

Boundaries in the Wind

Fatima Beshar

When I was a child, I used to imagine the sky had limits. In my head, she formed a perfect sphere, encasing our home like the glass of a snow globe. I could then trace her invisible shell above the mountains that surrounded our town, which brought me the purest sense of safety, as if a shield spun from ether has delicately circled our land to keep us protected.

It had never once failed in its duty; never once did it consider unleashing its full weight upon us either. Yet, a year ago, the sky was suspended in terror. She refused to fold around the earth and cradle us, for missiles broke into her realm, and an enemy demanded authority over her. Her imagined sphere of safety no longer embraced the land below, a barrier stood bold between land and sky.

In this newfound fury, I feared my words would be blocked from reaching God. And in that frustration, I wished the sky would collapse like crumpled paper, smother us and spare us this new hostile unfamiliarity. The war turned everything soft into an object of forgetfulness and violence, a thing that rejects closeness and supplication. Eventually, fear and danger uprooted us from our valleys. We took hold of all what was dear to us and fled to the city. The sky refused to stretch her arms and follow, hanging, instead, perplexed and rigid in her place.

So, I was introduced to a different sky, one that held no memory of me.

Above the city, the sky was cold and indifferent. Its borders became walls, sealing us off from the land we came from. Our bodies, once vessels of belonging, became threats on our souls. The news declared that whatever lived and moved beneath the sky back in the south was now considered a target. I longed for the southern sky, despite her new bitterness, I found consolation in the fact that she at least remembered us.

The south was filled with stones by then, stones of ruin and loss, and I grew worried the wind's ungoverned force might scatter them around our new place. War had taken dominion over the wind, and so it sketched an invisible fence from the south to the city, mocking our inability to return. It reveled in watching people of mountain and valley lineage scattered on the edges of urban streets, their homes left behind in rubble and memory.

I called to the wind, once soft and familiar, willing it to turn back. I hoped it would carry the scent of olives we could no longer harvest, not the acrid stench of gunpowder and dust. I wished it would wrap the mothers in the shawl of its old gentleness, those mothers heavy with unborn children clinging to their branches, hoping to give birth not on grounds split by sirens and missiles, but into light, into the hands of people, not stones.

The place we now lived in was a box, crowded with people and voices. Below us, more boxes. Above, still more. The city became a vertical prison of stacked grief and severed roots. When summer began its quiet seduction of fall and the leaves shed all shame from the city's trees, I couldn't feel the changing of the seasons. I remembered a poem I wrote and read aloud at dinner three years ago. I had wished for winter to linger, imagining that war was bashful in the cold, and that perhaps Ares slept through the frost, sparing us the brazenness of spring, when daylight returns and blood finds leisure in light. But as seasons began to overlap, year after year, I came to understand that no sweetness of sleep could satisfy war's hunger.

The trees here stood like ghosts, replicas of lives trapped in an anxious dream; unlike the wild and ungovernable pines and oaks of home. In desperation, I wished the barrier between my soul and body would dissolve, so I could visit the orange and lemon tree groves and make sure they still breathed. I longed to be light, translucent, and untouchable, so that no executioner could mark me for the simple crime of existing on my land.

City dwellers recoiled from the sound of mourning. They despised the cries of rocks, of broken branches and roots. They did not know the smell of soil or forests. That is why, in silence, I continued asking the wind not to bring them these things, not out of shame, but out of fear. I feared the city would one day exile us even from these borrowed boxes. I only wished the wind would trace its lines around our bodies, not between our hearts and those we love.

Time passed. The south faded farther. The sky did not yield. And I began to despise geography and space altogether. The land I loved refused to carry my weight. The sky was a stranger and refused to merge into the one back in the south despite it stretching over the same country. The wind kept lifting us up mercilessly, tossing us into harsher exiles, until even our names became hoarse and alien to us.

Before my grandparents fled across oceans, beyond even the final borders the wind had drawn, my grandmother asked us to retrieve the jars of thyme and olive oil she had stored in the attic in Bint Jbeil. My grandfather made us promise to pick the remaining olives from the trees, if ever the war grew tired and stopped.

But war never ends; it only pauses to rearrange its stones. And even now, as people return to what remains of home, the sky hangs loose and untethered. The wind lingers at the edge of the land it once cradled, watching with scornful silence as each person dares to cross the boundary it traced.

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