

## Broadway

Under Grand Central's tattered vault --maybe half a dozen electric stars still lit-- one saxophone blew, and a sheer black scrim

billowed over some minor constellation under repair. Then, on Broadway, red wings in a storefront tableau, lustrous, the live macaws preening, beaks opening and closing like those animated knives that unfold all night in jewelers' windows. For sale, glass eyes turned outward toward the rain, the birds lined up like the endless flowers and cheap gems, the makeshift tables of secondhand magazines and shoes the hawkers eye while they shelter in the doorways of banks. So many pockets and paper cups and hands reeled over the weight of that glittered pavement, and at 103rd a woman reached to me across the wet roof of a stranger's car and said, I'm Carlotta, I'm hungry. She was only asking for change, so I don't know why I took her hand. The rooftops were glowing above us, enormous, crystalline, a second city lit from within. That night a man on the downtown local stood up and said, My name is Ezekiel, I am a poet, and my poem this evening is called fall. He stood up straight to recite, a child reminded of his posture by the gravity of his text, his hands hidden in the pockets of his coat. Love is protected, he said, the way leaves are packed in snow, the rubies of fall. God is protecting the jewel of love for us. He didn't ask for anything, but I gave him all the change left in my pocket, and the man beside me, impulsive, moved, gave Ezekiel his watch. It wasn't an expensive watch, I don't even know if it worked, but the poet started, then walked away as if so much good fortune must be hurried away from, before anyone realizes it's a mistake. Carlotta, her stocking cap glazed like feathers in the rain, under the radiant towers, the floodlit ramparts, must have wondered at my impulse to touch her, which was like touching myself, the way your own hand feels when you hold it because you want to feel contained. She said, You get home safe now, you hear? In the same way Ezekiel turned back to the benevolent stranger. I will write a poem for you tomorrow, he said. The poem I will write will go like this: Our ancestors are replenishing the jewel of love for us.

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