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12th Grade

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Caddo Magnet High

A Sort of Miracle

Straw into gold--

It used to feel like a fairytale miracle, but now,  
hands rough with cuts and slick with blood,  
it's survival.

Braiding hay is work, and work means she is not walked out into the woods  
like Mama, like all her brothers and sisters.

For a time, she is the golden-haired princess of the factory  
tasked with the impossible: holding her head up.

But, of course, work runs out.

Her hair is shorn and the walking starts:

Ravensbruck, Buchenwald, Dachau.

Snow is falling when they depart for the last time,  
and it is far too easy to slip past the glint of gun barrels,  
into the arms of the woods. They are not welcoming,  
they do not care if she survives the night, but they do not hate her.

They hold her until nightfall, ambivalent,  
until the crush of boots over ice dwindles to just the sound  
of her own feeble cough. It is quiet, now,  
and she is allowed to be still, if only for a moment.

It feels unbelievable, a fairytale, but this time, when she walks,

she doesn't stop until she reaches a barn.

She is only seventeen, but she has seen miracles before.

They shouldn't have opened the boxcar doors, and everyone knew it,  
knew what would be waiting inside.

It is so easy to lock a door and forget,  
turn a deaf ear to whatever cries emanate until they're finally stifled.

It's harder to pry a gate open, but they manage it,  
and some 30 thousand people spill out of Dachau,  
emaciated and wretched but alive and thankful.

Despite everything, they are thankful, because they are free,  
and they were not left to rot in a camp abandoned like a box car.

It's the worst kind of miracle, he thinks as he turns to his brother,  
both of them like pillars in their American uniforms.

But-- a miracle, nonetheless.

Teatime. Even after all these years,  
how lovely to have nothing better to do.

How lovely to sit in a tidy parlour, to nibble on treats  
and chat with a neighbor. And some neighbor, at that.

"I didn't see you," he says, eyes wide, disbelieving.

"You wouldn't have recognized me," she replies.

It's true-- in the decades since her walk into the woods

her blonde hair has grown back, faded to grey.

Her face has more lines, but more life, too.

The woman who has lives just houses away

from the man who once wore an American uniform

has all but left behind the girl who turned straw into gold.

It's a bit of a miracle,

such a near miss all those years ago,

and now such a twist of fate.

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