

SPACE IS A BIG PLACE

On the coast of North Africa—built in an inlet of the Mediterranean Sea—exists a hotel distinct in form; a spitting image of 1880’s Americana. Two stories, it is, and within holds a ballroom beyond a grand reception lobby, mirrored staircases immediately before, and a pair of halls to left and to the right on each floor, symmetrical.

The proprietor of this place calls themselves Sidore to the attendant, Mr. Howell, not a reference to Gilligan’s Island’s millionaire. In fact, Mr. Howell has grown so opposed to the frequent connections his name brings to this acclaimed 70’s sitcom that he instead goes by Mr. Ben Bazil, or Mr. BB for short.

BB manages day to day affairs, sorting receipts and posting ads in the local column for the Ptici Tribune. Not to mention BB’s involvement in disposing of the dead who die in this place. Influenza, consumption, cancer of the gut; things un-sinister in nature, and thus, our establishment should be seen as a good samaritan hotel, which cares for every last need of its customer base.

To speak of the hotel’s high points, the speaker may never stop. Famous creatives—the worlds over—find themselves under the roof of Sidore’s lodgings. A prince of Corea, to name one, came in the days of ’82, at arguably the place’s height in popularity, and during their stay offered our lovely Mr. BB a gold bird statue made of pure silver. A beautiful thing really, which he still displays atop his desk for guests to comment.

Perhaps it is time to put a name on this well-renowned hotel, and so it shall be called to your ears *The Cumin Seed*. A little out of place and time, rhythm and rhyme, but don't let my descriptions fool you into thinking it all a nothingless dreamscape where nothing matters and nothing belongs. The heart of any hotel is its people and their relationships.

Now, enough exposition. Let us enter *The Cumin Seed* from the perspective of a West African trader who docked their ship in the cove on July the seventh, last.

Isa

The water was clear, not uncommon to my eyes, but a beauty nonetheless. I'd been on this route maybe ten, twelve times and its shimmer drew attention no different from a siren. Never before had we stopped at this port, however, as our destination of Egypt was not much more than a couple days' journey ahead. I don't know what convinced us to dock this particular time. We had sailed through fine waters before, and aside from the usual thirst and exhaustion of a seafarer, nothing stood out as unique.

Akna, my daughter through marriage, dove into the crystalline water from the bow of the ship. "It's warm!"

"It looks it." I followed her in and she wasn't wrong.

"Hey Pops, why don't we live here?"

"Is it too dissimilar from what you know? You were born and raised in the Caribbean Sea, were you not?"

"Yeah, I guess, but it sucks because there's hurricanes and stuff. Here in the Mediterranean it's always nice."

I looked back to the ship and my crew, all of whom already cracked rum for an afternoon of drinking and smoking in the heat. "Maybe we'll stay for a while. The shipment can wait."

"What, really? A vacation at the famous *Cumin Seed*?" Her teeth glimmered with sea water and star fish.

“It’ll give you something to remember. And for me too. Not all life should be work.”

“Variation is the spice of life! Hey, do you think that’s why they call it *The Cumin Seed*? Because it’s a spice and adds to your life.”

“I haven’t the slightest, but I like your guesses.” Together we swam to shore and shook the wetness from our hair before hiking the short trail up the sandy banks to the hotel.

“There’s nothing worse than walking in wet pants. I hate it,” Akna said a few meters on.

“I can think of worse things, but sure, it is up there.”

She stopped in her tracks to face me. “Really, Isa? Name one thing worse?”

“Hmm, you’ve put me on the spot.”

“You know what? I got one.”

“What’s that?”

“Cheese,” she answered.

“Cheese?”

“I hate cheese. It stinks and sometimes it’s crunchy and sometimes it’s soft. How do you know which one you’re getting? It’s so unpredictable.”

“Aren’t you a little old to be a fussy eater?”

“I saw you throw away a perfectly good orange because you didn’t like the texture.”

“The stringy stuff: it feels weird on my teeth.”

Her eyebrow raised higher than I knew possible.

“Hide your pride, Akna, or we’ll miss a room at the *Cumin*,” I said.

“All I’m saying is you shouldn’t be judging other people, especially when it’s for something you’re at fault of too.”