

WATERMARK

Joanna Goodman

We danced side by side cradling pitchers of milk.
The idea was to keep them from falling.
To go up to the room where the child slept
and spy on his breathing. We said congratulations until the word
sounded like it meant something else. Outside bombs were exploding.
Then walking to Maria's house across fields of dry grass,
knocking on the door with the flat of my hand, once, twice,
are you the one who saves men?
Her with a bottle of water and a basin for my soiled hands.
Her pouring water on my hands. I was old then.
I told her about a garden, about a barren tree upheld by stones,
about crows pinned to the branches. She stood all night
by the window until the ground rocked on its iron horse.
I said, *could you love me?*
The color of the sky is the color of shrapnel.
The trains are made of lead. Death comes from anywhere.
Alone on a red stool I heard people passing behind the church,
heard the roofs falling from buildings
and soldiers rubbing their knees.
Every word is the sacrifice of another word, another sound.
I whispered our names into a candle. My child lay in bed,
light blowing through the curtains. I meant to lie down too
but the song of the bells curdled in the air
and my hands were full of feathers.
Maria said, we'll build ourselves in ivory,
we'll build ourselves in pauses, we'll build ourselves in clutter.