

Lived experience is everything...

We are honored here at CTI.PC to post this unbelievably breathtaking poem by
Haylee Quick and Keinard Gaines:

We are not the shadow you step over
not the cardboard prophecy on the corner
not the cautionary tale you tell your children
when the windows are rolled up.

We are a breath.

We are a pulse.

We are the same red blood beating under bruised skin.

You built your cities with hands like ours.

Laid brick, poured concrete, stocked shelves,
raised babies, paid taxes, said “yes ma’am” and “sir.”

We did not fall from the sky like debris.

We are not aliens to your sidewalks.

We are part of the spine of this place.

You call us “the homeless”

like it’s a species.

Like we don’t remember birthdays.

Like we don’t love hard.

Like we don’t laugh so loud it echoes off freeway overpasses.

We are not statistics on your evening news.

We are fathers who still know the weight of a child asleep on their chest.

We are mothers who still hear lullabies in the dark.

We are veterans of wars you sent us to fight.
We are workers your system chewed up and spit out
when rent climbed higher than our paychecks.
And here's the truth that makes you uncomfortable—
we are part of society.
Not outside it. Not beneath it.
Inside it.
Built into its bones.
When you say "those people,"
you're talking about your cousin,
your old classmate,
the cashier who smiled at you last year.
You're talking about one medical bill away.
One fire.
One layoff.
One bad season of life.
We have voices.
They may be hoarse from cold nights
and screaming into silence,
but they are still voices.
And they will not stay quiet forever.
We are done shrinking ourselves
to make you comfortable.
Done apologizing for surviving.
Done pretending we are invisible
just because you don't want to look.

We are human.

Say it out loud.

Human.

We bleed.

We dream.

We rage.

We hope.

We deserve dignity

not pity tossed like spare change.

We deserve policy with a heartbeat.

We deserve eye contact.

We deserve a key in a door that locks behind us

and opens to safety.

But until then—

we are standing.

On corners. In tents. In shelters.

In the cold. In the rain.

Standing.

And every time you pass us,

remember—

we are not the crack in your city.

We are the mirror.

We are the reminder.

We are the reckoning.

We are homeless, still human.