

## Where Are Our Voices?

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Where are our voices,  
those of us who keep watch  
day and night,

counting breaths not our own,  
praying to gods,  
to ancestors,  
to silence,  
to anything or anyone that will listen—

for one more day of survival?

I see the brilliance,  
the power of lived experience,  
as it should be,  
for who else knows the war within better  
than those who have fought it  
tooth and bone?

But I wonder,  
is there space for those of us  
who carry the battles on our backs too,  
who did not wield the weapon  
but felt its recoil in our chest,  
who did not touch the poison  
but tasted the bitter every day  
through the breath of those we hold closest?

We have not felt withdrawals ourselves,  
but we have held trembling alongside,  
our bodies learning the rhythm of a suffering  
we cannot name as our own.

We carry wisdom  
that could help the world,  
yet still watch our own  
slip through our hands.

Even when spaces are offered,  
some of us sometimes step back,  
afraid our words will sound too loud,  
afraid our pain might steal the air  
meant for those  
who lived the fire firsthand.

And when we do,  
our quiet is misread—  
as if we have no story,  
as if we are too nervous to speak.  
But it is not absence.  
It is the weight of holding,  
the cost of carrying,  
the carefulness of never wanting to take  
what was never ours.

And yes,  
there is anger too—  
anger at being unseen,  
anger at watching policies fail,  
anger that our people keep slipping  
through cracks we did not build  
but are forced to stand inside.

And when we fight for change,  
we are seen as a bother,  
without experience,  
as if we do not know.

And for those whose minds or bodies  
grow in different rhythms,  
their struggle is not seen as existence,  
as if their light could be ignored.

Like so many we care for,  
their battles go unnamed,  
their lives uncounted—  
and the silence leaves us grieving  
what is slipping away before our eyes.

We lose them  
long before the grave.

We lose them to the streets,  
to the system,  
to the hollowing of their own bodies,  
to the distance that addiction builds.  
We lose them while they are still breathing,  
and still,  
we are asked to only speak  
when the breathing is done.

We are invited to speak only in mourning,  
our voices summoned  
when a candle is lit for the fallen,  
when names are read into night air.

But what of the everyday—  
when fear curls in our stomachs,  
when we live the long ache of not knowing  
if today will be loss  
or will today be grace?

Do we not recover too?  
Do we not stumble and rise  
in our own quiet ways,  
patching hearts that split  
between hope and dread,  
between faith and fracture?

Where are our voices?  
Not only at vigils,  
but in the living rooms of change,  
at the tables where systems are made,  
in the circle of stories  
that shape tomorrow.

We do not want to lead instead,  
we want to walk beside—  
as we always have,  
as we continue to do—  
with truth,  
with memory,  
with carrying,  
with the rawness of being human  
in this impossible balance.

Doesn't our battle count too?  
Not just as mourners,  
but as carriers of courage,  
as witnesses who refuse silence.

Where are our voices?  
They are here—  
still breaking,  
still rising,  
still chasing healing  
through the shadows of fear and hope.

We too are learning how to recover:  
from losses,  
from silence,  
from caring for someone in recovery—  
waking each day hoping to hear their voices,  
dreading the quiet that lingers too long,  
no matter how many years have passed.

And still, among those closest to us,  
there are some still fighting,  
still struggling beyond our reach.

We are not seeking approval.  
But we wonder—  
when, or if,  
our battle will ever be seen.

Some of us grow discouraged,  
exhausted from fighting to be heard,  
slipping and fading into the background,  
unseen.

Yet some of us will continue to show up—  
whether heard or quieted—  
because this battle  
does not end in silence.

We walk it daily,  
chasing our own recovery,  
carrying what cannot be dropped,

continuing to save lives  
the best we know how,

until no more lives are stolen  
by this disease,  
until the cries of our people  
find healing and peace.