

Marine Snow

Stanley Kelman, Jr.

They came with eyes bright as coin slots,
hearts beating like boardwalk rides,
drawn by the glitter and gilt,
the rumor of fortunes whispered in neon,
a kingdom rising at the edge of the sea.
Here, even the broken dreamed,
to claim a name,
to matter,
to rise from ruin into light.

Now, the alleys are soft with rot.
Not just trash,
but the wreckage of intentions:
a wallet photo, a busted heel,
a dream turned brittle in the wind.
The tide brought hope,
and then it left,
carrying the names they'd tried to carve
into the sand.

Casinos crown the skyline,
spires of gold in the minds of tourists.
Each window reflects a version of glory:
what might be,
what once was.
But the city's hymn is half-eaten,
sung in the teeth of those
who bet their last on grace.

Beneath the glimmer, shadows curl,
figures in threadbare coats,
faces seamed with cold and time.
They cluster in the blue hum of signage,
clutching bags like body parts.
The wind has teeth.
The street, a sieve for the forgotten.

The promise here was carved in steel,
and polished for the passing gaze,
but not for us.
Not for the slow-voiced,
the half-healed,
the ones whose hunger hums beneath their coats.
We're the silence in the corner booth,
the cough behind the curtain.

From a window, I watch a gull
slice through haze like a blade.
Below, men sip from empty cups
and women warm their hands
on fumes of what they've lost.
Their faces blur beneath the lights,
not soft, but smudged,
like names no one speaks anymore.

All I've got is this bag:
frayed at the zipper,
lined with scraps and afterthoughts.
A map to nowhere,
a can of beans,

a lighter that works sometimes.

I organize it nightly,
like priests do bones.

The boardwalk plays its music box tune,
bells, fries, coins falling in machines.
I watch from the shadows near the Ferris wheel,
the scent of grease and suntan oil
fading into salt.
I count those in suits.
None count me.
They drift through like tides,
dropping crumbs,
a sympathy nickel,
a smirk.

The gull returns.
It lands beside a glowing sign-
HARD ROCK-
and pecks at nothing.
This place is a monument
to what we throw away:
plastic bags, bottle caps,
futures.
A mausoleum built with promises
that couldn't float.

The sea eats everything
and burps it back
in pieces.

But in the alleys, the tide had spoken.
Here lay the fragments,
detritus of lives worn thin—
not just trash, but remnants of longing,
stone and silt, once solid, now worn away,
dust from those who sought a place,
only to be ground down, discarded.
Like gravel from a shattered hard rock,
they gathered in gutters, clung to curbs,
bits of what once reached skyward,
now settled into cracks
where no one looked.

At night, I beg for heat.
Not coins-
just the warmth of recognition.
I repack my bag again,
a ritual against despair,
a makeshift altar for the still-breathing.
And so, we fall; fragments of forgotten things,
silent, slow, a rain of broken dreams.

What once rose bright now drifts below,
settling as silt on the ocean floor.
A quiet snowfall in the dark,
the weight of hope rising no more.
Beneath the glimmer, far from light,
they gather, layer upon layer,
what we lost, who we let go,
recast into the depths of marine snow.

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