

Held

Nothing beautiful survives under the smell of bleach,
where minutes break like thin river ice,
where each heartbeat sinks through broken floorboards.

At noon I began the slow betrayal of hope,
my hands crushing the plastic bag to feed a silence,
each squeeze another demand the world would never answer.

It was not mercy, because mercy needs witnesses to exist,
only the small ritual of pretending failure is not already complete,
squeeze, hold, release, squeeze, hold, release, without asking why.

Her kidneys withered like fields swallowed by salt water,
Her lungs collapsed like burned tents after a storm,
still she floated there, tethered by the thin rope of breath.

Far away, a machine dreamed, behind locked white doors,
untouched, unpromised, breathing easy where no prayers reached,
while her family counted bills like rosary beads losing hope.

I stayed because absence is a knife,
because every empty bed can be an altar,
because breathing for another is the oldest kind of prayer,
because surrender would have been just another name for forgetting.

At midnight the dust salted the ledges.
At four the stars salted the floors.
At five her heart broke
and spilled the last honey of the body.

We dragged it back with the same useless hands,
because in the end even failure tastes sweeter than surrender.

She opened her eyes as if waking from drowning,
found her son standing there like the last cruel thing,
and gave him a smile so thin it almost wept.

She did not choose the slow violence we called survival,
did not choose to become a map of every missed chance,
but even then, she chose not to leave empty-handed.

The final breath was hers because we could not steal it,
because even grief knows when to let go of its debt,
because she built her leaving out of breath and fury.

And that was the celebration, the ruined and beautiful ending,
the celebration that cost everything and gave nothing back.