

ONE HONEST SENTENCE

Writing angry is impossible for me. Anger gives me no courage, only paralysis. I need silence. An inner silence. And peace. Alcohol does absolutely nothing for me except turn me into an idiot. I have to write that down until it sinks in. I don't need so many cups of coffee. My prophet tells me to be sober. I came up with the most amazing idea while I was drunk. And high. I've forgotten the idea now that I am sober. Maybe that's why the prophet said to be sober. So that I could forget about all of my "good" ideas; my "brilliant" ideas. And just do the work I was called to do. Not to romanticize, not to embellish. Not to question the instincts that come in the lonely cold calm of morning. To endure with patience the moments where it seems like I may never move forward again. Never set down another word or even bother to reply to my emails. I can't reply to emails now. Anyone who has ever ignored an email from me, I get you. I get you. This coffee is good. The lingering toothpaste in my mouth gives the coffee a minty taste.

All the slogans I see walking around in New York about the poor and about black lives is the definition of hypocrisy. I am at the center of the problem here! This sacred point of pilgrimage has been warped into a cesspool of greed and lust. Just like all the sacred points of pilgrimage of old. I say this because. I. Am. An. American. I see my home filled with false idols. Who will be the one to come and smash them all? What the fuck is an American? "American." It means nothing. I am a human. A member of the *ins*, as they say in Arabic. Turn away from being an *American* just as your spiritual forefathers and mothers turned away from being *arab*. That is, literally, linguistically, what they did. It doesn't matter if no one reading this knows it. You know it.

What is revolution? What is revolutionary?

A revolutionary scientist--Copernicus, Galileo, Einstein--is not one who changes facts or even necessarily proves anyone else wrong. They are someone who changes the way the entire community of scientists goes about their work. And the new paradigm they introduce always needs a few courageous stragelers to embrace it on faith before credence. And convert the skeptical. Before the new paradigm becomes the tradition. This might take a week or it might take one hundred years. But that doesn't matter because the old paradigm isn't wrong or less accurate, it's just older. The world is as it is. A revolution only changes the way we see it. It doesn't change what we *can* see.

And what we see is always there before we need it. Like the target for the actor. Actors can't work alone. They need a community. They need the way they see to be guided by a paradigm agreed upon by specialists in the field. But no actor can call themselves an actor or an actress or whatever if they aren't bringing forth a new paradigm.

Yes. I've been reading Kuhn. And now I am pretending to understand what he wrote. And now all of you reading this must suffer for it.

I think about 9/11 every day. Every. Single. Day.

Periodically, I will re-read only three responses to 9/11. Noam Chomsky's. Susan Sontag's. And Toni Morrison's.

Toni Morrison called her essay (is that what it is?) *The Dead Of September 11th*. She does not say who these dead are. She simply addresses *the dead*. She says she wants to hold them in her arms, these dead. I find this interesting.

The eleven hijackers were among the dead too. I want to hold *them* in my arms too. And what about all those who died that day in a way not remotely connected to the event? I want to hold them in my arms too. There were actually nineteen hijackers. I looked this up to make sure. But I keep remembering them as eleven. I make this mistake on a consistent basis. I want to hold them in my arms, too.

I want to hold all the dead in my arms.

I think about 9/11 everyday. It seems like it's no one else's burden to bear but my own. Not because one of the hijackers, the most famous one, shares my namesake. Not because of what I look like, or where I'm "from." Or because I know anyone who died that day (I know all of those who died that day, and none of them at all).

I think about it because when it happened, I was seven. My brain was in its stage of primary and explosive learning. And 9/11 happened right in front of me. It happened in my living room, in fact. It literally happened in my living room. I was there.

At the age of seven, muslim children are taught how to pray. But it's still ok, at this age, for them to play around and laugh and not take it seriously while all the giant adults are being so somber. That's why there are no chairs in a mosque, so that the kids can run around and play. Age ten is when things get serious.

On 9/11 our school gathered around some dumb tree to do some dumb crying about this dumb thing--9/11. And I remember my friend did something that made me laugh. I don't remember what it was, and I don't know who that friend is or where they are now. But I laughed because I was seven. And I was still allowed to play during prayer.

Want to know my favorite joke about 9/11? It's in the movie, *The Big Sick*:

--"So, uh, 9/11. No, I mean, I've always wanted to have a conversation about it. With... people."

--"You've never talked to people about 9/11?"

--"No, what's you're... what's your status?"

--"What's my status on 9/11? Oh, um. Anti. It was a tragedy. I mean, we lost nineteen of our best guys."

I'm sure there are better jokes out there, though.

One in every three slaves brought to America from the coast of Africa called themselves muslim. And said *la ilaha ilallah muhammadun abadu warasulallah*. *There is no god but god and muhammad is the slave and messenger of god.*

You fools who read a statement like 9/11 "seems like it's no one else's burden to bear but my own" and immediately think "oh poor guy, he's being discriminated against." That's not it at all. Do not misunderstand me. I write about bigger things. About deeper things. Things I haven't even found yet. I don't know what I'm writing about. Don't you understand?

I'm talking about an artist's burden. 9/11 (for lack of a better name for it, because it's really not about that day or that event), 9/11 is still this raging question in my mind.

A question I can't answer because I haven't even figured out how to ask it. Others have figured out there way, but I haven't figured out mine. When I try, I become angry or afraid. Blocked. My tongue becomes tied. And unlike Moses, I have no brother to speak for me.

I have too many brothers, in fact, who will never speak for me. I must find my own means of making my message clear.

Being clear is not the same as being understood. I doubt I will ever be understood. But I can work to be clear. To be brave. To be uncompromising in my message. Despite my weakness and inability to speak Pharaoh's language with true fluency. Like Moses. Who is my prophet. My law-giver. My forefather and king.

I keep checking the clock even though I've set a timer for my writing this morning. I set the timer so that I wouldn't have to keep checking the clock. But I keep checking the clock. What's going to happen when I have to stop writing? Something crazy, apparently. Something I'm afraid of.

Uncle is awake now, "*Good thing we went shopping yesterday because we're going to have seven inches of snow tomorrow,*" he says.

Shut the fuck up! I can't say this, because he is my uncle. And this is his apartment. He is so generous to me. Taking care of me. He thinks I am taking care of him. He thinks I'm the only one who truly cares.

My grandma thought I was taking care of her while she was taking care of me too.

Just being around. Is that all some people need? Just for someone to be around? Is that all we can do for one another in this life? Just be around?

And suddenly, when we're not, who is the one who dies? The gone person, or the person who notices that they are gone?

Are we the world of the dead? The world the living must keep at bay?

When that great king of old sealed the gate of molten iron upon the race of grog and magog, with the assurance that in time, that race would break free again, and tear the earth apart, was he looking at a destructive race? Or a liberating one?

The germination of the working class. Is that what we are waiting for? Are we waiting for them to finally tear the earth apart?

Muhammad is my arbiter. My prophet. My teacher. My commander. My lover. My namesake. Insult him--insult my namesake--and you insult my very being.

Muhammad is dead. Insult him all you want.

Muhammad would tell me not to lash out against mockery or insult. To turn the other cheek like our brother Jesus. Or to get up and leave. Without a word. Reserve your anger for injustice, not mockery. Love your enemy. They are in fact, the recipients of your message. The ones being called to god, they are the most deserving of love.

Twelve years of persecution, patiently withstood. And then the hijra. And then war.

When everyone wants to beat the shit out of you, you know you're on to something.

Back then they'd crucify you.

So we have no excuse.

Maybe they'll still crucify us. In Guantanamo or wherever. Global prison industrial complex. A mass and perpetual crucifixion.

I know god is not real.

But the prophets are. The old and the new.

And god is the only absolute truth.

And there is no absolute truth.

Stop dwelling on god! And truth! It matters not! Any concern with god is a concern with absolutely nothing at all. It is a non-concern. A waste. If you can talk in and out about it endlessly and use contradictory facts to affirm your own position you know precisely already what you need to know. That what you're talking about doesn't matter.

What matters is that you chose to talk at all.

Find out why.

Why am I writing this very morning?

That's what I'm trying to get to the bottom of.

I don't think I will get to the bottom of it. I will just keep writing, keep checking the clock, keep drinking coffee, keep shitting, keep pacing aimlessly, until the timer goes off.

And when it does, what happens then? I will have to go back into the world. But I am already in the world. Maybe I will die. I hope to stay alive. I want to get to the bottom of this. This... what! What! What!

I cannot be a poet. I do not know the rules. I cannot find the masters. All the masters are gone. There have never been any masters. All poets are non-masters who became masters looking for a master and never finding one.

"What you really ought to be is a poet,"

she said.

Really?

Do you even know the meaning of the word? Poet?

One among a community of isolated souls. That's what a poet is.

There it is again. That damned word, *soul*. That word I keep using. If I were a poet I'd be able to find a different word. Not be such a simp for my soul.

If that were an honest word it wouldn't be such a slut for poets.

I just want to write one honest sentence in my life.

Deliver one honestly spoken line.

Just one.

Is that too much?

Or will that require a little more anger?

A little more play during prayer?

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