowers

*The Northern people had lived here, the South, for so many generations we'd lost count. They lived here in those good old sunny days — as they like to remember them today, nostalgically — before they lost and left.*

A woman from the South prays hard every day and every night for God to allow her to move to the North. This, she believes, will be good for her life. In her prayers, she asks, "Wouldn't it be the best to live in the North? They have four seasons — not like here, where we have only two. They have those special flowers described in the fairy-tales I read every night. Not like here. Here the flowers die from the heat. Even I find it hard to breathe — this air is diabolically suffocating."

Alas, God says no to her prayers. This makes her question, despairingly, if God is fair to her. All those hours she spent reading, all those days she spent writing, all those months she worked herself to her very bones — all those years she spent making herself a worthy expert. Poof!

Two years later, on a bright day — burning with heat, like any other day in the South — she encounters a blind man. He sits on a stool, under a skeletal tree, besides wares that he sells. Around his feet, grass and weeds grow and thrive — flourishing.

She is puzzled. "How odd — the grass and flowering weeds look evergreen compared to that skeleton-tree in this dry, parched season." She observes him for a while, noticing that he is barely moving.

She speaks to him, and he responds, "You know, I cannot walk alone. I cannot even go far from my room. My employer takes me to this spot, where I sell his goods." He sits still — peacefully, smiling. His heart feels content, regardless of his inability to move. He adds that his family lives miles away from him. To go as far to meet them is already good enough.

The blind man's words strike her.

She realizes, "He who cannot see does not want many things for himself. He who cannot see does not need to see the world, but meet his family. He who sits still embraces his place. The plants around him grow because his body shades them, protecting them from this life-consuming heat."

As she walks home, she thinks, "I have always wanted to see what is in far-away places, to see the beautiful things in this world, to seek all the knowledge the world can offer. Why have I craved for so, so much?"

When she arrives home, she cries — ashamed that she blamed God for what did not happen. Between her tears, she talks to herself, "If I am going to be sent to another

place, it must be because I am destined to bring peace to the other beings who inhabit that place. It must be with noble intentions, not just for my own benefit."

One year later, she is finally sent to the North.

Suddenly, everyone in the world — including her — has to confine themselves to their homes. A plague roams. That spring, flowers everywhere in the world bloom like no other year. The weather is kinder than ever — for no human could poison the air.

## **Parable of the Expert**

In the beginning, the expert is asked a question by a fellow, "How can you possibly be an expert — when you still do as is written in the old holy book — a book from centuries before you?"

*A woman has heard many parables about those who walk to find answers. She decides she shall walk.*

## **Parable of the Mausoleum of Seeds**

Every deed is counted, even if it be the weight of a seed.

A mausoleum was built. Dedicated to all those flowering seeds taken away — forcibly — from the soil they had lived.

People go there to mourn and pay respect — hoping no other flowering seeds will ever again suffer.

Yet, the takers remain persistent, generation after generation. Taking, taking, taking. Everything.

But the roots and sprouts that managed to remain in the soil are persistent too. New saplings and flowers grow, though missing many petals.

We pray no wind will carry them away.

If the wind carries them, it carries a part of us too.

These seeds will float until they finally land — hoping to settle in a haven, not this illusion.

We wish for a haven where they can bloom, bringing new seedlings into the world.

If the seedlings are nurtured with care, they can grow as tall as those mausoleums.

Their shade can turn the mausoleums' bricks back into soil.

We pray, in the future, people will not build another mausoleum for seeds.

## **On Planting a Story**

Write your story on a bulb, then plant it. Will it become a flowerful story? Or will it rot?

Whisper a story to a bulb, then plant it. Will it become a fragrant story? Or will it stink?

Write a word on a bulb, plant it in autumn.

Will the winter sleep complete the sentence?

Will the spring complete the paragraph?

Will the summer complete the story?

What will it be next autumn?

## **Parable of the Two Trees**

A woman walks with her teacher. They pass by two trees on the side of the pathway. One tree has fruits hanging on every branch, while the other has flowers on every branch.

From her teacher, the woman wishes for answers — to know the difference between the tree bearing fruit and the flowering tree.

However, she cannot form an even-handed question.

A little more than four millennia ago, a man takes pairs of every animal into an ark, ahead of the great flood. He is desperate to know where he should land, so he prays to God to send him to a blessed landing place. In the end, he arrives in a mountainous area where figs grow abundantly.

A woman has just migrated from the South to the North. She needs to adjust herself to this new place, where people conduct things differently than the people of her hometown. She walks around, all the while wondering if this place is blessed.

On her neighbour's patch of soil, right in front of their house, there stands a fig tree.

Is this a sign that this place may be the blessed landing place, as promised?

During one of her walks, she sees two women, both wearing the garments of piety — just like her mother. They try to pick a fig with a stick. She, the woman, notices that their features are different than those of the Northern people. Questions run through her mind, "Isn't it a sin to take fruit that belongs to others without permission? Or is it possible that the fig tree belongs to them?". She then hesitates, "But fig trees are originally from the Southland. Who am I to say to whom these figs belong? Or to whom this land belongs?"

Since the North has four seasons, plants grow differently than in the South, where there are only two. Only summer is full of light and warmth. The light fades during fall, only getting colder in winter, before the light returns in spring. Despite this, the farming fields are endlessly growing flowers with methods invented here. Thus the people can still have such beauty, even when the seasons will not allow plants to grow naturally.

The soil of the North is also different. Some of it is sandy, while other parts are hard and impenetrable. Some planters have to replace this soil with a more fertile kind to grow their flowers.

As the old saying goes, the light is always brighter on the other side. The Northern people like Southern flowers very much. They bought such flowers and shipped them here.

Imagine the ark carries plants, bearing flowers and fruits, instead of animals.

Now imagine the ark carries people instead.

## **Parable of the Unstolen Fig**

## **Parable of the Freedom of Figs**

A woman bumps into a neighbour. The neighbour lives in the house where the woman found a fig tree a year ago.

She, the woman, remarks, "What a beautiful fig tree you have here!"

The neighbour says, "Oh, thank you. Unfortunately, these figs never ripen."

She then asks, "May I have a fig from the tree?"

The neighbour smiles and says, "Sure, there is a stick under the tree. People usually use it to pick figs. You can have as many as you want."

She then picks three figs — one for a fellow parabolist, one for a poet, and one for a teacher.

Say it loud seven times, count with your fingers:

Fig tree

Can you hear it?

## **Parable of the Pilgrims**

In the first year, a woman encounters twenty pilgrims gathered at a monument, covered with flowers in autumn. Three of these pilgrims step forward to lay down their flowers.

These pilgrims speak no parables. Instead, they tear parable pages and spit on them.

She is paralyzed by shock for fifteen seconds. She flees in fear.

The second year, she returns and sees ten pilgrims.

In the ninth year, she sees one pilgrim.

In the tenth year, it is only her.

If this parable is written on a page, the woman asks you not to tear it.

## Parable of the Route of Flowers

A woman witnessed the pilgrims — those who tore up parables in the autumn. She asks herself — for months — why she was destined to see it at that precise time.

Winter comes. She opens her map. She seeks out the route she took that day, hoping to find at least one reasonable answer to this enigma. She retraces the route.

The monument.

The fig tree.

The two trees.

The neighbourhood with flowers of four seasons.

The mausoleum of seeds.

The question to the expert.

In spring, she walks the route and passes by a neighbour, minding her garden. The neighbour is replanting the iris the woman saw last spring, when she first began to know the flowers in the neighbourhood. She was captivated by the iris flower. She had never seen anything like that before. Nine triangular petals — six purple, and three yellow — layered and colliding in harmony.

Using her mother tongue's address for a woman or mother, she greets her neighbour, "Hello, Bu". She asks the neighbour, whose own irises are as colourful as the flowers, "Does the iris belong to you?"

"Yes, the iris is mine, but the garden is lent to me. I am only taking care of this piece of land", the neighbour replies.

The woman is intrigued.

The neighbour then continues, "Fifteen years ago, there was an incident here in front of my house. A leak underground caused the ground to collapse. It was so frightening. After the sinkhole was filled with sand, I covered it with fertile soil. So now we have this garden to share."

The woman admires how her neighbour transformed misfortune into beauty. She thanks her for growing her iris.

Her neighbour asks in return, "What brings you to walk the neighbourhood, my child?"

"I need to find an answer to a question that saddened me."

The neighbour offers her an iris root so she can have her own. That night, she returns to the monument with two fellows. She plants the iris root across from the monument.

**With respect for the ancestors, in spring the woman sings,**

Apalah guna berkain batik, kalaulah tidak pakai bajunya

Eh sayang, disayang

*It is no use to wear a batik sarong, if it is without the pairing blouse*

*Oh dear, oh dear*

Kalau pakai baju berkembang, eh jangan lupa pakai kainnya

Eh sayang, disayang

*When wearing a flowery blouse, do not forget to wear the pairing sarong*

*Oh dear, oh dear*

Suruh lupa tak bisa lupa, aduh sayang

Eh sayang, aduh sayang

*Tell me to forget, I cannot forget, oh dear*

*Oh dear, what a pity*

Lupa sebentar di waktu tidur

*Forget for a while in slumber*

The woman's iris flourished and bloomed. The new roots grow and spread, widening, much like her courage. This is a gracious gift.

**They bloom in summer. So she says,**

Kalau kamu hidup dikelilingi bunga-bunga, jangan lupa dari mana asalnya bunga-bunga ini.

*If you live surrounded by flowers, do not forget where these flowers come from.*

Kalau kamu hidup dikelilingi bunga-bunga, jangan lupa bagaimana kamu mendapatkannya.

*If you live surrounded by flowers, do not forget how you got them.*

## **Some Questions Left Unanswered**

How do you know when it is time to leave?

How do I know it is time to leave?

How do you know that you have to stay?

How do I know that I have to stay?

Or, to return.

## Colophon

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