

# Words Afire

**L**ong ago, in a city made of silence, the people forgot how to speak. Not all at once, and not because of sorrow — but by slow agreement. Words had grown dangerous. Some blamed them for war, others for lies. They came to believe that words were like flames of fire shooting from their mouths, burning everything before them. So the elders decreed that truth would be guarded by quiet, and silence became sacred. They spoke only in gestures, in glances, in choreographed stillness. It was not done out of cruelty, but out of fear — fear of what words had once unleashed. But one day, a wind rose. It did not blow from the mountains or the sea. It came from within — a tremble in the chest, a pressure in the bones, as though something long imprisoned was waking up. The wind danced through the streets, unseen but not unfelt. Doors swung open. Flames flared without consuming. And from the mouths of the least expected — children, foreigners, the broken-hearted — words burst forth in song. Not the old words. Not the careful ones. New ones. Wild ones. Musical ones. Each person heard a different tongue — and somehow, each heard what they needed. Some cried. Some laughed. Some fell to their knees. Not because of what was said, but because something greater was saying itself through them. The elders tried to restore the silence, but it was too late. A song had begun, with melody and with meaning. It spread — not by conquest, not by command — but by fire that did not burn and wind that did not scatter. And wherever it went, it left behind not ruins, but roots.

The city did not return to silence. But it learned a new kind of speaking and listening — one that heard not just words, but the music as well.

— *William Zeitler*

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