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What Haunts Me Most

Everyone has a bat story, but Aaron's is the one that haunts me most. One night, his mother forgot

the sheets on the clothesline and they turned into moonlit caves, or marble eaves, or attics

full of pearls—places darkness likes to perch—and three bats slept there, three lightbulbs of dusk

hanging from a white ceiling, until she woke up at dawn, suddenly remembering, and ran barefoot

across the wet grass to sweep up in one movement the whole monument of it, coming back in

with an armful of bright ruins, crumbling. That morning, Aaron's father found the first bat

in his shirt pocket, sleeping, a pen full of soft ink. His mother found the second bat as she put on her bra

and felt it fluttering, a dark heart, against her chest. That night, Aaron shook his pillowcase

and the last bat flew out, a perfect metaphor for a nightmare. What haunts me about this story

isn't the ruined laundry, it's not a kind of puritanism, or the image of the bats hidden in the sheets

like seeds in a slice of translucent pear—it's that the bats went to sleep in what they thought

was a home, as animals in a cave, and woke up as a pen, a heart, a nightmare in a boy's head.