

Rina Banerjee

Make Me a Summary of the World

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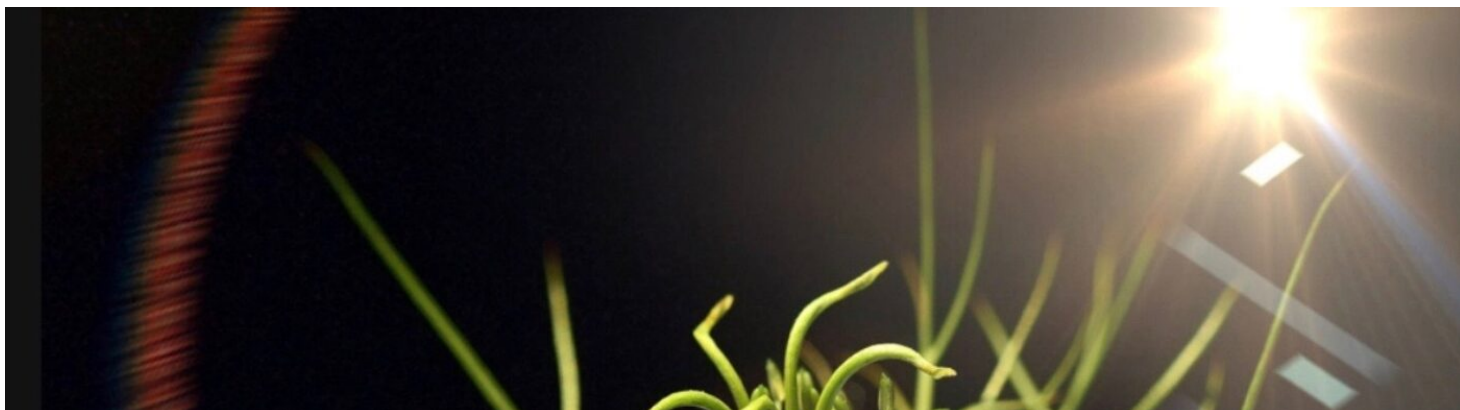
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# *BOMB*

## An Artist's Guide to Herbs: Black Seed by Harmony Holiday

*With Nigella Sativa, we arrive at midnight together, to the intimacy that can come from mass hysteria.*

Part of the [Spectacular Herbs](#) series.





*And he's getting more and more lonely, more and more atomized, he's being blown apart— Henry Miller*

If you want to laugh *with* the man-made aspects of the apocalypse and feel vindicated by the whirlwind, listen to more Sun Ra, the prophetic jazz pianist who predicted this a long time ago and promised spaceships and black salvation if we would give up our deaths for him. But few would give up their deaths for anything. When asked to choose immortality, it forces us to face the seductive vanity of the death drive and how it might lure us all to the wrong side of necromancy—to romanticizing atrophy, voguing danger, or asking ourselves with debased composure why we are a destiny. The planet is inflamed, the planet is in flames, and the law of cause and effect is infamous for the man walking through fire who forgot he was the water and so became a kind of doom right in the middle of his own salvation, put himself out, got his wish.

I've been pacing riddles like this one in effort to comprehend why destruction, or the rhetoric of destruction, feels so casual these days, so relaxed, like the shrugged *Hello, America*, of another drugged out villain live on CNN. We seem to love our bloody mirrors. It's as if we're taking comfort in corruption and outrage, not all that concerned with survival, deriving a sense of hyper-fertility from the idea of a doomsday clock ticking ever closer to midnight, exploiting our every frenzy, in love with our time bomb, our scapegoat, our angry goat memes, our race rants, our stammering guffaws, enamored with the greater

catastrophe of American life because maybe it fulfills our sublimated desire to be rescued, by god or some monarch or MGM or Netflix, Freud, Jung, poets, negritude, Sun Ra. CNN says the North Koreans are casually blowing up tunnels, the Americans fill another glass house with blow and pyrotechnics out by the pool and wait to be entertained by private property war games and the shameless cavalcade of bait. *It's a motherfucker, don't you know, if they push that button, your ass has got to go, Sun Ra laughs, they're talking about, nuclear war, they're talking about, nuclear war.*

As a master griot, Sun Ra puts our peril in perspective for us, as hearsay, rumor, gossip, something petty, an irritant you move to swipe away like a fly indoors but one drawn toward you by your own idleness in the face of the machine. We idle in the glow of machines in part to refashion the intimacy we sacrifice to go into hiding behind them in the first place, and affectionately name our idling, *productivity, or domestic life.* We are being blown apart by our myriad electronic devices on a personal level, forced to live in etheric compartments, to fold into avatars and unfold into presence on the shoulders of those ghosting self-inventions standing in for us inside the machines, and so it's no wonder that the idea of achieving unity by being ripped apart or atomized or bombed out, holds subconscious allure for men who don't seem to realize that their outward inhumanity is fueling a need for intimacy so cruel and wild it would incinerate the world just to feel like part of it again.

The death drive Freud describes is actually a desire to feel alive in a way that the sickest among us only arrive at through violence and extinguishing, through forcing other bodies and bloodlines to join them in their downfall dreamscapes, not out of hate, but because the desperate need to come together will find a way. One problem with manmade anything, is that it usually prides itself on seedlessness, from watermelons to grapes to those dwarf oranges unfurling like a child's first smile, to the machines we program into companionship, the black pit or core, the seed, the sentient microchip, the factor that tells us if something is capable of reproducing itself or not, is missing.

This barrenness, these helplessly alive entities robbed of lust, when we consume them on this inflamed planet in our bitter unreadiness to give up our deaths, in our desire to chase death toward its most vulgar accomplices, we

nudge the clock a little closer to midnight by inducing systemic inflammation in ourselves, in our cells and arteries which do not tend to thrive on barren synthetic light, barren fruit, barren lusterless grass fed to lustless traumatized livestock, we helplessly mimic our politicking, steady ticking doom clock, we are the cells of the Earth, she is alive because we are, inflamed because we are, sick because we are, beautiful because we are— and the floods will come because our parched souls demand them.

Now imagine a time lapse of black seeds reentering all of the spaces left empty by their mistreatment and industrial exile (GMO lifestyles), all of their sites of original and inevitable belonging, all of the bodies the black seeds produced only to be expelled like *enfants terribles* from their own creations, being invaded, reawakened with the truth of their existence, compelled to give up their deaths, confronted with consequences of synthetic intimacy and having to feel whole again, to enjoy the sensual and crave the feeling of being tasted. In our succumbing to that much life-force there is no need for the broken intimacy of war, in our revival of honest origin myths we are less vulnerable to the mutually assured destruction of nuclear war, for what we are really threatening to destroy, why our patriarchal machismo flares up in times of outrageous chaos is because, whether we face it or not, we are biologically programmed to destroy lies, stories that rebuke the laws of nature, the ones inside our bodies or in the environments we create.

Black seeds and the volatile oil they produce, Black Seed Oil or *Nigella Sativa*, were discovered in Tutankhamun's tomb with a note dubbing them "the cure for all diseases." I don't think the ancients were prone to exaggeration in the ways advertising executives are today, this declaration was no sales pitch, it was a man beyond time divulging the secrets that got him there peacefully. The fact that any substance can be dubbed such a versatile cure at any point in human history suggests that there is a common root of all diseases, and in the paradigm of Black Seed oil as nature's most miraculous curative, that root catalyst of so much genetic dysfunction is simply, inflammation.

In an inflamed body, all functions are erratic, and most bodies in modern environments suffer from some degree of inflammation, either due to states of anxiety or overuse of machines or most of all due to what we eat and how:

produce with no seeds and consuming animal products that did the same and then not understanding why we feel more and more atomized. We use the very habits causing our alienation for comfort, more food, more social media, more branding and looking for intimacy in the flames. A substance called Thymoquinone, black seed oil's main bioactive constituent, can reverse everything from many cancers, to kidney disease, respiratory issues, skin eruptions, articular inflammation, back pain, neurological disorders, and stroke.

Western or allopathic medicine has a habit of finding a plant that is confoundingly therapeutic, dissecting it layer by layer on a molecular level, and then isolating the compound that is found most useful, with little if any explicit acknowledgement that it might have something to do with the ratios of that compound to others found in the plant in its natural form that account for the body's positive response to it. Thymoquinone has been characterized as a phytochemical, which just means a unique compound found in a plant, and is being studied on its own likely in hopes that some company can get a patent on it or a specific method of producing it, and sell it as an anti-cancer drug. It's a lonely way to approach healing, and also naïve and atomizing, like we're trying to make weapons to restore our health because the plants and flowers aren't aggressively individualistic enough for the shallow glories of modern science and machining.

Meanwhile, Tutankhamun isn't in his tomb with a vile of some soloing chemical called Thymoquinone, he's in there with black seed oil and Sun Ra trying to save the world. Whatever it is about black seeds, blackness and seeds, and black seed oil that calms the body into a state of healing with a spiced wood-like assertive flavor, distinct from other bitters, isn't just the Thymoquinone, and since it's a plant associated with Africa, with darkness and shadow and magic and those prophetic tombs, it's taken a while for science to face the fullness of its miraculous oneness, though studies and empirical evidence prove its efficacy again and again. May we keep it whole and full of desire to heal.

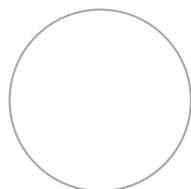
If we want to laugh ourselves to the ledge with Sun Ra and the Tender Buttons and admit that it's a collective coldness and the seedless feeling that follows that got us there, not some purely political malfunction, then maybe when we get there it will be the fact that we arrive at midnight together, the intimacy of

mass hysteria, that shocks us into cooperation, into admitting that we just missed a good senseless party, that old convivial feeling, that we don't need to be blown apart to gather, that we don't need to be barren to be modern, that what we want is as ancient as a pharaoh carving his prayer into the wall of an eternal resting place, giving up his death for us. I take a spoonful every morning as the sun goes up in flames, sprinkle the seeds themselves on legumes or avocados as the orb dims and softens. This solitary black ritual multiplied, turned toward solidarity, this end to the denial of how lonely it is to live without black seeds and black kings and black instructions on black tombs in black eternity, this return to ourselves is a scandal, a rumor of war I'm eager to spread.

### **Here is a Sun Ra Playlist for the Solstice:**

#### **All Sun**

by Brightmoments



Harmony Holiday is the author of *Negro League Baseball*, *Go Find Your Father/A Famous Blues* and most recently *Hollywood Forever*. She is also the founder of

Mythscience, an arts production house devoted to cross-disciplinary work that helps artists re-engage with their bodies, the Mingus School, its first series of events, and the Afrosonics archive of jazz and everyday diaspora poetics. She worked on the *SOS, The Selected Poems of Amiri Baraka*, transcribing all of his poetry recorded with jazz accompaniment that had yet to be released in print. Harmony studied rhetoric and at UC Berkeley and taught for the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre. She received her MFA from Columbia University and has received the Motherwell Prize from Fence Books, a Ruth Lilly Fellowship and a NYFA Fellowship. She is currently working on a book of poems on Reparations and the body, a collection of essays on the same topic, and a biography of jazz singer Abbey Lincoln. She lives in New York and Los Angeles.

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