1000 Paper Cranes

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Pavitra Attanayake

Do you remember the first time you made me a paper crane? on the front step of our house, from a sheet of week-old newspaper carrying the same smell of ancient libraries that lingered within your mind and drifted about your room, caressing me as I snuck in for just a quick sniff. You’d look up from your desk littered with the will of the stars and smile.

You don’t? It’s okay, I know. it’s hard, probably frightening too, isn’t it? More frightening than those days when I couldn’t bear to see you lying in bed with tubes like rusted barbed wire shoved down your throat in a prison world that can only bring you pain.

But one day, we’re gonna sit together on that dusty front step painted with the bloody red of crushed vanadinite and I’m going to show you all the stories stored within the folds of one thousand paper cranes.

Three paper cranes
- one stained flaming garnet, etched with candle burns clawing up the sides with rips torn exactly, so precisely that wings couldn’t leave this godless ground for the girl I was.
- one with eyes the color of old pennies and hidden secrets left in back alleyways tail a bit soggy from the tears of troublemakers with hearts of gold pressed under a heavy, foreboding book of unspoken thought for the person I am.
- and one folded with sharp edges of ruthless beauty the trembling of laughing violins and manic grins white sheets, embroidered in gold, honey, the first drop of rain on a desert mind for the woman I want to be.
Two paper cranes
  painted in the weeping blue of midsummer’s night sorrow and stolen goodbyes
  layer upon layer, walls of dead onyx ribs suffocating, stiff
  like the feel of new leather armor upon a weary youth who saw too much of the world
for the cruel princes
  who carry around glistening jagged javelins
  made from the colored church glass shards of my mind
  and pick flowers for crying maidens with perfectly fake golden hair
  from the gardens within my watching eyes

Four paper cranes
  made of flimsy motel stationary, grimy from too many hands, one too many nights
  with weakened heads that droop onto my shoulder in weary defeat
  ancient hollowed willow trees standing against a callous winter’s storm
  and tails like needles blunted
  from regretful sorrow, folded without care
  but with the precision of tearful anger
for friends I hung on to
  too long

One paper crane
  bathed in a sliver of snarling pewter moonlight
  crawling into my bed uninvited and
  drenched in smeared lipstick made
  from the silent waterfalls of my arms
for the battle scars that refuse to leave
  as I sit waiting, waiting ’til
  iron suns awaken to protect me from
  these thoughts dancing around the sadness in my veins

Five paper cranes
  contorted from early morning clouds drenched in fire
  gathered from mid-July days
  stored in boxes of desire hidden in a shallow grave
  so fragile that I’m afraid to even
  think too long around them
for the dreams I can’t bring myself to let go
  like strangers I fall in love with
  while passing by on city roads
And nine-hundred-eighty-three paper cranes
for all the desires my voice can’t sing
dying sirens buried between rotting wood and thrashing waters
and all the sins my mind won’t let me think
lonely straw fields where lightning comes to frolic
and all the memories I have yet to make
forgotten libraries filled with books no one has ever read

But I’ll leave one paper crane
that we can make together
for the time I told you goodbye
and you didn’t answer,
I walked out remembering
a figment of your arms
holding me
as a storm wind of rustling wings
carried you away