**How to Write a Poem in a Time of War**

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*You can’t begin just anywhere. It’s a wreck.*

                                                                                       Shrapnel and the eye

Of a house, a row of houses. There’s a rat scrambling

From light with fleshy trash in its mouth. A baby strapped to its mother’s back

Cut loose.                                                                     Soldiers crawl the city,

The river, the town, the village,

                                      The bedroom, our kitchen. They eat everything.

Or burn it.

They kill what they cannot take. They rape. What they cannot kill they take.

Rumors fall like rain.

                                     Like bombs.

                 Like mother and father tears swallowed for restless peace.

                                     Like sunset slanting toward a moonless midnight.

Like a train blown free of its destination.         Like a seed fallen where

There is no chance of trees                 or anyplace       for birds to live.

*No, start here.                           Deer peer from the edge of the woods.*

                                                                        We used to see woodpeckers

The size of the sun, redbirds, and were greeted

                                          By chickadees with their good morning songs.

We’d started to cook outside slippery with dew and laughter, ah those smoky sweet sunrises.

We tried to pretend war wasn’t going to happen.

Though they began building their houses all around us and demanding  more.

They started teaching our children their god’s story,

                                                               A story in which we’d always be slaves.

*No. Not here.*

*You can’t begin here.*

*This is memory shredded because it is impossible to hold by words, even poetry.*

These memories were left here with the trees:

The torn pocket of your daughter’s hand-sewn dress,

The sash, the lace.

The baby’s delicately beaded moccasin still connected to the foot,

A young man’s note of promise to his beloved —

                                                                              *No! This is not the best place to begin.*

Everyone was asleep, despite the distant bombs. Terror had become the familiar stranger.

Our beloved twin girls curled up in their nightgowns, next to their father and me.

*If we begin here, none of us will make it to the end*

                                                                                                               *Of the poem.*

Someone has to make it out alive, sang a grandfather to his grandson,

His granddaughter, as he blew his most powerful song into the hearts of the children.

There it would be hidden from the soldiers,

Who would take them miles, rivers, mountains from the navel cord place

Of the origin story.

He knew one day, far day, the grandchildren would return,  generations later

Over slick highways                             constructed over old trails

Through walls of laws meant to hamper or destroy, over the  libraries of

The ancestors in the winds, born in stones.

His song brings us to his home place in these smoky hills.

*Begin here.*

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