

Icebreakers

by Tagreid Hassabo

My uncle George, the day they buried Aunt Etta, told George Jr. to put the rocking chair out on the porch and face it west toward the cemetery. The next morning, when Junior returned, the chair was rocking his dead Papa.

What do you call that? When your world has changed senseless you no longer want it.

I find names for unnamed feelings. Usually, I don't have to look; the words just pop up.

Joie mokbeef... *Joie mokbeef.* I got that chilling feeling one time when I woke up in the middle of the night and for moments I could not remember who or where I was, but not because I was comatose, and not because I forgot either. I thought hard and deep, and in that brief time all the characters in my life stood still while I roamed among them looking for me.

Painful *instipitude* is another one. Like when I called my mother to ask if I can substitute rice flour for wheat, only she'd been dead for four years. *Minkoush, kooklain, phelangoly*, and this and that and this and that, and oh, let

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me not forget the occasional confusing *houp-houp*.

The rest of the feelings, those that remain nameless, I ignore. Then, they disappear.

Saturday, I napped on the couch, right here in Seattle. But in my dream I was in *Rue D'Agadir* in Morocco. Why Morocco? It was nighttime and there were some kids playing soccer in a dimly lit street. The two goals were marked with stacks of broken up grey bricks. I was stranded and was trying to find my way out, but where to? Not clear. A station wagon drove by, the

kids scrambled to the sides of the street. The dust levitated and hovered against the orange light. I waved, and the car stopped and reversed. I had a bad feeling about the driver, but I got in. Then I noticed there was a little girl in the back seat. She was not crying, though it looked like she had been. I told the driver, who was silent all along, that I forgot something in my hotel room. He drove me back. I took the girl with me and we hid in my room. Then the man came after us. I saw him through the peep-hole. I was not sure what he wanted. It is better to say it like this: I was not sure what he wanted to do with us. I was not afraid, only some vague concern for the girl. It was all about her. The man reverse-peeped and the peep-hole went all black. I jumped. I looked down to tell the girl to shush, and there she was holding my hand to her face and very innocently biting off chunks of my flesh and chewing on it. I woke up. Sweat. Palpitations. I got off the couch and went to the bathroom to splash my face. At the door of my bathroom, in Seattle, I nearly screamed. There he was, squeezing a zit in front of the mirror, the evil man in my dream. It was Brad, my husband. For real.

Ashtata ... Ashtata ... Ashtata ...Ashtata. Do you know how twisted that feels? *Ashtataaaaaaaaaa.*

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Brad took me to lunch at The Grille today. This is a slice of our conversation.

"Do you know how Chihuly lost his eye?"

I thought, There he goes again.

Brad is one of those you hear about on the radio when they say *Support to your local radio station comes from listeners like you*. He is you. Two tickets for a tour of Dale Chihuly's boathouse studio and hot shop, he won that last week during KPLN pledge drive, and now it is all he talks about.

"Pretty shards?" I went along.

"You would think so. But nope, he wasn't blowing glass and it wasn't a fateful creative moment. A car accident. A plain old car accident. He flew through the windshield and it took out his eye." This kind of discovery excites him.

"?"

"I think he plays it up with the eye patch. It gives him an artsy flare"

“But he *is* an artist.”

“Yeah, but come on. Eye patch? It’s like certifiably mad artist.”

“Would it make you happier if he’d plunged a skewer in his eye?”

“Don’t start.”

“What? What did I say?” We were quiet for a while, but the way he kept looking at me with fearful eyes made me say, “You win Brad.” Then, it was *ebrii* again.

Ebrii. That’s when I feel like I am two, not one, each standing on either side of Brad, each pulling him by one arm. Like a tug of war. Each trying to bring the other

down. Neither one of us knows what to do with him when the game is over.

When we were young, Brad and I had big dreams. The kind of dreams so big you keep secret so that no one and nothing would jinx them. The kind of dreams you keep secret for so long you forget what they were.

Eight years ago—and three into our marriage—we moved East and put what money we had into a small bee-keeping farm in Queen Anne, Maryland. It is the kind of random decision that ignites Brad and transforms him into someone pleasurable unfamiliar, until it wears off.

Out in the farm we adopted a two year old German shepherd, Aaron, whose owners had recently divorced and neither one could keep him. Aaron was a clever search and rescue.

One day, by the chicken coop, Aaron ran to me and tried—persistently—to sniff my crotch. *Aaron, stop*, I yelled. I pushed, threatened and snapped, but he was frantic, shoving his face between my legs. He prodded, snarled and howled, howled, snarled and prodded until I fell hard on my back and then he ran off and got Brad. Two days later I had a miscarriage. I had no idea I was pregnant.

I never tried to get pregnant again. Correction: I tried to never get pregnant again, and that worked. I would have made a good mom, no doubt. It’s those other sentiments I questioned the sincerity of. The *quosoms*, I’m pretty sure Ma had them too. That’s what made her up and leave, *pouffff*, just like that. Aaron must have known, in the way dogs see what we do not see. And that is why he did what he did, you know, attempted to rescue my baby. From me.

We never had any dogs again either. They know much too much.

Brad can go either way. With or without babies. With or without dogs.

Brad does everything I want. Mostly, I want him to not do everything I want.

Sometimes he’ll try so hard he’ll forget what he was trying to do. Like when he thinks I want him to keep going but then we stop even sooner because it’s starting to sound like an old man smacking. Then he will lie next to me telling jokes or making belly waves to apologize for incomplete sex.

These are the things you find out after the fact. Like Ma said, Picking a man is like picking a watermelon, smooth and polished on the outside but you won’t know for sure if it’s red and juicy or pale and dry until you’ve cut in and dug deep; by then you can’t give it back.

I can’t give him back. That’s what I think every morning in the shower when I look down on the dark crescent of Brad’s hairs fluttering on the



drain-strainer—and it also makes me think that, at this rate, the luminous crescent on the crown of his head will soon be a full moon.

My mother, she likes her similes. She also said marriage is like ice, shines like a diamond at first, then melts away and leaves a cold mess.

Dale Chihuly built a wall of diamond ice. Brad told me this. In Jerusalem. Brad told me this in Seattle; it's the wall that was in Jerusalem. Thirty blocks of pure ice, 6 x 4 x 3 feet deep. Each. It wasn't your ice-factory kind of ice either. Arctic Diamond, they called it, unbelievably pure you could shoot a photo through 10 inches of it, and it would come out crisp clear. Perfect geometrical blocks quarried and transported from an Alaskan pond by rail, barge, ship and truck, all the way across the world, and erected right outside the old city stone wall near Jaffa Gate.

Somewhere in the junk Brad printed, it said the wall represented the “thawing” of tensions in the region. This is all happening right there in the burning desert, where everything flares.

I am all for positive thinking. But ... poor ice.

Guess what? When they finally opened the dark sub-zero containers in the soaring heat, and it found a world so different from what it had signed up for back in Alaska, the ice did a quick Uncle George. Thunder roared in the containers, and when they checked the cargo, the ice had fractured splitting in halves then quarters then eighths.

Hissing, creaking and cracking is what the crowds who gathered to view the weathered wall on the first day heard as the ice continued to break into thousands of pieces; and as the wind whipped it, it cried itself to a puddle until three days later there was not a piece of ice standing. Just the cold mess.

There it is again, that feeling, the icebreaker. When you can't recognize the world anymore that you no longer want it. What do you call that? Sometimes I think it's *rious*, but not quite. This one is tricky.

It's at the tip of my tongue. But since I can't find a name for it, I guess I'm just gonna have to ignore it.