

Walking and Listening

*A wholly inadequate attempt at paying any semblance of respect, empathy, and love to any case of conflict which goes unheard and unaided in and by the world.
With special consideration for the
Genocide of Palestinians in Gaza by the Israeli Government.*

Sunlight rained down guided missiles which we weren't quite prepared for. Neither Gabe nor I had the foresight, or thought, that we might've acted pre-emptively— put on some sunscreen— to save us the pain of being spectators to its conditioning, cleansing of our skin. Gabe's began to redden like a burn. Anyone could feel the heat. Anyone could have seen it in the surrounding woodlands, as they had shed their summer verdure and had begun to die. We walked by trunks which leaned on arid air for support— having lost so much of themselves they seemed to hang like buildings greeted by objects of neighbourly impudence. They were buttressed only by the dying screams of the wind and leaves shaken from their homes to become rubble on the razed forest floor.

Gabe and I walked a path of paved concrete on our way to a climbing crag. The path led uphill and wound its way round several hills, which had undulations so minor you'd walk unknowingly (or unwillingly) over them. We lead so smooth a pilgrimage that we were able to enjoy the human nature around us. Trees had not dared grow on the solid stream of cement and aggregate where we walked but rather, they feigned enjoyment at being ornamental sediment along the road's banks. They'd let their pinecones fall like impotent grenades, or dull flares, while the needle foot-soldiers swarmed the ground only to be swept up by higher powers. How, on certain stretches, there were fences half as tall as any given tree, which were barbed with wire at their peaks like branches that claw at you when you pay them too little mind, only to remind you that you shouldn't be too close to anything resembling wild and alien— or natural. Apart from the road, there were two grey sidewalks we could've walked on if the road felt too dangerous. If at any point had we desired it, we had the privilege of sanctuary. And we very much might've.

The road was by no means perfect. There were stones scattered atop it, which looked like rubble from some ancient land whose buildings might've seemed a half-sunk visage, were it not for the obvious boulders that had recently suffered some excavating (and a typhoon). There were fallen branches everywhere, the trees mourning their own and their loved ones, and all those in the strip. The trees and the season begged us to listen but all we heard were our voices thudding against the baren scene of a black and gritty road with two grey sidewalks half as inspired as the constructed banality of the wilderness we walked beside— complicit in walking the muted path. Despite not hearing, Gabe and I walked a path of paved concrete with undulations so minor you'd walk unwittingly over them— unless you had some sense in your feet.

“I’ll never understand how people could choose a city over a town,” I said to Gabe, as I took my shoes off, “the scale of it’s just too big.”

He responded quickly, “I mean— I can totally understand it,” and paused for a moment “It depends on what you want out of life.”

“How could you want anything other than this?” I pointed out, looking out onto the criminal scene, and highlighting how we could perversely make a day of killing innocent things. I talked about the sky and how it felt warmer than it had in recent years; how everything around us felt it too. I felt the warm ground and knew its heat. I thought I could guess at the weight of what was to come. I imagined what it must be like to be the ground, and to bear the heat, the weight of everything, yet be seemingly unbothered by it. To continue extending itself as long as time lies ahead of itself. How hubristic of us to assume that we are at all better than the ground we walk on.

“I didn’t say *I* did, but I can see how people would,” he looked to see if I were satisfied.

“Explain it to me.”

“Well, there’s proximity,” he said as we walked through life and death in all their Autumnal shades, which he readily ignored.

“Proximity to what?”

“Proximity to everything! To people, work, stores; the things they like; the things they need—” looking now at me as though I were oblivious to the obvious. I knew where Gabe was coming from, but I also refused to have vague, echoed and expected sounds end this conversation.

“Yeah, sure, but how much do you actually care about the things close to you?”

“A lot,” he said in a voice he thought sounded sincere.

“How about, the people close to you?” I looked around me and tried to feel all those dying souls.

“What?” The wind picked up.

“All the people you’re in close proximity to, how much of them do you see?” Leaves fell one by one, then in clusters and families.

“I’m not even gonna bother answering that, and you’re not gonna make me feel shit about it either.” The wind carried them for a brief fleeting while in the safety of air until they submitted to earth so that their death could be heard by the crunch beneath our feet.

“Here’s the thing. So many people say they care about proximity and convenience, and yet are so quick to comment on things so far from them. They speak, make an unoriginal opinion— all

opinions are in some sense unoriginal, please don't be offended— and then don't act. They don't change. In any sense. Something minor to just steer you slightly in the right direction would do wonders for yourself and the world, yet people choose convenience and comfort.”

After some imagined silence, I continued, “Don't you ever wonder why it is that we think we need these things?”

“Sure, I recognize that there's so much wrong with the way things work.”

“And...?”

“That's it. I recognize the fact, and that's about all I can manage.”

“How can you just live your life knowing that, and not actively try to do things to better it.”

“Look, man, I just want to live my life and make some money; and once I've done that I can start to worry about things.”

“By the time you do that it'll be too late.”

“Then I suppose it'll be too late.”

So, him and I walked in silence a while. Crunch. Crunch. Crunch. The trees echoed screams from across the sea, and the earth trembled lightly as the sunlight continued its assault. Crunch. Crunch. Crunch. Gabe and I were powerless, believing we were at the centre of it all. Crunch. The forest would have cried if it had the energy or resources to. Crunch (*Help!*). *Did you hear that?* I wanted to say but knew it would fall on deaf ears.

The darkness drops again; but now I know

That twenty centuries of stony sleep

Were vexed to nightmare by a rocking cradle,

And what rough beast, its hour come round at last,

Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born?

— “The Second Coming” by William Butler Yeats
(18-22)