

another place

(for A., who was there)

Who knew the past would follow us so far,
 years collapsing like an ancient accordion,
 scraps of memory tucked like torn photographs
 into the sockets of our eyes
 Remember the gray Beirut seafront, car pulling up,
 men ordering, "Get in," our hearts thudding against bone
 as we broke and ran? Remember the splintered staccato
 of bullets against rock, the way dust rose, stunned,
 in the aftershock of silence
 Our days were punctuated by static and news,
 our nights by the brilliance of tracer bullets
 in flight. We huddled on campus steps,
 transistors pressed to our ears,
 straining for some echo of the future.
 The day we finally fled the beleaguered city -
 tanks closing in, danger a promise waiting patiently -
 the sun sank blazing behind us into the sea,
 marking a trail of blood-red light:
 a path promising return
 But return was a story scribbled in a notebook
 misplaced during flight. We journeyed far,
 exchanged one country for another,
 fled one war to live a lifetime within others;
 learned to let our faces hide our selves,
 to speak our story in a private tongue,
 the past a shadow in our bones.
 Salt water and sojourns leave their traces.
 Decades later we still hoard echoes,
 find ourselves breathing the dust of that place
 where banyan trees tangle in the earth,
 twisted limbs gesticulating toward light.
 Fragments of memory welter in our flesh,
 fierce and penetrating as shrapnel.

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