



A physician's war, and what they couldn't destroy

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The word 'war' in the title is not a metaphor: it was a real, recent war, and it brought airstrikes to my city. Every day that I left home, I left my family and my cats behind, and I never knew for certain whether I would return. I was working in an unstable area; fighter jets passed overhead several times a day, but the person I worked for ignored all warnings, ignored repeated requests for a safety protocol, a designated shelter, and an evacuation plan, none of which were ever put in place. Getting time off was difficult.

That day, on my mother's advice, I hadn't sat at my usual desk in the doctor's room. I'd moved to another seat and was in the middle of writing up patient files when, near noon, a terrible sound tore through the building. The window shattered. Dust came down from the ceiling. Explosions continued to erupt, one after another, one after another. I had no choice but to leave, to try and survive.

On the stairs, going down to get out of the building, a mother was pushing her child ahead of her, anxious, but careful. A woman with her hair still freshly dyed was asking for the way out. When we reached the outside, smoke and broken glass filled every space. People were running away from the explosion site. It wasn't the clinic itself that was struck, but it was close enough that the

walls trembled and the windows gave way. A man was holding a cloth against his bleeding, wounded forehead. Another man opened the parking garage at his home to us so we would have somewhere to shelter.

Even before this event, patients and medical staff alike had suffered anxiety, fear, and worry because there was no safety net, warning system, or crisis preparation. Among the staff, that fear was rarely spoken aloud, but it was felt in a shared glance across the hallway, in how quickly we all learned each other's routes to the stairwell, in the quiet that fell over the break room when the jets passed overhead again. Before any of this started, the clinic was already understaffed, and in the weeks that followed, nobody could take time off because no one else could be called in to cover the work. Decisions that should have been taken by a committee were made in a hallway, in minutes, by whoever happened to be standing there, not because we were trained for it, but because the war didn't wait for protocol.

We stayed in that parking garage for a while, but once the bombing finally stopped, I went back outside to find more broken glass: glass from homes and shops that people had built over years of effort and hope. People who had wanted to taste something like an

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ordinary life. That rain-soaked ground became the resting place for the destroyed dreams of people already struggling through poverty, inflation, and inequality. The remains of the glass that lodged itself in the soles of my shoes were a sign of something else entirely: broken human hearts.

My heart broke too that day. I realized I worked for a system whose rules and reasoning valued paperwork, equipment, and money above human life and dignity. That is why I resigned, so I would no longer have to witness expensive medications being sold to people already living in poverty, or watch medicine that was rightfully theirs get diverted and sold freely elsewhere. It was a hard choice, in an already broken economy, but it was the right one, and it was the only thing that brought my mind some peace.

What carried me through the months after that decision had nothing to do with the job I'd left behind. It came from everything I'd already been holding onto outside of it, the whole time, without quite realizing how much it sustained me: my mother's voice on the phone when the lines worked; my cats waiting by the door whether I came home early or late; a few friends who kept writing to me even when weeks passed between my replies; the first time an editor wrote back about something I'd written and told me it mattered. These were worth more to me than any amount of money I was ever paid. I don't think I understood, before all this, how little money has to do with why a person keeps going.

I used to imagine, on the walk home some nights, what it would have looked like if the person running my workplace had led with even a little honesty instead of control. Not softness, just honesty. The difference matters more than people think. I observed that

people accepted the control, and kept their mouths shut in public. They never spoke the truth out loud. I don't think that was weakness, just survival. I think it was exactly what you get when the only currency in a place is obedience.

I've had time since to sit with what the choice to quit actually cost me. It cost income I couldn't easily replace, in an economy already collapsing under inflation, at a time I could have used every bit of financial safety. In retrospect, I don't regret it. I think about the version of myself who might have stayed, who might have signed off on things I knew were wrong, and I don't recognize her as someone I would want to become. Some choices don't make sense on a balance sheet. They only make sense in whether you can still look at yourself afterwards.

I don't know if the war is really over, or just paused somewhere where I can't see it from here. What I do know is that it won't end for the people who went down the stairs and then back upstairs again the next morning, those who signed the forms, who kept working. The war, I imagine, will keep running inside them even when the outer war ends. If there's anything I'd want an administrator reading this to sit with, it's this: the desk gets repaired quickly, the person who was sitting at it does not. Whatever protections exist for buildings and equipment during a crisis, the people should have them first, not as an afterthought once things calm down enough to remember them.

I end with a prayer. May no war be left anywhere in the world. May people never forget their values and their true selves in the pursuit of their most basic needs. May humans, animals, and the natural world live in peace, and may progress never come at the cost of dignity, equality, or humanity.

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