

The Soldier



letter arrived from their son, away at war.

Dear mother, father,
I am on my way home at last.

There is one thing I must ask before I return:
My friend saved my life in one of our worst battles.

Which cost him an arm and an eye,
and left his face badly disfigured.

He has no home to return to.

I ask that he live with us.

Their reply was careful, written in a practiced hand.

Dear son,
We are sorry for what your friend has suffered,
and deeply grateful that he saved you.

But you must understand what you are asking.

Such a burden would change everything.

Perhaps there is another place for him —
somewhere better suited to his needs.

Weeks passed before another letter came.

Dear mother, father.
There is no other place.

If I return, I do not return without him.

This time, they answered quickly.

Dear son,

Come home.
We're sorry, but come alone.

A responsibility like that is more than we can bear.

He must find his own way.

There was no reply.

Instead, an official envelope arrived, bearing a city seal.
It spoke in opaque, official phrases:
an accident, a fall —
The word *intent* left carefully unmentioned.

They traveled to the city in silence.

At the place of identification, a sheet was drawn back.

They recognized their son at once.

Except that he had only one arm.
One eye.
And a badly disfigured face.

— *William Zeitler*
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