

Children With No Angels

I ran into myself at the pub.

I walked in and there I was, small and dusty, in a dress once green, now brown by aerosol and hunger. A microphone jutted into my mouth. Behind the camera, a voice urged me to answer: *Can you tell me how this has been for you?*

I looked around: school roofs peeled into the sky, classrooms folded into sand-heaps, legs and arms and slippers scattered like toys, bracelets tangled with bicycle wheels, the not-dead people running nowhere but away. The interpreter asked again and I wanted to say everything. Instead, I said *bad*, and the camera zoomed in to listen to my tears, saying everything I couldn't.

"You alright Chissy?" Jamie asked.

His voice tugged me back. The pub air was thick with beer and chips. My colleagues laughed at something not meant for me. I sat down and tried to remember how to be here.

"These children have no angels," I said softly. "We are the grass when elephants fight, breaking under boots we don't understand. We sprout in craters, drink dust, memorize the pangs of hunger. We grow roots in rubble, and fade in the silence after bombs. We break and grow again because nobody stops to ask if the grass survives."

I've made everything awkward again. This is who I am, awkward.

The television kept looping her—me—crying in Gaza, a child asking for bread, for mother, for air. And I remembered when I was a homeless child, a nameless person, an IDP they tagged and counted and moved like cattle. And now, the envelope in my bag from the immigration department is burning my lap. I've carried it around for three days, afraid to open and look, afraid to see my new identity, afraid of what new label awaits me.