

# Tea with Cardamom

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*For Abtiyo Mohammed Aboker whom I love and miss with  
equal measure. May you rest in peace.*

## *Victoria Street*

If buildings had feelings, Victoria Street  
would need a therapist.

Thugs, imams, families, woman beaters,  
and a pub, reside in anarchy,

rubble, stray cats and love.  
No *Morning* to each other.

The post man knows to knock once.  
Children are ushered from pavements

after Maghrib, billowing garnets brush past  
sloganed crop tops. The breeze

brings the Adaan, dubstep and sirens,  
the smell of the sauna, the smoke of incense.

Out front, my father breaks his fast,  
chews dates, offers a cautious smile

to those with heavy eyes across the way.  
These parallel buildings demonstrate

difference, but reflect something  
of the same. The street is anything

but royal,  
we share a common fate.

## *Cardamom*

I'm trying to pinpoint when your mother's love stopped being the neighbourhood alarm clock on school days; the cardamom songbird we no longer hear through the walls. It began with you bunking school for your brotherhood of wayward sons. How did they teach you

to unthread the ropes of her heart? Your Nikes left imprints the civil war never did. I try to remember the exact moment your school teachers felt vindicated. Your extra-terrestrial eyes, bruised and hard. The only required information.

How did you become a statistic and not the space between zero and one, where love lies? I think of the moment your mother became homeless in her Dubai imported living room. Threading the years into abaayas and daughters, serving tea without cardamom.

Was there a day you tried to teach her war was safe – the charred feet, burning neighbourhoods, familiar limbs, counting heads? The running and the loss, the losing, and the praying next to your empty bed? Why didn't you learn that mothers turn into refugees when we leave?

## *At 57*

Nasra changed the entire decor, ripped up the carpet,  
put her bed by the window and his cupboard by the door.  
She threw away his bedside dates, dry without his warmth,

and stole away the gabays, prescriptions, his brown leather jacket  
from prying eyes. She placed her vanity box by his old radio  
to hide the truth; the dim lit hallway looks like him at night.

The coffee table is still swarmed with his books: the Quran,  
Sunnah, Dreams of my Father. She envies the spines. Yesterday,  
she wore his shoes to garden, her toes somehow finding the soil.