

Or Die, Like Trees, Standing Up

The axe cuts through the perfect circle without sound, without movement; a tension, an arrest, a confession of industrial guilt. The perennial cyclicity trapped within wood, within bodies inflicted with that familiar longing: fatal, stubborn, and strangely serene.

In the land of disappearing humans and their spectral kin, a lone plant explodes with its own seeds. In English they call it ballistic dispersal. In Arabic: the jinn's apples. Ballistic seed. Militant plants. Exploding. Not without a piercing shriek. The missiles travel at the speed of *mourning* light. The missiles puncture the feeble blue of the sky, leaving holes.

The sirens wake up from their slumber. Wet, they lift their heads above the water and release their serenading calls. The sirens go off in the land of disappearing humans and their spectral kin. An incessant cry emerges from the rivers, the wells, the seas, the shallow puddles of inferior rain, the tear ducts, the sink, *your* sink, and mine.

Deafening sounds trapped in the vivarium. An explosion, an eerie silence, a grey that covers us like film, and

over

there,

the

trees

die

standing

up.

The axe cuts through the stagnant air. The axe made from the limbs of trees. A whip a slash an infectious sense of relief. The man who doesn't heed the sirens' calls bends his head towards a flower that grows near his grounded palm. He listens to the ascent of raindrops in its soft stem, upwards upwards towards the punctured sky. The heartache disperses. It reaches the flesh under his nail. His nails turn blue with the melancholy of flowers.

In the land of disappearing humans and their spectral kin, foreign trees catch on fire. Self-immolation. *Their* decision, not mine. Diaphanous sheets cover the bodies that struggle to move. Thickets between the flesh and the bone, the flesh and the wood, the flesh and the soil, the flesh and a grave nascent loss. Look under the burnt roots of the trees. Miniature dinosaurs, martyred oranges, scarps of fairies' wings and there lies the debris of magical villages. The villages where the phoenixes would ascend in holy flight.

The man who doesn't heed the sirens' calls thinks of return: the land as martyr; the land as agent; the land as red refusal - embodied. He knows the less than convoluted truth: if you touch the roots they will come back to life. Does he remember the girl from the folktale who covered whatever she touched with moss? No, and neither do you.

But the man remembers the poet whose heart was wrapped in moss. He remembers his warning: "if you live, live free // or die like trees standing up // standing, standing, standing like trees // and throw a stone into the stagnant water so that rivers may emerge // ring your bells in the kingdom of silence and sing // sing your anthem // sing, sing // and let the wall of fear shatter like clay."* The man heeds the poet's alarm.

He bends his head in concentration. He embroiders a phoenix, a griffin, the star of Bethlehem. Beit Lahm: house of bread, the house of flesh; the house of 'fusing' too. The space of fiction covers his young hands like film.

In the land of emerging humans and their spectral kin, militant plants explode not in martyrdom but euphoria. The man does not shake his hands to repel the watching eye; the eye recalling the movement of flesh. He recognizes the afternoon metamorphosis: afternoon knowledge; afternoon return to our kin.

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