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## Our Fluttering Stranger

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**Abstract**

Currently, Lebanon is undergoing dire economic and political crises, in addition to, the August 4, 2020, Port explosion, and the worldwide Corona Virus pandemic. The country is badly in debt and a third of its population is suffering from extreme poverty. More specifically, in the past year, the country has been suffering from a shortage of fuel. To express her anger at the high rate of pollution, the narrator wrote a poem describing how the Lebanese have been living in the dark because the government can no longer supply electricity. All citizens are obliged to pay another bill for private generators. The narrator was inspired by Coleridge's poem *Frost at Midnight*, in which the soot, the fluttering stranger, is romantically described coming out of the fireplace; for Coleridge soot is a symbol of domestic tranquility, companionship, and deep thought. The narrator creates her version of Lebanese soot in *Our Fluttering Stranger*.

*Keywords:* pollution, soot, fluttering stranger, Coleridge, Lebanon,

## Our Fluttering Stranger

By Luma Balaa<sup>1</sup>

The film of soot on the grate of the fireplace, the fluttering *stranger*  
abandoned Coleridge's house, the lake district, and its cozy fire.

Ever since *Frost at midnight*,  
no one has admired its sight.

It flew away because it felt neglected!

It wanted to be again, praised, and respected!

Like a vulture, sniffing its prey, traveled forward in time.

It flapped its wings and over mountains, it climbed.

It crossed many seas to finally make Lebanon its hearth,  
the land of the electricity generators since my birth.

This fluttering, techno foreigner stranger  
was welcomed in every house and corner,  
a saluted gain in a small shop, hut, or mansion,  
a must-have, and everybody's solution.

The government electricity had altogether been halted,  
our lives were put on hold and blocked.

We were living in the gloomy pitch-black dark!

The rechargeable torch lights no longer gave sparks.

Muggers, rapists, offenders faced females at moonless sites,

After 5 pm on rainy shadowy streets as if it were midnight.

We became like roosters who ran their lives according to sunlight

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From sunrise to sunset – undergoing all chores during daylight  
Food went bad, the water taps were drying,  
elevators ceased functioning, nothing was functioning,  
Into the belly of a big whale,  
like, Jonah, the whole nation was trapped in this tale.  
We were swallowed by the monster of darkness.  
We were desperate, lost all hope, and were anxious.

Consequently, the Lebanese have made the stranger their friend.  
It became their oxygen despite the death it spread.  
The generators rewound the clock of life – it started ticking again  
People went to work, despite all pains.  
Electricity feeds life like what blood does in our veins,  
a sense of normalcy even if this could not be sustained.

Coleridge's domestic tranquilizer and thought provoker  
metamorphosed into a sweet-bitter flavor,  
a double-edged sword, a life-giver, and a life-threatener.  
Simultaneous, living, surviving, carrying on, viability,  
And an abhorrence, numbness, and absurdity,  
lit rooms, internet, refrigerators, well-stored food, and worked technology.  
At the same time, killing us with its toxic waste at high velocity.

The fluttering stranger smoke is uninterrupted, day and night, and is being formed  
from million expensive loud generators, energy creators, marching on and on  
a whirring, creaking, clanking, creating creepy death music.  
Band members play different tunes and acoustics,  
beating the song of death to their hums and drums  
suffocating, intoxicating, destroying our lungs

Their melody is not like an optimistic lark,  
but like grunting, hungry lions in the dark.  
Our ears have been accustomed to the loud noise  
We get addicted and cannot sleep if there was silence.  
The soot keeps the citizens' company,  
escorted by generator music, like a malevolent lullaby.  
It has a hypnotic effect; it makes you sleep.  
It hugs, drugs, and makes you breathe it in so deep.  
People watch the film fly and stick onto surfaces:  
their windows, shoes, fans, beds, and matrices.  
Eyeing its victims, it spreads its wings aloft hovering  
attracted to the prospect of a meal soaring, descending.  
The sniffers, snort, hallucinate, lie down numb.  
They lose their sense of smell and become dumb.