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A name unasked

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Poetry

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My name is always
read from the band.
Still.

They smooth it out.
A corner rounded,
not for function,
but speed.

I have done that, too.
All my life.

Through doors,
at counters,
under bright lights.
I learned to be cut into a million pieces.
So that others could stay whole.

So that my children could go through
without apology.

Now the bed rails hold me.
Unlike any other border.
Unlike any other regime.

Voices move around:
clean, practiced, precise.

Full of words that land
like a drum in my chest,
but thin out
near the crown.

Another one in scrubs asks,
"Any pain?"

Yet pain is not my first language.
In my first language
pain is not a number.
It is a season.
It has a smell.
It brings loved ones along with it.

My mouth tries the right syllables,
but to the left it fails.

To the surprise of none.

I think of lunches packed
before dawn.
The lid snapped shut
so tight
nothing could spill.

A whole life
of feeding others first –
and now
I am fed by strangers

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who do not know
what comfort tastes like.

My tongue remembers
cardamom,
hot tea,
the soft burn of ginger –
the way my mother
could make a room feel safe
with steam.

Here,
everything is measured
except that.
The nurse comes closer.
She does not rush
to fix me.

In that quiet,
my breathing changes.
Not cured.
Not saved.
Just,
less alone.
And for the first time in years
I do not cut corners.
I let my name
remain whole.

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