I Am a Mother

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I am a mother; Not the serene mother of faded photographs, who stands by the window in the late afternoon while the house brims with the scent of warm bread and tranquility. I am the mother who, for years, clutched her child in the cold corridors of immigration offices, amidst unanswered letters, nights of homelessness, and the dread of tomorrow—pretending, every single time, that she had not yet shattered. Seven years have passed since my migration, and still, I am neither rooted in this soil nor severed from my own. For years, I have been suspended in a silent limbo; like a suitcase abandoned in the corner of a distant station, its owner's return forever uncertain. Scarcely two months had passed since my arrival when I realized a tiny life had taken root within me. And in that very moment, the man I believed would be the refuge of my darkest days walked away, leaving me entirely alone with an alien world and empty hands. He left without knowing he was abandoning a woman whose very language of grief was incomprehensible in this land. My pregnancy was not a season of blossoming; it was a season of endurance. It carried the scent of cold walls, of nights when the fear of the future settled upon my chest like fog, stealing the sleep from my eyes. It carried the scent of a woman whose only wish

was for someone to take her hand and whisper softly in her ear: "Rest a little... I will take care of everything." But there was no one. I became a mother bearing wounds. I became a mother steeped in anxiety. With a quiet, creeping sorrow that coiled slowly through my soul like winter mist, dimming the light of the world. And despite it all, I rose every dawn, cooked for my child, combed her hair, dressed her, pinned a smile to my lips, and feigned that I still had the strength to hold up the world. My daughter grew. She is six now, and in two months, she will start elementary school. And sometimes, I gaze into the depths of her eyes, terrified lest all my exhaustion has slowly made its home in her little soul. Once, she was a serene child. But children learn hidden sorrow faster than anyone; from the tremor of a voice, from protracted silences, from a mother who is perpetually exhausted, perpetually restless, perpetually standing on the precipice of a breakdown. Now, she fights me. She rebels. She wields sharp words. And every time I raise my voice, it feels as though I am breaking a piece of my own heart with my bare hands. I have turned into a mother whose exhaustion has rooted itself in the very fabric of her being; a mother whose threshold for patience has worn thin, whose face greets sorrow long before it musters a smile. And bitterest of all is the knowledge that she, too, is wounded. A child who should have learned security from her mother’s embrace learned anxiety from my eyes. Sometimes I feel my daughter resents me; for failing to build a peaceful world for her, for the fact that her childhood carries the scent of tears and apprehension. And now, every time I seek a moment of ease, every time I try to breathe calmly in the warmth of a new affection, her anger rises between us; as if to say in silence: "When my world was not at peace, how can you be at peace?" And perhaps she is right. For years, I have been enough for everyone, except for myself. People love my writing. I write for magazines, organize panels, cultivate ideas, speak, and offer hope to others. Everyone says I am a strong woman. But no one saw the nights I sat in the darkness of the closet and wept silently, just so my child wouldn't wake to the sound of her mother breaking. No one knew how desperately I yearned, just once, for someone to take care of me. Just once. For a while now, even my tears have gone quiet. It is as if my psyche has reached a soundless land; I recognize neither the thrill of joy nor the abyss of sorrow. I merely tire quickly; of the noises, of the crowds, of the endless demands of life. Yesterday, when the washing machine broke down, I sat and cried like a child. Not for the machine; for myself. For all the years I stayed strong, simply because I didn't have the right to fall apart. It was there I realized just how deeply wounded I am. How desperately I need someone to stroke this exhausted soul and murmur: "You don't have to be strong all the time anymore." I am tired; more tired than any word could ever measure. I miss myself; the girl who used to laugh in Iran, the woman who still held out hope for tomorrow, the heart that believed love could save the world. For years, in the streets of this cold land, among the trains, the letters, and the days that slipped away in silence, I have been wandering in search

of myself. And the most sorrowful part of it all is that still, despite all this erosion, every night before bed I gently pull the blanket over my daughter's shoulders, brush the hair from her forehead, kiss her softly, and silently beg the universe to ensure she never turns out like me.