

Rizwan Akhtar

## The Porcelain

(*In memory of Faiz Ahmad Faiz*)\*

A city was once abundant in candles,  
then darkness became a language  
all lineage, all expressions were tightened  
unknown maladies surfaced  
on alveolar and dental ridges.

From the darkness emerged *ghazals*  
carefully sifted, transplanted  
and grew across the continent like an ivy—  
in the exiled incubator  
with my oxygenated English  
and a souvenir worn for diplomatic huff ,  
I see you. From where I will bring  
the pitcher-maker's whirl and an uncensored lurk—  
you inserted putty on the right chinks,  
had a porcelain brimmed with strange potions,  
a hand familiar with similes and Persian fluff  
quilting the cradling cities in poems.

Your poems have cloned  
in the rugged and even places  
where language is a mutilated wick.

*\*Faiz Ahmad Faiz (1911-84) is the renowned Urdu poet from Pakistan,  
and was the recipient of the Lenin Peace Prize.*

## The Crow\*

(Death was the midwife that delivered the Crow. Rand Brandes)

Walking in the lazy drizzle  
I saw the carcass of a crow  
pouched in a tuft of grass  
legs uplifted  
a cargo turned upside down.  
An ovalish totem  
bobbed into a ripped rugby ball  
and stiffened into a taxidermist's fancy,  
while the beak had gone still,  
a question mark  
asking me to move on.

I threw a glance around, complicit  
in this causality—  
the world should have been a museum  
for such fossils lying unattended  
on the road.

Wet with shimmering English rain  
that crow was not black enough,  
not like ours back home.  
It had other feathers too,  
but not like the one  
we have in the droning hot afternoons  
of Lahore  
where sun bakes the birds  
in its eternal oven—  
so I rubbed my eyes  
like the wipers working on the wind screen  
and hurried on.

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