

“I am a translator

who has found purpose through necessity.

Translation is supposed to be an innocuous act, but every word becomes a bomb in a battlefield. I am aware of the lives I'm responsible for when I am appointed as both general and messenger of my consanguineous army. My body trembles with the incredible burden, and I predict only disaster. A slip of the tongue here, a missed phrase there, and a bill goes unpaid. A child warily awaits a pick-up that never happens. A diagnosis falls on illiterate ears. Each mistake is an eaten ration, is a lost friend, is a civilian death. Translation then becomes precise, it becomes surgery, and it becomes my family's last line of defense.

Thirteen years old, and my word is gospel.

“What does it say?” my mother asks, her gaze blank on a school newsletter, a medical exam, an eviction notice. My tongue quivers and stumbles between one, two, one-and-a-half parlanes with the clumsiness of a native. I translate the text, and in the spaces between I translate the burden of knowledge. I translate the anxiety between me and words, for words are frequential slurry seeping through my cortical carpet. I stitch together the organic fragments of a language I call home through the galvanized steel of clinical palaver, and gurgle the disjointed syntax that results. Again, and again, and again.

Twenty-four years old, and my word is practice.

My repertoire expands. I translate the past to the present. I take in and translate the language of space—the space between objects, the space between words, the space between synapses. I translate the furious, ugly noise that you, and I, and we choose to drown out, and whisper it in silence. I translate blood and anguish with flowers and greeting cards. I translate with the knowledge that my translations can foster and destroy. I translate with the knowledge that there are many who wish to remain lost in translation.

I revel in the knowledge that my translations are my most powerful apparatus.



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