

# On Being Human

## Neon Orange Tree Trunks

My focus oscillates  
between my coffee's lazy steam  
swaying, and three tailored spheres  
of dust-coated leaves- either side  
of a rustic wooden gate-  
guarding the grand mansion  
deprived of human touch.

A forced garden on a painted pavement stands,  
autumn's touch goes unnoticed-  
All grey, grunting ghouls  
in and around six little sad trees.  
The yarn of caffeinated vapor endlessly,  
pirouettes and prances  
veiling, then unveiling the trees.

Something bright! Something ablaze!  
Fiery orange spews out the trunk  
with a curved spine, they rest as though  
sculpted, outside the soulless mansion.  
I see only them-

The drenched laborers taking  
shade under the fishnet shadows  
in their neon orange vests,  
no more drilling infinitely into the pavement  
the merciless sun demands  
a quiet sight.

How loud their minds must be?  
If only my hearing range  
fits within their frequencies.  
I know not of how long,  
or how far they've come  
only to nest under these  
fishnet shadows.

I know not if the man  
with the missing tooth  
misses his children,  
or if he has a family at all?

I know not of the man  
with eyes shut,  
dreams in colour  
or black or stoic white.

I know not of the story  
behind the scar  
disappearing into  
his vest's hem.

I know not if they live  
grieving the death  
of a life they inched  
towards, but never lived...

I walk towards them,  
my hands cold from carrying  
chilled mango-juice bottles;  
I place them in each jagged palm.

Them and I,  
may have different stories  
with snowflake shaped scars,  
tongues rolling into languages  
that don't mix  
and races that are miles  
apart. Yet, I felt  
the warmth, the love,  
the gratitude,  
that sprouted out of  
their crinkled eyes,  
with gap toothed smiles  
louder than the drilling  
of all heads combined,

“Thank you, *beti\**”, smiles the one with the missing tooth.

\*Daughter

## White noise

*after “A Rose from Jericho” by Omar Singer*

I lay down in the middle  
of the garden in protest  
the storm stirs, I stir,  
in detest rain slaps my body down.  
Ten minutes. Only ten minutes  
before her eyebrows frenzy at her grand-daughter cosy,  
under the cold, pouring rain.  
Ten minutes before she yells,  
‘Are you crazy?’, convinced fever would find me.

I seal tight my eyes, the video from Gaza on repeat:  
Beneath an anxious roof, an anxious family sit;  
Missiles fly and fragility reeks.  
I wince at the gasp of the little girl's voice-  
scared blue eyes scavenge safety in her toys  
her father scoops her, rosary beads sprint  
chanting so loud but the war cry wins!  
Dying a thousand deaths before their house crumbles  
until voices replace thuds-  
a command, an unmusical roar, bang!  
The 53-year long cycle repeats  
I hear it all in white noise, lost in ‘technical’ translation.  
I hear it all sizzling, hot inside my head.

I hear it. I collect myself, “Stop crying,  
be grateful that it’s not you instead!”.  
Eyes flaming, I paralyze in helplessness.  
Will withers, whimpers at this thing  
called humanity-  
the white noise wrapped in sweet silence.

Birds chirp unaware, the cows moo in reply...  
The earth invites me, tossing the  
honeyed serenity from tree to tree  
away from desolation, closer to doomsday  
I lay, peacefully in my mossy casket  
listening to the conflict being retold  
in thousand different voices,  
in thousand different media strains.  
I listen, and I listen. I hear static.

My grandmother finds me-  
she yells, like clockwork.