TRANSMISSIONS FROM THE BLUE COMPUTER

"In the beginning was the word,” said God.

“So, maybe we should go back to the word and have no land at all?” asked the reporter.

WARNING:

AS YOU READ THIS, A CIGARETTE MACHINE IS THANKING AN ETHIOPIAN IN HEBREW WHILE GIVING HIM CHANGE IN MAALOT, SIX HOURS FROM ZEFAT BY DONKEY.

How Fortunes Have Changed…

1.

FROM HER HOTEL room in Tel Aviv, Myrtle Suze Brink can see the nearly full opaque white moon rising over the translucent but dark slowly lapping gentle sea. Suze reminisces to herself about her first cruise here, with Spottie her dog many years ago. She had even brought a list of managers who took dogs into Tel Aviv hotels. That first trip, Suze remembers fondly that she had fallen in love with Shimoni, the first mate on the Italian-Israeli ship. They had made a kiddish\(^1\) ceremony in his cabin, deck 4, Room #436A. She had become fond of Eli the waiter too. Eli had said to her, serving chicken soup with almonds, oh, he too, like Shimoni, spoke English quite nicely, and that Suze should please not hesitate to let him know if there was anything he could do for her.

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\(^1\) A ritual toasting of wine on Shabbat.
"Spottie Dog *quieta in cabina con me, in la sua gabbia,*" in her yellowing notebooks which she still has in hand from decades earlier, the seventy-year-old gray-white-speckled short-haired Myrtle Suze Brink, who still goes by Suze most of the time, sits cross-legged on her solitary bed and reads to herself the evidence of her so diligently practicing her Italian back in the early sixties. Approaching Israel from her home in the paradise of Venice for the first time, shortly after John F. Kennedy’s election, “RELAX!” Shimoni had said to her. Hurrah for the navy, Suze had thought, then, asking Eli to bring the silver fruit bowl to her cabin. Remembering her artfully created illusion of a charmed life, then, Suze, now, lies with the black satin sleep mask she had taken from the night plane from Venice pulled and tied tightly over her eyes with the velvet straps wrapped around back. Closing and covering her eyes, Suze remembered how she had dressed in a two piece red bathing suit with yellow shoes and floppy hat, and had gone out to sun herself. She had taken *Ben Hur* by Lew Wallace to read, or to try to read, or to try to pretend to read. She had found herself instead enjoying the slight sea roll, feeling like a baby rocked in cradle, straining to make that gentle rock of the waves the only audible sound. At dinnertime she remembers she had asked Eli to bring her beef goulash with potatoes to the cabin, which she had eaten in bed.

"Sea smooth, *tutto calma*," years later, Suze reads in her notebooks. How concerned she had been, or so it seemed now, with resting, walking her dog Spottie, and meals.

Shimoni–Suze remembered him well. A *sabra*, mother a *sabra*, and his father had been born near Mt. Arad. She had been fascinated too with Ezra, the Iraqi; Veretnik, the Russian; and Merel Haim the German, whose parents left Germany in ’34. And they all worked on to the same crew, collective boatmen on Suze’s trip to heaven, instead of to Hades. When she arrived that time, Nathan, the husband Suze had subsequently lost, had left a welcome-home note. Well, there was no one to welcome Suze home now. Only Mrs. Grossman, hard-working but sometimes cruel manager of this residence suite hotel. Oh it was lovely to have a suite near the beach, but Mrs. Grossman who raised open-heart surgery fees for her guests when necessary, hadn’t let Suze have a dog ever since Spottie had died. All Suze had left now was a record of her dog’s vaccinations, a computer graphic picture showing floppy ears and a doggish nose of considerable width, and a note from a veterinarian in Tel Aviv. Suze had saved also Hilda Fridstein’s note from the ISPCA in Tel Aviv, "To Myrtle Brink in Memory of Dog Brink, 1990," the year Spottie had died and left her.

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2 Spottie Dog is quiet in the cabin with me, in his own little cage.
3 All calm
"As an American citizen with a home in Venice, Italy and Tel Aviv, may I suggest a PUBLIC RELATIONS idea? Policewomen!? “Suze writes with a mother of pearl pen now, on squared-boxed scraps of lavender paper, which she is using instead of a journal or a notebook, preparing a letter to the editor or perhaps to the police department.

Now in her room in Tel Aviv, amidst numerous plants with white blossoms, curtains, blue velvet, and floral-covered chairs, Suze can't get to sleep. Fitful from the brimming moon streaming in through the window of her hotel room, Suze gets up to read what she had written in her journal of the cruise back then:

"Fish, fresh. Chicken, eggs. Filet, steak. Green lettuce, vegetables."

How she had enjoyed eating then, to herself, Suze silently remarks, flipping tightly her notebook with withering blue floral cover shut.

Suze makes a list of her soft materials she has with her so she can make a nice homely space wherever she lands while traveling around the globe. "Lavender sachet. Feather pillow. Bed sheets. Cases. Caftan. Cashmere smokers. Velvet slippers."

Suze moves gracefully from panic to panic.

"I need," Suze writes, "a gentle climate. And purposelessness. A sense of agreeable leisurely passing of time, sudden on a shaft of sunlight. Even when the dust moves, rising hidden laughter."

2

THE NEXT MORNING by seven, Suze positions herself on the stretch of golden Tel Aviv sand in her beach chair, probably in the same floppy straw hat she had worn on that cruise. In spite of her incessant mobility, she maintains a sense of permanency through her objects. Now she wears pink plastic beach shoes. For a beach dress, she wears a turquoise and green striped serape, something she had picked up once in Mexico on her way to Antigua to meet Natami. She had stopped at the counter on her way out to ask for one of the small tightly packed bags that she had left behind the counter with the desk boy or manager when leaving for Venice. Suze had wanted to itemize everything. Silver high school pin. College badge from Goucher, where she had studied literature. Another badge, for being a water safety instructor. A letter from
George Bush, Senior, thanking her for something she had sent to him. Four finger zîls. Three silver goblets.

3

BY NINE, SUZE, decorated with her gay youthful scarves, strides confidently with her bag in hand to see Eli. She is calm, though periodically experiencing a consciousness of personal freedom she has not felt for years sweeping over her like a prominent new impulse she cannot contain. Eli is like a man who always survives, working now in a restaurant, off Allenby, but seemingly idle, facing her with a determination whenever she looks in his eyes. For a moment he had stood, confronted, when she first came in, the waiters around him moving on noiseless feet among a rattling of tea things and whispered words. But instantly amidst the rush, she had located him. Soon enough, they were left together as if to talk, over a mere laid table, as if they should be able to nonchalantly pick up on years of discontinuous conversation. Suze felt a sense of delicacy, a shame, a qualm and consequently didn't bother to ask of Shimoni, feeling their situation helpless. His movements having answered for her, back then, that not only was he married, but that he was always pursued by a stream of interesting foreign women. Suze had promptly protested, been discharged from inner kiddish circles and cabin ceremonies with him, and she and Eli had struck up this comradely relationship which now many years after they still maintained. Both of them knew so, felt so, and appreciated this for what it was.

4.

SUZE HAD BEEN so dramatic and theatrical, Eli felt. When confronted with Suze, Eli repeatedly asked himself how families get so torn apart. Diaspora? Money? Suze always said she had nobody, which is why he allowed her to turn to him ever since the cruise on which he and Shimoni had been working, hoping to meet and strike up with attractive moneyed women. Suze often brought him high-tipping customers when, armed with someone else, she came in to talk. He had overheard her conversation once with Lotan, the journalist, another Tel Aviver who some how had befriended her. Eli had tried to give good service, to not look as if he had heard, to give the impression of being smart. But he had heard something about a father, a banker, a divorce, all the money being taken by a brother who had abandoned her in a state mental hospital interpreting an accident as a suicide attempt when her car swerved off the road. Suze had lost the dome house in Poundridge as well, after all that work. Suze had designed it herself. Lotan had always been telling her to make great literature of her story, she was back on her feet, why go to court. A lot of bother. For vengeance?
SUZE SAT DOWN at her usual table. She tried to read *Satanic Verses*, something new she had picked up. She read some headlines about the Persian Gulf in some imported paper. Aboard a US ship, a chopper descended upon the deck, with its burden of stretcher-borne "wounded"—groaning, shrieking "victims" hustled by corpsmen to high speed elevators. The elevators that took only seconds to drop to the receiving bay within the 1,000-bed ship. Suze closed the paper, feeling manipulated that the story she had been lured into reading had been describing only a mere drill. The back of the paper described how rear-echelon units were assigned light duties and allowed to rest in their cots or play football and volleyball on the desert sands. Suze sighed. She wondered if she should contact her brother, her sister, all she felt she had left for family, or get herself a gas mask. It was so tiresome, really. This business of committing suicide. How many times in her life had she tried? She couldn’t remember them all. She had heard of Indians in India, when they reached a certain age the elders gave up all their possessions and wandered the earth with no ties. But unfortunately where ever she was she still felt the need to feed, the urge to nurture, the poor pregnant cats—she would have to make a note to call. She waved to Eli, who had already seen her. Unsuspecting of what was up with her, he brought her the usual—fresh squeezed orange juice, in a large chilled glass.

SUZE SENSED ELI to be busy. She didn't try to talk to him. She knew how important it was for men, this man, any man, to take cover under the superior importance of his work in order to distance himself from any woman, not only from her. She drank the juice, and organized her receipts of paid bills instead of giving him the appearance that she was waiting for the smallest crumb of recognition or attention from him. When you are up to your ass in alligators, it’s hard to remember you came to drain the swamp, something inside of her said. Suze made a note of this aphorism to herself, as well as to the Police Officer. Suze also diligently recorded every transaction from these last few days on a separate square of lavender paper. She caught herself planning to scatter them to the breeze as she jumped. Looking around the room, she found herself imagining Police Officer Avi Ben David over at Tel Aviv Homicide later trying to make sense of the pieces. She had gone from an Arab hut to a Pent Hut in Tel Aviv, to living in Venice. There, because of the canals, she didn’t have to deal with cars after that horrible accident, where she could become lost and sit in a quiet square on the edge of a fountain but she had never found that little house with the garden in which to grow old gracefully. Suze looked at her last bag, ruefully, sitting somewhere around her on the floor by her pink plastic covered reddened feet. She had always been admired for the
way she traveled with only a few things with her, which she coordinated so that each particular item served many various functions. Suze traveled at least 30,000 air miles some years, carrying her little dog from the beach in Maui. She and the dog were often heard singing sweet love songs with each other as a mother and child would. But now she finalized all her records and notes: Jerusalem Post, Fridays, free. Signed by the manager 12/16/89. Cruelty to the dog, reported to the Israeli SPCA, for reasons of her own, by the manager who wanted to force her dog out of the hotel. 7.70 shekels divided by 2-$3.87 in phone calls, telephone 606, 8/5, 9/2, 9/11. 9/23. . . the last four calls about the kitten to the Israeli SPCA. Every phone call she had made for several months, to Lotan, at Haaretz, the newspaper. Every receipt of the fluctuating rent, marked PAID. Suze had kept timed and dated computer printouts for every payment. She fastened the receipts and scraps together, in meticulous order, with a paper clip. Then she leafed listlessly through Death in Venice, by Thomas Mann. She remembered there were those who when it was time to die, they died like Thomas Mann, fading in a beach chair. Then there were those who died in a plane crash. And then there were those who when everyone else died in the same plane crash, because a person’s time has not come, that person had a protection from death and that person would live. Suze left Eli a big tip, plus the cost of the juice, and headed towards the beach again, where she rented another beach chair.

7.

SUZE DABBED a little French perfume on her purple scarf. This wasn’t going to be easy, she thought as she sat down. Perhaps she should fly again to Palazzo del Giglio, in Venice, there to discover who knows what—perhaps lads of imported beauty. INSHA ALLAH as the Arabs say: Please God, who knows what can happen. Suddenly she felt a misty nostalgia come over her, even for an American supermarket. Too bad, really, that her friend Hazel had never found her a place to rent in Carmel. In paradisiacal Venice, perhaps she could see some of her favorite people and their places and things. The Greek who had loved her for her money, or because he thought she had more than she did. She longed to see the gondoliers streaming past, singing to their boat loads of tourists on guitar and mandolin as they crossed under bridges and out to the Zido. The rambling structures, the statuettes, the Corinthian columns, and the colored poles in front of the awnings, the dead-ripe fruit served in cafes and bars. Her eyes wandered in awe over voluminous aged structures, the shops with walls covered with Carnival masks, the sun and the moon. She never had made that side trip to the temples of Isis and Venus in Pompeii, or to the statue of Isis in Rome. People had been good to her, with her coming and going. But over that last lunch with her lawyer over there, she hadn’t even mentioned or said a word, even though the lawyer had handled her business for years, the buying and selling of property. She became aware of the
sandwalling on the old castle. The Island of Judaica, spelled differently but settled by Jews first streaming out of Spain The sundial with Apollo, the masks of Apollo kissing/embracing Luna. As these images streamed through her mind, Suze thought again about Death in Venice, by Thomas Mann, the man who had died in the beach chair. She picked up The Age of Reason, which she also kept in her possession, by Thomas Paine. Also flower-covered. She had bought some wrapping paper and made her own covers, enjoying the fact that her reading material became more incognito, this furthering her enjoying the possibility of becoming lost in the mazes of petit lace curtains in respectable bars. Suze thumbed through, listlessly, not seeing what she held in her two hands before her, increasingly preoccupied about what to do. She was tired. She liked animals better than people. Suze shut the book, looked at the waves and stared.

8.

SAD SUZE, as she ruefully called herself when not referring to herself as Ta’oot which meant in Hebrew, mistake, wrong number, slumped in her rented beach chair. She was hardly conscious or aware of the hour when she woke up, hardly aware of where she was. Oh yes. After paying the rental fee, slowly she remembered, Suze had settled the chair in the sand, moving to the edge of the busy quarter. When the loud teenagers had arrived around noon, Suze had risked the zenith of the rays and moved elsewhere, staring into the froth absorbed in the rhythm of the impulse of the waves, feeling sad about the loss of her mother, the funeral, not even showing up back there. But after all, the family had dumped her into that hospital, all but abandoning her, only showing up a couple of times in the six months while Suze had not even clothes. Only the staff-provided bathrobes and nightgowns. Seersucker. Floral. Nothing had matched. Suze had taken up the study of dance, afterwards, so enjoying the fact that she was so free, and able just to move again, wearing yellow leotards when she had been commuting regularly to a class downtown. Suze picked up the pile of last papers, looking for the photographs of herself striking exotic poses back in that Lower Manhattan studio in New York. There she was around sunset, on the Tel Aviv beach, rifling through her last bag of belongings, looking for the pictures. She found only old letters. Dear Suze, greetings about her 65th birthday, addresses of house kit manufacturers, a copy of Moveable Feast by Hemingway, who was always finding fault with the wives, young girls and girlfriends, but whose prose still gave her glimpses into the literary cafe life she had always sought.

The sunset approached nightfall, and Suze tried at once to remember and to forget. She had found not the dance pictures, but the design for the beach hut the kibbutz had not given her the go-ahead to build, called "the Evil Eye." She had left them. Then she found
the articles to send to Lady Mairi, and two copies, the original and Xerox of Paul’s last letter.

DEAR MYRTLE,

(There was hardly enough light left or just coming on from the neon signs announcing the restaurants behind her to read his scrawl):

I JUST WANT TO SAY, THAT REGARDLESS OF WHAT MAY BE WRITTEN ON PAPER, I PROMISE THAT YOU WILL NEVER LACK FOR MATERIAL COMFORT AS LONG AS IT IS IN MY POWER TO GIVE YOU.

Yet Suze had always left the origin of her fortunes vague, always intimating and allowing casual acquaintances to believe that perhaps she survived on a settlement from the auto accident. Suze sighed, as the last orange in the panoramic sky arching above the Tel Aviv beach disintegrated into a deep haze of purple, and the first star came out. She found herself regretting that she could not find Paul now. So desperately she had tried looking him up through the old address of his company but finding he was no longer there, then on the advice of Lotan she had given up looking. . . Warily Suze got up, left the bag, and dragged only her beach chair now, walking out into the last gentle lap of the waves, feeling the last breeze on her sunburned gnarled and wrinkled hands which, when she looked down at them, she could hardly recognize as her own. So slowly had the process occurred. As slowly and insidiously as the gentle waning to low tide. Starting out in her late forties with a couple of round discolored age spots. Discrete at first. Deteriorating gradually. She shut her eyes, not able to look at her physical self with any caring or compassion. She found herself with her eyes closed picturing, even imagining, that which she had accomplished building, the eight-sided house, her luxury dream, with the round tub, on a cliff in St. Thomas, with the drop to the beach . . . so that she might find some comfort before her final jump to her last rest. A cutout advertisement for a book of Frank Lloyd Wright drawings floated after her. Excuse me, miss, you dropped this, a small voice said behind her. Suze turned, murmured thank you, took the paper, put down her beach chair, put the scrap with the rest of her belongings, took off her serape and plastic beach shoes, and went in, to float a bit, one last bit, letting the waves wash and rewash her aging old naked and withered body on the shores of the Tel Aviv sand, hoping it would be a long time before some one would spot her and rescue her. . . Suze remembered, once she had tried to drown like this. She had only survived because of Spottie’s presence, waiting for her on the shore. . . she mused ruefully again, what if Wright had accepted her in his study circle.
of disciples around his house in Wisconsin? Would her life have run a different course? But she had spoken up to much, asked too many questions, noticing the differential ways in which he treated his disciples and the members of his own family.

9.

AS THE WAVE HAD HIT up against her and her skin had tinged with the hard splashing of the cold spray, Suze had felt the pangs of desire to call her sister, Sasha's mother. Life lived from the point of view of death, Suze was realizing very rapidly, was lived quite differently. After ignoring her sister for years, leaving the long stream of letters from the Mid West in the US unanswered, Suze now suddenly and urgently wanted to reunite with her female sibling. To gather the energy to do so, she knew she had to be fortified by her friends in Venice first Suze had crawled back, gotten dressed, collected her things, returned to the room, made the arrangements and flew to Venice, saw the old sprightly Lady Mairi from Northern Ireland again. They had lunched in the original ghetto where the Venetian Jews were thrown, as in ghetto, thrown away, like iron from a factory. Suze hadn't said a word of the predicament she was in, which was absurd. Suze had done what she vowed to do at 66. She had sold off all her houses, stocks and properties, aiming to kill herself at 70. She had been living off the money until all her cash ran out, not wanting to live to be old, intending to kill herself when her finances ran out. But having had a change of heart, Suze had changed her mind. Then Suze had flown to the United States, after calling her sister from Venice and announcing that she intended to come over for a short visit. The visit to her sister had not been a success, except that Suze had learned that she had a niece now in Israel, a writer, working on a science fiction novel about the future of Jerusalem, her sister had told her. The niece she had learned of was named Sasha. There, too, in the States, Suze had become concerned about the animal police control officer, and the system of collection of strays. She had called the Humane Society manager, and joined the organization. The membership was only $15, what the hell. Suze had shown up rather desperately trying to show her sister that she really was a good citizen. That ever since her six months in the hospital she had been trying to see the world through rose-colored glasses. That after all, she had not known Paul very well, when he met her he had not taken over the family business. He had been only a painter. He liked to paint her in the nude. So what. He never sold the portraits. Dancing with the boys at the dock and perhaps being promiscuous with them, so what. That was so long ago, and the boys were going off to war, not knowing if they would return, why shouldn't Suze have had a good time? But her sister had never forgiven her for being the family flame, at that time. Suze showed up this time from Tel Aviv and Venice with all her lifeguard badges and her “Calling All Listeners” contribution to Kol Israel card from 1988. Her sister, although sad and lonely since her husband of 30 years had died, had not been
impressed. In fact, she had been angry. How could this bohemian decadent sister show up after 23 years like this, after 23 years of returning unopened unanswered letters. "Ah, Sweet Mystery of Life," Kol Israel had played for Suze saying afterwards, "Myrtle Brink in Venice, Italy, says it makes her heart sing when she hears the signal..." Her sister, a widow, had continued her inane dinner partying; upstairs in an abandoned nephew’s bedroom, Suze had continued her listing:

- 2 female cats with kittens, hidden:
  - 1 striped kitten with white paws (born 24 Sept)
  - 2 white ginger black kittens (born 9 October)

These were the cats behind the residence hotel at 5 Geula who ran back to take kittens hidden on Yona Hanaui. For this, on 10/16, before taking off for her final familial desperate visit, Suze had paid 6:30 shekels in postage to send an express registered American Express check. On 10/17, from the airport in Rome she had telephoned Hilda, the lady who ran the Israeli SPCA, at home, to make sure that had received it. Hilda confirmed. Suze had rested assured, that there had been a reason for her troubled existence that day.

10.

"SASHA, WAKE UP..."  

Sasha sighed, taciturn. What luck. "I'm not sleeping," she called to Isaac outside.

"Well then come to the phone."

"I can’t. I'm writing," Sasha looked at her carefully organized papers. At the candle burning, the piled unanswered letters from home.

"Somebody in your family has died. Why do you do something that costs money when you don’t earn..."

Sasha opens the door and slowly goes outside. Down the stairs

11.

BACK IN THE STATES, Suze had tried to give everything to her sister: the account of her second marriage to the Israeli, Natan, priceless scattered entries thrown hurredly into perverse journals. Signed letters attesting to her character from 1967. Articles about
cruelty to animals. Notes about cats. Pictures of masked men in the Intifada, from the weekend Jerusalem Post. Suze had even kept the raggedy clip of an article on the wave of canine immigrants accompanying the Soviet newcomers. Nor could she bear to throw out the editorial which predicted effects on veteran dogs, or the clips of Peanuts comic strips in English of Lucy asking Charley Brown, what do you do after you’ve had the happiest day in your life, what then? Plus Suze had held on to an article on rabbis tramping through the mud of a wet winter on the Carmel range, in pursuit of a red heifer. My sister hates me, Suze thought, but she stayed, wanting to deposit these pieces of herself somewhere, with some human being, signifying that her life would have come to some meaningful end? These bits were so precious, reflecting her soul, her state of mind somehow. If she jumped, who else would gather and make whole these fragments of herself? Forcing by her imagination to conjecture a person behind the pieces? Well, what about it? Suze challenged herself, alone in the early hours of the morning in the bedroom of her now-grown nephew, whom she had last seen as a child. Suze would awake from troubled sleep and sort through the refuse and shreds. The outer representations of her inner self. The pictures of the original Canaan Dog, dating back to biblical times, having changed little since the days of guard dog and shepherd to the ancient Israelites. Personal correspondence from the Israel Kennel Club. These were mementos for posterity, a woman’s attempt to create a history for herself, Suze thought proudly as she laid them all out in an orderly way in a binder, which required a lot of work. Here too was a record of the golden retriever at the World Dog Show, when it was in Tel Aviv. In the morning, her sister, when presented with the gift of Suze’s collected flashes of important items, hadn’t accepted the lifetime project.

Suze had returned home, checked into the Sheraton, trying the whole way while she was making the final arrangements packing, getting to the airport, flying, changing planes, going through another airport, and yet another, and another, attempting not to feel anything at all. She accomplished all her final acts in a senseless daze, already dead to her self. Only her body remained, inside nothing but this dead malaise.

12.

“BUT MOM, I don’t have room for anything," Sasha was explaining to her mother long distance over the hotel lobby phone, in front of Isaac.

"I'm writing. I'm not going out much at all now, only to a cafe now and then and to check my mail. But I'll get Isaac to pick it up when he goes over to Club Natural, to the bars, if he has room for it here. And no, I might not come back at all."

13.

SASHA GAVE ISAAC instructions.

Isaac came home empty-handed.

Isaac informed Sasha nonchalantly that the manager of the residence hotel at 5 Geula, Mrs. Grossman, had sold all of her aunt’s possessions. Sasha went back to her writing, unsuspecting of any camouflaged problems and undisturbed. Actually, Isaac had sold all Suze’s jewelry he had retrieved from Mrs. Grossman except a gold sapphire ring. This he had given to Rebekah, in the morning, who had kissed him. Isaac had blushed. Rebekah had kissed him again.