

Saharnaz omran

The Sound Money Makes

I need a blank page where sounds can sit. How do you know a sound has truly been produced?

At what tempo does a violinist play for a wealthy man? Pursuing such echoes with my distorted ears might be futile, but I have no choice. It is necessary.

Instead, scattered lines of color flood the room, leaving me acoustically castrated. A sound swallows me: cold metal clinking inside my throat, vibrating against bone; the sharp tear of a green rectangle of paper. That green rectangle swallows my voice and severs me from myself.

I stood before the mountain of echo. I screamed into the valley, feeling my vocal cords vibrate, waiting for the mountains to send my voice back. Then came the surprise: the echo returned everything—the wind, the birds, the gravel beneath my feet—except me. My own voice vanished into the air, leaving behind a terrifying, hollow silence.

Fifteen minutes remain before the wealthy man arrives. I must tear the silent consonants from my throat. The wealthy man is waiting. I am waiting. The commas pause in mid-air.

Tear the banknote. A single paper bill holds more value than my echo. But what happens if I stubbornly refuse and devalue what they treasure? The instructions are issued. Before I can decide, the wealthy man appears. My decision arrives before I do. I surrender. Why? The reason is clear.

Jingle the coins.

Toss the coins into the air.

Rub the banknotes together.

Tear the money.

Nothing remains under the assault of these sounds except despair. I yield, allowing this avalanche of masterless echoes to perform for the rich man.

He wants the friction of wealth; I want my lost echo.

Suddenly, the surprise turns cruel: as he rubs the green paper between his thumb and index finger, the rustle sounds exactly like a human voice suffocating in a throat. Money has stolen the physical resonance of speech.

Footstep, echo, footstep.

I am like an unclaimed letter; the wealthy man is the clerk tasked with burning unaddressed mail.

The trembling coins and the waiting paper bills all surrender to the stubbornness of the lost voice trapped in my larynx.

I open my mouth to reclaim my sound, but only the clink of metal pours out.