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A Tender, Comforting Something

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Gazing out our large corner window
after a week away
I see the birdbath empty
and rise from the chair
without thought.

Outside, a chill—
natural on the threshold of winter.
The hose feels stiff
and crackles as I lift it,
its water frozen—
I hope only in part.

The faucet fully open
produces a spray from its source,
but no water flows.

Shaking and bending the hose gently
yields the disappointing same.

Thirsty birds
will have to wait—

but only wait.
My affection for them
assures their needs will be met
when nature brings warmth.

Returning to the chair,
I pass by the dining room table
and am drawn to a color photo on the
newspaper's front page.

A child is being carried—
still,
limp,
dead—
by his father—
sobbing,
lost—
somewhere in a faraway land
of war.

My affection for the child and his father—
his suffering mother unseen,
his sisters and brothers,
aunts and uncles,
teachers and friends—
brings sadness,
then anger,
then helplessness.

Unlike thirsty birds
I know of nothing I can do to assure
these beloveds—
hearts frozen

by a chill
this time
the unnatural has brought.

Would it comfort them to feel
there is one in the distance
who cares,
suffers with them,
would never cause them harm?

I want to bless them.

Later in the day—
the birdbath full—
four ravens come
to the branches of the ash
that shades the bath.
Two by two they alight
to drink
vigilantly.

I long for the arrival of the hawks,
who bless the bath—
and me—
when they come.
But they rarely come,
and always alone.

The ravens will have to do,
as I—
far away and unimagined—
will have to do.

I can soothe the thirsty birds.

I can offer a blessing to my brothers and sisters—
hoping they will feel
in the soft kiss of a gentle breeze
a tender, comforting something.

Dedicated to Thomas Friedman

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