

Message Without a Voice

Fatemehsadat Shahrezaei, Italy/Iran

In a sun-baked town where walls remember dust,
a little girl learns the first lesson of life:
how to carry a message
without being allowed to speak
the messenger they never notice,
a motor neuron in a city that forbids freedom.

They teach her obedience in small stitches:
a cloth pulled tighter,
a laugh trimmed shorter,
a dream folded until it fits
inside a room with no windows

Every “no” arrives politely,
like a hand on the shoulder,
until care becomes a lock
and the key is never there

So something gathers in her chest
not a shout,
a sediment.

Anger does not always blaze;
sometimes it settles,
grain by grain, day by day,
until it accumulates and occupies the heart
the way people carry hope
quietly, until it shapes them.

Her family are stars around her at first
astrocytes at the edges of her world,
cleaning what spills before it spreads,
keeping her small fire inside from going out

But time is a slow pressure.

Support becomes condition
Condition becomes silence
Silence becomes another layer of sediment

One morning she walks toward school
with a notebook and a half-hope in her hands,
and the street sharpens its gaze
to the smallest loosened thread,
a single strand of hair,
slipping free beneath her hijab

A policewoman in uniform steps in front of her,
cruel in her certainty
the city’s microglia,
trained to sense danger
until the danger is her freedom

“Come.”

The word closes like a gate.

They take her because her hijab
didn't fully cover her hair
because law counts strands like crimes.

In the station's white rooms,
pain is made procedural;
hours stretch thin and endless.
They torture her
for the crime of being visible,
until her own silence
starts to feel like shelter.

Released, the air is the same,
but she is not;
and the warning follows her home
like a shadow that learned her name.

Her anger turns into cargo:
hundreds of kilos,
stacked behind her ribs,
until every breath
must squeeze around it.

And then, one day,
she leaves.

Not just a street,
not just a house,
not just a family
she leaves the entire border
that once told her who she was.

She crosses into another language
where her name sounds unfamiliar,
and freedom
has the shape of loneliness.

Because what is a messenger
without someone waiting?!
What is a song
without an ear that knows it?

She walks, she studies, she survives,
and still degenerates quietly
like a home with lights on
and no one inside.

And at the end of every day
the same question returns to her,
simple as breath and heavier than stone:

How can a single motor neuron
be considered alive

outside its own body
outside the brain that held it,
outside the network that gave it meaning
when everything in it still moves,
yet nothing in it feels like living?