

Questions Beneath the Buried Jars

I ask you, Irena Sendler -
child of Warsaw, daughter of a doctor
who healed the poor without counting coins -
did kindness begin
the day you watched your father give everything away,
even the strength that illness stole from him?

You answer -
love was my first inheritance,
passed down not in money
but in mercy.

I ask -
about that
girl in university halls
refusing the benches that separated classmates.

If dignity could be arranged by rows,
Were you afraid of being called radical,
of doors closing before your life had begun?

You say -

a closed door is lighter
than a closed conscience.

Almost immediately -

What did you see when you walked through its gates
wearing the Star of David against your chest?

You answer -

I saw neighbors,
not strangers.

And once you see,
you cannot be blind again.

I ask how courage carried babies past soldiers,
how lullabies survived inside toolboxes and
ambulances, hidden bundles of blankets -
how names became passports to tomorrow.

You answer -

each child was a universe,
and saving one world
was reason enough to risk my own.

From you I learn
that heroism looks like a social worker's bag,
filled with medicine, bread, and impossible hope,
hope which buried names in jars
beneath your floorboards -
fragile constellations of memory
waiting for a future sky.
You believed families might return,
even when history turned cruel.

I call you a hero
because torture could not unlock your loyalty,
because even facing death
you protected children you might never see again.
You chose humanity
when hatred demanded obedience.

And when I question
as how might one repair this world,
I see your actions sewing history together -

Moving through cracks in tyranny,
Turning convents into shelters,
risks into refuge.

And so I ask you one last question -
after so much loss,
after names nearly vanished into silence,
did hope survive?

You answer -
hope survives like jars buried beneath the floor,
fragile with memory yet
waiting for someone to dig through darkness
and lift the future back into light.

Bibliography

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