

World Science Fiction Spring 2019

Islamicates Volume 1: Anthology of Science Fiction short stories inspired from Muslim Cultures

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The Answer

Niloufar Behrooz

Author Bio: Niloufar Behrooz is a PhD candidate of English Literature at the University of Isfahan, Iran. She is a poet, essayist, musician, translator and language instructor. Her work has appeared in The Literary Hatchet, Litro Magazine, Haiku Presence, Paper Wasp, Gema Online Journal and elsewhere. Literature, languages, performative arts and culture studies are among her interests.

I woke up to an infinite darkness. Some kind of blindfold had made opening my eyes an impossible effort. I tried to reach for it but my hands seemed to be locked in place as well.

"Stop moving so much!" A low-pitched hollow voice growled. I stopped fidgeting by the sound of the cold and mechanical voice that did not bear any human characteristics.

I didn't know where I was or who I was surrounded with. All I knew was that the thing I was in was moving. I could feel a bump every once in a while. It wasn't a car though. We weren't moving on the ground or any spatial entity for that matter. It felt like a centrifugal gravity kind of movement. Was I being kidnapped through time?

The container stopped with a noisy bump. I was immediately lifted by two stiff hands.

I was put in a chair and then the blindfold was removed.

In front of me were standing seven fully grown men made entirely out of concrete. Their expressionless stony eyes were fixated on me as if they were more surprised at my sight than I was at theirs. They pressed a button and a bunch of wires flew out of nowhere and plugged to my

forehead and wrists. Simultaneously, a huge screen appeared on the wall, monitoring my brain activity and thoughts.

"Where is this place? Who are you?" I asked as I watched my own words instantly appear on the screen.

"You are not here to ask questions." Retorted the same hollow voice I had heard in the container. He was the one with coal black eyes. They were the most uncanny creatures that I had ever seen in my life and somehow it was me who was perceived as the only strange unnatural being in the room. *Was that it? Was I too human for them? Was I spotted out on the account of my excessive 'humanness?'*

"You are brought here as the last specimen of your race to answer our questions." The Same voice replied as if he had heard my thoughts. *Specimen? Race?* I didn't have to say the words out loud. They appeared in italics on the screen as I thought them.

"You are the last being who has still not turned concrete. And we want to know why. You must have the cure."

So that really was it. I was too much of a human for them. But I didn't have any cure. And I most certainly did not have the answers they were looking for.

"I don't have the answers you are looking for." I echoed my thoughts on the screen.

"He is saying exactly what he's thinking. That's weird!" He said looking at the screen.

"Why wouldn't I tell you the truth? I really don't have the..."

"The truth? What do you mean by that?" He interrupted me giving the word 'truth' an alien emphasis.

"Truth is when your thoughts and words match. It's also called honesty. It's the opposite of a lie..." I heard myself sound like a dictionary so I stopped.

"But lying is one of our main principles. One shall always be deceitful." He uttered the second sentence with a more serious tone as if he was quoting from their scriptures.

"And telling the truth is one of ours." I retorted back. "It is against the will of my God to tell lies."

"Your God?"

"I call him Allah. The one and only God I praise and worship."

"I think I know the word God, sir." One of them said with an air of serene knowledge.

"I know that one too. But it is against our principles to worship a God." My interrogator said quoting their unknown scriptures again. "One shall not worship anything but himself. Every individual must praise only his own physical presence..."

His speech was cut short by the entrance of another figure at this point. This one was half concrete half human flesh covered in rags. And it was a girl! Or at least it looked like one. She had a small figure with black braids coming down to her waist. I looked at her dusty tortured face and I could still see that she had a dazzling beauty.

She whispered something to the concrete beings in a slave-like manner and threw a quick glance at me. Her eyes weren't cold and stony like the others. There was a trace of life and hope in them. I knew she was the key to this nightmarish world I was inserted in.

Whatever she said made them anxious and they hurried out of the room leaving me on the chair with plugged wires.

The girl found a little courage at the sight of them leaving and approached me with a look of curiosity and concern.

"What is this place? Why aren't you entirely concrete like the rest of them?" I asked.

"I'm not allowed to talk to the ones they bring in for investigation." She replied looking back at the door in fear. "But I didn't think there were any non-concretes left." She added with a faint smile. "I used be a non-concrete you know. We all did. But now it's only a matter of time before I completely turn into one of them."

"So what happened to you? Why did you turn concrete?"

"We weren't always like this. Believe it or not we used to be human too. We were good. We were pure. And then our people started to forget their goodness. They started lying, cheating, stealing, murdering and seeing no one else but themselves. With every lie their tongues turned into concrete, with every theft their hands, and with every murder their hearts. They denied everything that didn't have a physical presence; everything that was metaphysical, spiritual, or abstract for that matter. So they all started turning into 'concrete.' But it happened so gradually that no one even noticed the change. Before they knew it, they were all concrete. And then they started to change the sacred scriptures and principles. They wrote their own textbook and threw the old ones away. They turned every notion to its opposite. It used to be 'love for yourself what you love for your brother,' but now it's 'love yourself only.' They don't even remember how they used to be. They don't remember the definition of what was good and pure. Now it's either concrete or non-concrete. That's why they see you as an alien. You have to escape or you'll turn into one of them. The new generation have started searching and asking questions about their origin. That's why they're bringing in

half-concrete people like me to find a cure. But it's useless. It all starts with a few questions and then you're stuck here forever. The more they keep you here the sooner they concretize your brain. That's what they do to everyone who hasn't turned yet and doesn't give them the cure. That's what they did to me. I'd didn't have the answer or the cure they were looking for. So they concretized my brain and now it's spreading all over my body. It's too late for me but you have to escape and save the human race, the good and pure race..."

She stopped talking at the sound of heavy tramping footsteps.

The concrete men entered the room. One was holding a headphone-like device in his hands. He gave it to the girl and ordered her to do something with it. She came near my chair and hopelessly stared at me. I looked into her eyes and felt a deep stirring in my heart. I was ready to sacrifice myself for this little creature. I took her concrete hand in an instant. And then to my own bewilderment it happened. The girl's concrete hand turned into human flesh, spread to her arm and before she could withdraw her hand she was wholly human. Her eyes sparkled with joy.

The answer was there all along. So simple. The key to everyone's rescue.

The cure to humanity.

Love. Selfless love...

The concrete men gazed at the appearance of my thoughts on the screen.