

While the War Happens Elsewhere

In the hospital, the IV hums like a small stream behind glass.
I watch snow fall into the Hudson by Riverside Park, quiet, gray, without destination,
and think of a boy crouched behind his mother, somewhere far from here, where
sky is louder. On the news, they speak of casualties as though they've never
held a body, never brushed dust from a cheek. I think of the man
digging through broken stone for a shoe, a spoon, anything just to say: *I am
here*. Here, the radiator keeps ticking, the snow keeps falling, even when I
stop watching. A woman cries in the next room - her voice tearing through drywall
like an animal with no mouth. Later, the nurse comes to give her applesauce and water,
until her voice gone, her eyes on the cup, as though it contains a name she has lost.
I sit beside the window, and touch the soft place under my jaw to remember I am still in
this life. Somewhere, a child is born in the middle of war. He cries. No one comes.
Somewhere, a man wraps his wife in a sheet and carries her toward
the sound of birds that do not belong to this country. Somewhere, a boy
steps off a bus, his hands empty, but drawn to his chest as if remembering
what they once carried. I think of all the tender things that hold us.
I think of how the world breaks, how a mouth can open only to swallow smoke,
how mercy moves slower than blood. How when I was six, Xiamen flooded so fast the
streets became a single brown throat. My father carried me through the current,
through broken glass and bicycles, the smell of oil and rot. I saw neighbors
clinging to rooftops, calling names that disappeared into the water's open mouth.
The current bit at our knees, dragged our shadows down like something hungry.
He said *hold on*, and I held on.

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