



The manger in the triage room

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There is a woman in labor
on the edge of a border town.
The room is small,
its walls thin as the hope she carries,
and her breathing sounds like the beginning of scripture—
that trembling between terror and tenderness
where a child insists on being born
even when the world has no place for him.

Once, they called her Mary.
Now her name is written
on a temporary ID band,
misspelled,
creased from the hands that pass it
without looking.

The story is ancient—
a journey,
a refusal,
a door that will not open.
Only now, the innkeeper
has been replaced by a triage nurse
whose voice wavers from fatigue
and institutional protocol.
“No papers, no record, no insurance.”
Behind the words:
We don’t know what to do with you.

Joseph once searched for shelter
under a cold sky.
Today he waits in the hallway,
holding a plastic bag with her clothes,
eyes lowered
as if fearing that eye contact
might be another violation of policy.

Inside, machines glow.
 Vital signs beep like hesitant prayers.
 She is one of the countless
 who crossed oceans, deserts, borders,
 only to arrive here—
 at another locked door
 disguised as a waiting room.

The child is born anyway.
 Because birth is an act of rebellion,
 a refusal to be erased.
 Because even in the margins,
 life insists.

In Bethlehem, the manger smelled of hay.
 Here, the sheets smell of disinfectant
 and something metallic,
 sharp as the truth no one speaks:
 that some bodies are considered
 less deserving of care.

Outside, the world gathers statistics—
 numbers of the trafficked,
 the displaced,
 the undocumented.
 They multiply like the stars
 the shepherds once followed,
 except this time
 no angel interrupts the dark
 with glad tidings.

And yet—
 there is a nurse who lingers
 at the edge of her shift.
 She adjusts the blanket,
 whispers a name with gentleness
 rare in institutions built
 to process rather than embrace.
 A small mercy,
 quiet enough to be missed,
 but unmistakably human.

The child sleeps.
 Not in a manger,
 but in a borrowed crib
 marked “charity.”
 A label that tries, and fails,
 to reduce him.



The nativity was once a promise
that the lowly mattered.
Today it is a mirror
showing us where we have failed
and where we can begin again.

The inn is full again—
but there is room,
if only we choose to see it,
if only we dare to open the door
for those who arrive
with nothing but a name
and the fierce, quiet hope
that someone will call them worthy
before it is too late.

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