

Aryan Ali-murad

Heads, Tails

Heads

It's hot here. Why are we leaving?

I know you never got to see it, but it's beautiful.

The mountains, the waterfalls. Why would we leave?

This is Babylon, Mesopotamia, the cradle of civilization,
the tower of Babel. This is where humans tried to reach heaven
with their ladders made of tables and stools. She has kept us for
nearly sixty years. I remember when her father gave us to her before
he had to leave. She's kept us all this time, dangling from her neck
on a golden thread. Sixty years and nine children later, she's given
us to her third-born son, saying we'll bring him good fortune and
health. Do we? She sobbed when he said goodbye. He mentioned
something about England. That's far, isn't it? And it's definitely
not as hot as it is here. Do you think England has people like
Goran, who, every morning while families sit and eat
breakfast in their gardens, comes and sings to them
in return for some food or drink? We're
trading Ser u pe for fish and chips, the
Cha'xana for the pub.

Tails

God toppled the ladders made of
tables and stools and sent the humans back
to earth, scattering and dispersing them to different
regions, with different languages. This isn't Mesopotamia
anymore. They are leaving because it is no longer safe here.

It rarely ever has been. I can hear its beauty more than you can
see it. I hear the wind whistling through cracks in rocks on the
mountain face and the waters crashing at its foot. But beyond the
splendour, I hear the ugliness shadowing the borders. A shadow
that has perpetually lurked, wearing different masks through time.
They will be safer far away from here, and we will give them
good fortune and health because that is what his mother
believes we will do. He is the first of the nine to leave, except
for the son who died in the accident. She sobbed then
too. She has worn us around her neck on a golden
thread since she was a little girl. If height was
measured in kindness she would have
been a giant.

Heads

It's cold here. Is that why his
daughter's leaving? He gave us to her
and said his mother gave us to him when he
left home. Now she is leaving, and we're going with
her. I don't blame her for wanting to leave the damp and
dark mornings, the short and cold days, the damp and dark
nights. I saw depressions beginning to form under her eyes, in
feints of purple against her pale olive skin. I'm glad we're leaving.
The people here don't sing in the mornings like Goran used to.
Maybe the people where we go next will. Have we done our job
for him? His mother said we'd bring him good fortune and health,
but have we? Almost forty years: divorce, addictions, solitude.
Has his life been any better than it would have been back home?
I miss his mother, the kind, giant lady. I miss how the
electricity would go out during the night and she
would sleep on the roof to escape the heat. Why is
he giving us to his daughter? Why wouldn't
he give us to his son?

Tails

Life works differently here.

They don't sing to each other. They push
and shove and mutter swear words under their
breath. But it was still better. War as a prospect offers
little hope for anyone. War as a reality forces a choice.

He made the right one. His children have had access to more
than they could have back home, and for him, that was all the
good fortune he needed. His daughter is leaving now, to go and seek
those opportunities that beckon out in the world. I've heard him say
his son hasn't fully weighed the privilege he was given by being born
here, and that he has done nothing with it. When he was that age,
he and his wife travelled a total of five months and nineteen
days to get to this country. Five months and nineteen days of
sleeping with scorpions under their mattresses, in rooms
with five other families, travelling through distress, just
to get here. He thinks all his son does is smoke
weed and cry about how empty he feels.

Life works differently here.

Heads

It's not cold or hot
here. It's just still. What are we?
The people here just come and stare at us
through the glass, mouth words to each other for
a bit, then walk away, stand in front of the next display
and do the same. I miss home, even the cold one. I've tried
keeping track of time throughout the years, tried remembering
all the little details. I remember when we were made – from
molten silver. We had value, or at least a different kind of value
from the one the kind, giant lady gave us when she started
wearing us around her neck. We were given in return for
so many things: the okra to make the Bamyra for the hungry
family, the bottle of arak that had to be bought in secret.
We have fallen out of countless pockets, have been
picked up by countless hands, but the more I've tried
to keep track of it all, the more it feels like
time is keeping track of me, of us.
Where do we go next?

Tails

We are roundabouts,
circles and loops. We are antiques,
good luck charms and tokens. We are one of
hundreds of thousands, and through time many of
us have been given to many of them. I remember things
too. I remember being flipped in the air to decide fates or
being tossed into the hat of the homeless man. I miss things too.
I miss being given and having a purpose. I miss being worn. We are
what they want us to be now. The people here stand in front of the
glass and give their own meanings to us. They speculate on our age,
our purpose, our journey, where we're from. Most think we're from
Turkey. But it doesn't matter. These things have the same weight
as shadows. The only thing that ever mattered, our only purpose,
was the people we helped, those whose pockets we nestled
in and hands we were clenched in, whose necks we hung
from. But they're all gone now. We won't be here
long. Soon we'll be collected, stored, filed,
archived; and we'll be forgotten,
just like them.