

Scot-Mid

I am 26,

walking through quiet Edinburgh streets

on my way to the supermarket.

There's a shopping list in my head, chanting

aubergine – ginger – butter to make ghee –

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Two children trail in front of me,

at the tail coats of fathers who walk further ahead

in heavy laced boots. The wee boy turns,

I smile, he screams. He screams,

'You're a bad woman!'

His sister hushes him away, apologetic.

Tells me he didn't mean it.

I am panic: eyes to the child,

to the pavement, to the wall,

did anyone else hear?

To the pavement, to the wall,

did anyone else hear him?

To the child, to the floor.

Returning home,

conscious of my face in that child's mind

and the newspapers he has seen

and the television he has watched

and the words he has heard,
I have a memory, briefly,
of a university friend
in consoling tones
telling me
I could 'pass for white'.

No matter how gentle.
No matter how serene.
No matter how many good works I do,
or taxes I pay,
or lives I save,
I will always be,
always be, to them
a dangerous woman.

And what are they to me?

Nadine Aisha Jassat

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