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Small Clinic At Kilometer 7 Robert Hill Long

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SMALL CLINIC AT KILOMETER 7

It did no good, the mercy dream. The belief that famine's dry ocean of sand and wind could be diked by hundred pound bags of enriched flour, sugar, dried milk. The erection of surplus surgical tents across the river-border from the guerilla actions, the efficient arranging of cots, plasma drips, bandage storage, the effort to keep as many of the wounded out of the monsoon, out of the sun. No good, the slow resisting of rage, the kindly cupping of each hand in prayer while facing the shot-up outskirts of the town, as though to hold water out to a thirsty sniper, and see the rifle laid down, and water taken as a final covenant. When the red bandannas agree to lay down their rifles for sorghum and millet, then we see the ditch just behind the treaty table. In the hands of the all-mercifuls, hard currency and flexible guarantees to whoever would lay down his flaying knife and drink the clean water flown in on white cargo jets, and promise hand over heart to employ the knife to dig seed holes.

The President's wife toured the facility, laid a sunscreened hand on this forehead and that shoulder, five minutes were allotted for her clinic walkthrough. There were so many photojournalists trailing her, they could not help stepping on the hands of some of the stretcher cases laid in the tent aisle. They knocked over a tray of syringes and injectable vitamins onto the plank walkway, the boots on glass sounded like teeth breaking. The helicopters were landing, they had to hurry. One of them looked backwards, pulled out a wad of local cash and tossed it at a nurse, begging pardon.

Bring the boy forward now. Let Nineveh see the number of bones it will take to purchase truth. Tie him to the hood and tie the girl to the trunk and rear bumper, and drive each street of the old city's square mile. Under your breath repeat O King of the age, these are the names of the bones only. O King of larder and pantry and silo and freezer, swollen with drugs and cowfat. Whose decrees part the air like knives part yellow fat from bone's white.

This was your son, this your daughter, every bone of them ready to dance for gladness at a feast, to run carrying good news west and east to the farm and the fishery. What is it to sit under the high awning, on a hill bearing your title, and watch the knives flash at either end of the valley? Is it to see your word remain bright through the dust of children running? King of sweetmeat, of custard and egg and white crabmeat. If strong hurt calms, then all your children will know peace to the very bone.