

Ayoni Makabe

She said I should learn to live without regrets, like a Yerubian warrior.

Like many of her comments this too came suddenly like a lightning, right on time and ate away at my heart like a million tiny ant-bites.

How could she possibly have known that I quit my job at the Call Center just hours ago. That's why I'd come into this bar in the first place, hoping to relieve my growing doubts with a glass of beer, as suddenly I saw her sitting there in the afternoon gloom, smoking a cigarette.

"Henry" she said. "I've known you for several months now, but I still find it hard to get accustomed to this absentmindedness of yours. You're in this mood again."

Well, she was right. Maybe I would have tried to prove otherwise just for the sake of resistance but I didn't want her to know about my decision to quit. She would just worry again and I didn't like it when she acted like my mother. So I took a look around me, pretended to study the Coca-Cola ads on the wall, and listened to the jukebox playing a sad song over the Wednesday afternoon hum.

She must have noticed that I acted as if I didn't care, still and perhaps just because of that, she told me again of her college-time revelation, this autumn morning when she suddenly realized every one of her worries could be overcome by travelling.

She told me I probably just needed a change and the friction would fly away like a bird. In any other person this wouldn't surprise me in the least, knowing that they were just projecting their hopeless wishes onto my own life.

Who didn't dream of Californian sunsets when the winters seemed endless?

Who didn't cry for a change, a chance to escape the daily routine?

But Sheila didn't just dream. She's been to all the places: Arabia, Belgium, China, Denmark, Ethiopia. Pick a letter and she tells a story.

That's why I liked being with her. I could just sit back and relax and forget my mounting money problems while I was listening to her tales, how she once worked as a fire lookout in Tibet, how she almost lost her rucksack in the Amazon, how she once assisted an South African professor, who was developing an alphabet for a small tribe. Sheila learned their language within a few months and even contributed one or two letters to their brand new alphabet. Sometimes, when she talked of all the friends she made there and how this so-called uncivilized tribe really offered us so much to learn, her eyes became so big and beautiful, full of sparks, like a whole tiny universe that helped me forget myself.

She told me how this tribe, the Yerubas led such a simple life, and yet did not lack anything. Sometimes the rain didn't come and the whole land was blown with red-brown dust for weeks, sometimes meat was very rare, but the Yerubas never lost their grace, not even in death. They always said: "Ayoni-Makabe!" which roughly meant: "Live, don't regret."

When Sheila was on her second glass of wine, she sometimes started to become silent and I knew it would only be a matter of minutes before she would hit me stone-cold with another one of her comments, as if we had been talking about me all the time and she was just drawing a conclusion.

"Ayoni-Makabe!"

That's what I told myself after I quit the Call Center job. But then doubt came knocking and I didn't even want to think about how I would pay the rent at the end of the month.

We were sitting next to each other, just inches away but even if I often felt a warm feeling towards her I never dared to speak of it. So we just sat there, drinking in silence, until we were the last in the room.

On the way home, I was wondering why she still put up with me.

As I fumbled for the keys in my pocket, I realized that she probably liked me.

As I went to bed, I imagined calling her.
And till the morning came I lay awake, regretting that I didn't tell her of my decision to quit.