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Myself in Them

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JACQUELINE BERGER

Myself in Them

Sitting in the car parked in the shade of a low branch
watching its green sway and half listening
to the reporter on the radio while half
imagining sadness as a bowl of water
into which more water is slowly
and continuously being added,
I hear the reporter ask a man
who several times a day dodges snipers
to reach the apartment of his girlfriend,
if she is very beautiful,
as though beauty were the only thing,
she is beautiful to me says the man
and besides most of the other women have already left.
The branch dips its fringe against my window,
beyond it is the city I will soon walk into.
A man walks across the war twice each day for a woman,
do I recognize myself in her, waiting for her lover,
do I recognize myself in him, ready to fall to his knees,
hands over head when a bullet ricochets on brick,
ready to die, do I recognize beauty
arranged as flowers and books on her table,
do I recognize death humming in the bones of the table,
in the bones of the flowers and the books,
the bones of the fog and the sun,
do I recognize myself in the reporter,
with his good meals and his pass,
who refuses the rubble of a dismantled city
even when set before him, even when the armies
are deployed and the talks have failed, the power lines cut,
even when nuns are raped and children wander the city
like rags, even when he returns home

and store displays are like perfect worlds
and women float through the streets
smelling of flowers and the flowers spill from the stalls,
and the war and the bones and the ash like grit in the air
are pushed to one side,
do I recognize myself in him,
in his good suit, in his next assignment, do I recognize
myself in the frayed rug, in the woman pacing,
waiting for her lover who traverses the war to come to her,
do I recognize her beauty, do I recognize
his need, do I recognize the bullet
ricocheting off brick
that chips like a tooth, do I recognize myself
sitting in the parked car with the branch dipping
against the window and the water
filling the bowl.