

The Dove

By Marcin Wojdyna

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The feathers are still stuck to their suits. White smears on black lapels, specks of down clinging to silk ties. They tried to wipe the blood off their faces before the cameras returned, but the scratches are there. Thin red lines across statesmen's cheeks. Marks of peace, at last.

They will tell the story differently. They always do. They will say I got confused, panicked, lost control. They will not say the truth: that I chose it.

For years, I played their trick.

I remember the funeral where they carried me in a wicker basket, lifting me skyward as though one bird could cover the drone of jets circling above. They wept, they prayed, they clapped as I took flight. Then they turned their backs and signed the next shipment of rifles.

I remember the treaty ceremony. The pen scratched, the cameras flashed, the ink dried. I swooped across the stage on cue, olive branch in beak. They shook hands for the world to see. By dusk, artillery rolled into the border towns.

I remember the protests. The crowd chanting, the banners raised. My image stamped on every flag, every badge, every cheap sticker. A symbol of hope, they said. But symbols are lighter than bodies, and mine was always the first thing abandoned when the batons came down.

And still, I flapped on. Pretending. Playing the part.

Until one day I didn't.

The doors opened. The crowd stood. The flashbulbs lit. But I did not rise gently. I fell. Into them. Beak, claws, wings, fury. Their screams were louder than their applause had ever been. Blood ran brighter than their fireworks.

They called it sacrilege. I call it truth.

Because peace was never more than a costume they made me wear. And when I tore it off, when I showed them what I had always been beneath the feathers, they finally listened.

Not to peace.

To me.

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