

The Unburned Bush

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In my mother's garden, the forsythia
burns gold but is never consumed.
I've walked past it for forty years,
barefoot on grass then gravel then concrete,
never thinking to remove my shoes.

When the hospice nurse calls at midnight
to say it's time, I drive through darkness
lit only by stoplights and gas stations.
The world divides into before and after
with ruthless efficiency.

In her room, machines are silent now.
Her breath, shallow as autumn puddles,
moves like small birds between branches.
I hold her hand, this hand that once
held mine at every street crossing.

I whisper, "I am here," though I know
she has already stepped into another country
where my voice cannot follow. Outside
the window: darkness, a few stars, the outline
of mountains she taught me to name.

This is holy ground—not because of death
but because of love's stubborn persistence.
We think revelation requires thunder,
but here it arrives in the quiet interval
between one breath and its absence.

Later, driving home, I pass a church
where Wednesday night prayer meeting lets out.
People cluster under streetlights, ordinary
as bread, laughing—their voices rising
in the night I carry only silence.