

We Are Here Because They Survived

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We are here
Because they survived.

Not because the world was kind.
Not because history was gentle.
But because somewhere in the dark,
They chose breath
One more time.

They do not speak of it often.
The Leaving.
The running.
The mountains that swallowed names
Whole.

They do not tell us
How the air felt
When home stopped being home.

We learned about war in classrooms,
But theirs was not a chapter.
It was a heartbeat.
It was a decision made in seconds
That shaped generations.

We are here
Because they crossed rivers
With more fear than luggage.
Because they buried photographs
In memory
When they could not carry them in their
Hands.

And now I sit in a country
That pronounces my name wrong
And asks me where I am really from,
While I struggle
To pronounce my own history.

I answer in English.
I dream in English.
I forget words

My grandmother once carried
Like a sacred cloth.

The guilt sits heavy
When Hmong syllables tangle in my mouth.
When I search for words that should feel like
home
And find only echoes.

What does it mean
To survive
If the language does not?

What does it mean
To be safe
If the songs grow quiet?

They worked factories
With hands that once knew soil.
They bent their backs
So I could stand upright.
They swallowed humiliation
So I could taste opportunities.

And still
I roll my eyes at their strictness.
Still
I wish they understood me better.

But their love was never soft.
It was built from survival.
It was shaped like protection.

We are here because they survived.

And maybe
We honor them not by guilt alone
But by remembering
By asking.
By learning the words
Before they disappear.

By speaking their names
Carefully.
By holding their stories
Like something fragile
And sacred.

We are here
Because they survived.

And now
It is our turn to make survival
Mean something more
Than loss.