



Obsession revered her eyes  
As she willfully glanced past my flirt;  
Coy words danced on her eyelashes  
Rifting through the stoic fragrance  
Like wings set against pale brown stares  
Trembling;  
and I knew for a day,  
She was mine.

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## THE TASTE OF ROOH AFZA

MASHIAT LAMISA

The taste of Rooh Afza lingers on my tongue -  
Sweetened but insipid  
Hurting the back of my throat like a  
Sour hymn does.  
From old plastic cups and rusted tin jugs,  
I imbibe water like a withered tree in autumn -  
As the sound of the Adhan floats  
From not afar.

The minaret vibrates as the Muezzin shakes the  
skies down.  
"Ramadan," my father said, "is when He accepts  
your prayers."  
So I prostrate, bow, kneel and weep -  
An hour and one more,  
God's men and their words turn my plastic insides  
into craquelure.  
"Expunge the remnants of despair that lie within,  
rid me of the past that persists," I pray to Him.  
My heart at peace, a whispering clamour;  
Yet the taste of Rooh Afza lingers -  
Now turned smooth and palatable.



# THEY

MYAT MOE KHAING

Mom slapped me hard on my face. I only asked her the direction to the West. She asked, "What for?" The six year-old I said, "To lay down a cloth. I will offer my namaz."

"I let you play with your friends and is this what they teach you? You aren't playing with them anymore."

I was too young to understand why mom didn't appreciate this imitating act of mine. Belief determined my playmates.

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"You hate them."

"I don't."

"Then you should."

"Why?"

"Because they aren't us."

I looked at the boy in raggedy clothes. He of course wasn't one of us. Long unkempt hair, dirty skin, torn clothes say that he was useless. Mom surely knows best.

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He didn't look like us. By us, I mean the ones who had been living here for as long as I can recall. He, along with a few more like him, came here few months ago because what all their countrymen did was bomb their own land. 'Syria' that's what I hear they come from.

He didn't speak like we did. Our language was too sophisticated for them to understand. You know them? The ones who never spoke? Probably they didn't want to embarrass themselves with their accents.

Above all, he didn't belong here. So,



we were his God.

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Once, our car stopped at a signal. He came running with a piece of cloth in his hand. Before we could say a word, he was done wiping the glasses. He pointed his index finger up and smiled. That was the only way he communicated.

"Now is he asking for a pound, eh? We didn't even ask for the service."

We drove away. I didn't bother to look back.

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"What if they are harmless?"

"They aren't."

"How do you know?"

"Are you challenging what I say? Oh Christ! Tell me you never spoke to them. I don't want to see you around them." Dad paused and then continued, "Ever. God knows what they are carrying with them."

"It could be arms or even diseases," his friend added. I never asked the same question again.

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"Sir, your order?"

I was looking at the menu of the restaurant I halted in for a while. My parents are eager to meet me after years I had spent studying abroad. Before I burden them with stuffing food in my mouth, I decided to check into this new restaurant next to the airport.

"The shikh kebab tastes best with nan. You might want to try it."

I take my eyes off the menu and look at the waiter. For a moment, I can't believe what I see.

It's him! It's exactly him. I look around. I see him everywhere in the manager there, the guard at the front door, the cashier at the corner, the busy waiters. He has grown in numbers.

He kept smiling confidently and waited for me to speak. I wonder where he got this confidence from. For a moment, I wanted to hug him tight and say, "I always knew you were harmless. I always felt what I was taught was wrong and that history was different. You guys would never try to kill and take over us. And today, you have proven us wrong. You have won our hearts, brother. Look at your business flourishing and all the people trusting you with it. Bravo!"

I look at the people devouring the food of the restaurant. Their faces have no sign of fear or suspicion. I want to cringe and wished mom was here to tell me what to do. But I had to decide. Water! Yes, that will be a good option to order.

He is still smiling. But it feels secure.

"Yeah sure," comes out of my mouth.