

Philip Lewis

The Proud Nubian King

The proud Nubian king
Has the regal bearing of a *mansab*
Of Old Mali
Six feet two,
One hundred eighty,
Dark-complexioned,
Thirty-four years old,
Not bad to look at, so
Everyone says.
He looks in the mirror
Each morning
And repeats it to himself
Like a mantra
“I am a King”
Or
“I am a Proud Nubian King”
No one seems to realize his kingliness
But himself
Even his vaunted Queen
Doesn't realize it
The Queen does not accord the King
The respect he thinks he deserves;
She sleeps around on him
(whenever she feels like it, which
Is often)
Badmouths him to her girlfriends
Every now and then he gets wind
Of the Queen's wrongdoings,

And “keeps her in line”
With slaps, punches and kicks
But truth be told, the Nubian King
Is impotent
He has an heir to the throne
But the King doesn’t know his name,
Nor does he know of his whereabouts;
All he knows is that the heir to his throne
Is not the issue of his Queen.

Every evening, the King must leave his domain
To work the night shift
At the Parkland Hotel,
A crumbling relic of the 1910s
On the “better” part of town
Most of the hotel’s guests are Europeans,
Africans, Asians, Latin Americans,
Shoe-string travelers
Who have no clue that the spook
Who takes up their soiled bed-sheets
and empties out their ashtrays,
unstops their toilets,
cleans out their bathtubs
and vacuums their rugs
is a King.

Every evening, the King
Wades through rivers of dried come,
Spittle, blood, urine, feces, dog
Dirt, foot-tracks, layers upon layers
Of dust from frayed “historic” carpets
And stairwells,
All the while muttering to himself
That he needs a better job.
He gets \$13.13 an hour,
Far less after taxes
Still less after union dues
The rest is gobbled up by rent,
Food,
Clothing,
And “recreation”
None of it goes toward
Building his Kingdom

The Kingdom costs nothing
But a little bit of his time
And imagination
He has a little room in the hotel
Allotted him by the management
Between shifts;
He relaxes in his little room,
And with the help of a bottle of Thunderbird
(or a couple blunts)
He returns to his Kingdom,
to a castle of his own making,
sitting on a throne of his own making,
wearing a crown of his own making,
to kiss a Queen of his own making,
decked out in royal robes,
facing an army, an air force, a people,
a nation, entirely
of his own making.

Bis Morgen

The store on xstrasse
Was where one usually
Found unusual things
It was still open at night,
Though near closing
An old, bald, fat man
In a skullcap
Sat near the doorway
I stepped in
To look for an old pipe
There were no pipes
There was plenty of used
Wooden furniture, in
Various states of repair
And disrepair
A lot of old tables
And armoires
I found nothing useful
I only found a wooden tray
Filled with old pince-nez
Glasses
And violin knobs
A young man in a Nike jacket
Was standing near the
Old man
And trying to tune up a violin.
He played a Turkish melody
The strings were scratchy
The bow was fucked up.
The man put the violin down.
“*Bis morgen, bruddah,*” he said,
As I stepped out.
“*Bis morgen, chatz,*” said the
Old man.

Paper Bag, Casablanca

Walking out of the hotel
I found to my right
In the middle of the sidewalk
A teenaged Moroccan
About five feet nine
Light brown skinned
Standing with his face
Buried in a paper bag.
He appeared to be endlessly
Blowing up the bag.
Okay, I thought:
If a guy wants to stand in the
Middle of a busy street
Blowing up a paper bag
It's his business,
Whatever floats his boat.
I walked around for a few hours
Brought a newspaper
Had lunch
And a glass of mint tea
Took pictures of the *medina*
And the souk off Boulevard Mohammed Cinq
Had another glass of tea
Then a Coke
And came back to the hotel.
The teenaged Moroccan
Was still there,
In the same spot,
Still trying to blow up
The paper
Bag

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