

To Give a City

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There is a patient at Mathari Hospital who says nothing for days. When it comes upon her to speak, she rocks to a metronome. Only she can hear it sway and tick, or maybe she is it, a creaky wooden *barçante* in the hopelessness of a fruitless day's dusk. She speaks for hours on end, sometimes praying and sometimes telling tales. Jedidiah revisits the hectic days of her residency at Aga Khan, strolls with her brother through the university walkways and dreams. She says he once promised to give her a city but instead gave her a hospital. She talks about her daughters too. Her words are often a cycle, from silence to silence. Jedi's triggers are unprecedented. A war could break out and she would persist in her oblivion as if she could outlive the Third World War. A sneeze away from a frenzied lecture. The lecture comes she goes on until her voice goes. The conversations always end with the story of Jedaiah.

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'Tall and skinny, more of a lover than a fighter. He'd mime me poems, you know. In the warm sea of our mother, (yes, his words) as we drank of her love from the same placenta, with our straws.'

Catatonia would be on its way like a gathering wave of salty death, haunted by the curve of Luna, when she starts on the cities her brother could give. His books were cities but the one he could never write was hers.