

Raven

Feathers fully covered in ashes ruffle in the wind.
No sackcloth. Black, as crisp as a clear night. Almost

like my blood browned, once cream dress, tattered and torn,
aged eroding by the elements...only darker.

What happened that you only use one foot
to hobble on, instead of walking straight on two?

Why couldn't He have given me wings
to soar, like you do, like all birds do?

Deep bottom of the sea eyes glistening darkness—
a moonlightless night with dancing shadows.

You don't seem to care that you can't walk
well, with your chest proud, preaching perching on the branch above me.

I didn't think it mattered much that I cannot walk, until
I crash landed, living under this tree.

Dagger claws that could rip my eyes
out...at least one of us would eat.

Couldn't your ancestor find an olive leaf for Noah?
Where did he go when the water dried up from the earth?

Cah cah cries.
Do you even know that

you and your kind
are unclean?¹ Unclean.

Why would He make us—the unclean?

¹ According to Blu Greenberg (author of *On Women and Judaism: A View From Tradition and How to Run a Traditional Jewish Household*), traditional Jewish views of “uncleanness” are misinterpreted and are better understood as purity laws and rituals. Jodi Magness explains in “Jesus and His Jewish Influences” (a 2015 Great Courses Audio series) that people in Jesus’ time were for the most part in continual uncleanness, except for priests during their temple stays. However, *Searching for Kadesh* examines uncleanness more from the context of exclusion and as a literary device.

New Family

Muffled sobs from a body wrapped in beige canvas

Don't cry.

What does crying solve?

Let her be.

Cry as much as you need to.

We still cry ourselves to sleep sometimes, even
him. We can be your new family now.

Don't give her false hope.

Bunch of blind paralytic outcasts,
forced to sit sleep here on this cold hard dirt,
starving, waiting for death.
You call that family?

Don't you remember

your first night, how you missed your family?

No. I never

Sobs amplify as she turns her back towards them

want to see them
again. How

could they leave me here?

Our families all had their reasons. Don't
listen to him. We call him Beautiful² because he
was given much beauty, but a
hardened heart and cannot
see beauty in anything.

See that man with long dark hair
sleeping next to him? That's Kindness;
he sees beauty in everything. He gets our water when no villagers are looking and
carries us to where we beg since he is blind and can walk. We
are his eyes and he is our feet. The woman across from him reads and writes,
but she cannot hear. We communicate with her in the sand
or use gestures. Our name for her is putting
our hand over our head like this, signifying her how smart she is. We
call the man leaning against this tree
behind me Happiness. He brings us laughter with his insights, even
though the villagers call him stupid. The
others are still out begging at the
temple, city gates, and sandy streets. We
are your new family now.

Sobs subside as she faces the sky

Scoffs.

² Acts 3

TEN CHARACTER SKETCHES:

I. Beautiful

They say he wasn't always like this. Once wealthy, he spent carelessly on women and "friends." They say he was handsome with the finest flowing light hair. But that slowly stopped when his ailment started. He dwindled his family inheritance on black magicians and healers, looking for a cure, he could never find. In the process, he lost everything and everyone he had. That's how they say he ended up here with us. On rare days, I can see glimpses of his beauty and striking locks, beneath all his bittersweet bitterness.

II. The Intelligent Woman

They say she came from a family of moderate means. Sickness caught her in infancy when she stopped listening to the birds and her family cooing. Instead of investing in cattle for marriage, they taught her to read and write many languages—better than most men. Perhaps they thought this would ensure her survival and let people see what they saw, that she wasn't dumb. But still, after her parents died, she still ended up here like the rest of us. That's what they say anyway.

III. Fighter

They warn, don't tick her off if you value your life. Red firey locks. Her major muscles upon muscles are stronger than most men. Easily provoked but not easily subdued. Glad she stays on our side, as long as she's not mad at us. They say she had her baby taken from her, deemed unfit in her condition. I wonder if her strength came from being a mother or just from being a woman. I bet it broke her when they ripped her baby away right after she gave birth. I wonder if the father even knew to care; if they even let her hold the baby.

IV. Cynic

They say he doesn't believe in anything. He says that there's nothing worth believing in. I wonder if that includes himself. Young. Would be tall if he stood, but always has to lie down and can't move below his neck. Has a sharper wit than any sword or arrow. Average looking, borderline attractive, but his words make up for that.

V. Reason

They say she can cut anyone down with a lash of her tongue, declaring herself the victor. She thinks emotions are all invalid, refusing to talk to anyone she deems too emotional. Emotions lack reason and logic; and thus, not worth her time. Straight-no-nonsense-hair. She seriously strives for pure logic. The only one of us who prioritizes her cleanliness and washing her clothes—her cream dress still creamy.

VI. Curiosity

They say he stays in a constant state of awe, wondering about these and those things that ordinary people could care less about—the smallest bugs to the rolling clouds. Although he lost his boyish looks, he still has some of his dark curls and his constant amazing awes and asking endless questions. Always excited to learn something new, adding it to his vast wrinkled knowledge.

VII. Happiness

They don't know his back-story—nobody does. He doesn't even know where he's from—otherwise, he would run back barefooted, unlike the rest of us. All we know is what we see—a deep slanted scar across his forehead and more scars rolling like roaring rivers down his back, between his broad, gentle shoulders. We see these scary scars when he dances clothesless, shamelessly—scaring the villagers and anyone passing by. We can only guess where these scars came from—his family, an accident, a cruel master? He could probably be the easiest one of us to pass living amongst villagers, when he has his clothes on, that is. But all we do know for sure is one night, someone left him here. He's been here ever since, even though it's been over 20 years—longer than any of us. Although we call him Happiness, he isn't always happy—he just brings happiness to us.

VIII. Sadness

They say he came soon after Happiness did. To this day, they're inseparable. Sadness may be small and meek with his peppery hair and beard, but is as sharp as any street merchant and as sly as any fox. Happiness carries him on his shoulders but respects him like an older brother. Sickly, Sadness was always the first of us to lay ill and the last of us to recover. We presume this is a large part of why he was left here and are amazed he still is.

IX. Laughter

They never know what he's laughing at; he just laughs—in the middle of the night, in random moments, and in not so random moments breaking our awkward silences. Some say he's "mad," with his bark brown hair whipping his face, flying with the wind. I'd like to think he's just remembering something from his lighter days, but he never shares what he is laughing at. Sometimes it's contagious; annoying; jarring. His explosions almost always catch us by startled surprise.

X. Kindness

They say he was born kind, although he was born without sight. His parents hid him in a corner of their home; he didn't leave there until their deaths. He is average looking, yet all of the women here love his kindness, not-so-secretly admiring him as close as we can get. And yet, he is equally just as kind to each of us—despite us wanting him to choose to see only one of us.

Who is He?

Who is this man from Nazareth we keep hearing about?

Rumors say he heals people like us.

My friend witnessed him healing a man who was paralyzed for years and years.

They say he's healed a countless bunch of blind paralytic outcasts.

Can he heal us?

I hear he can raise the dead.

Is he a black magician?

What good can possibly come out of Nazareth?

Why do people keep saying that?

Is Nazareth a place of rubbish?

Prophecy says that the Messiah will come from Bethlehem.

Rumors say he is the one.

Will he deliver us from the end of the Romans' whips?

Can he end our endless oppression?

Will he lead us into war and win?

What happens to people like us in war?

Win or lose; we never win.

Rumors say he is a false prophet.

Will the authorities uncover him?

What makes a prophet false or true?

Who are we to say?

Rumors say he is the one...

The one?

The one, what?

The one Moses and the Prophets prophesied would come for our people.

What about the rest of the people?

Even us?

Is he the one like all of the other ones who didn't turn out to be the one?

If he is the one, how can we be sure he is the one?

Will he heal us?

How do we even know where he will be?

He collects listening crowds.

Followers or protesters?

Who cares?

His words must have meaning to move the masses.

What does he say?

Love your neighbor as yourself...

That doesn't include family, right?

Blessed are the poor...

How are we blessed?

He's talking about us, right? We're the poorest of the poor.

Or is he using us as a metaphor?

His words probably are meant for the healthy.

But he heals people like us.

Probably meant for people with homes and families.

But he left his family and home.

Why? Is he crazy?

Who cares who he is, as long as he can heal us?

How can he heal us when we're stuck here?

We need to find a way to get to him.

It sounds like a lot of work for something that has a high likelihood of

failing.

Will he ever come to us?

How do we find a man wandering without a home?

The same way you find us.

What if all the rumors are just rumors?

What would we have to lose?

Hope. Less hope.

We could gain everything. Our dreams.

But what if the rumors are true?

Then we will be healed.

If he heals us.

How does he choose who to heal?

Why are the Chosen chosen?

What about the unchosen?

He could be a hoax.

He could be real.

What's the catch?

There has to be a catch.

Who does he say that he is?

They say he doesn't say.

Is he who they say he is?

Which they?