

## March 4

a jackhammer sounds its continuous report outside one window, slows to a muffle, as if taking a few short breaths, then restarts pummelling the earth to get back under ground. Out the back window, a rooster crows, like the jackhammer, unseen. In between its long late morning calls, children shout in unison, school songs beyond the chicken coop and construction. Men walk on the tops of buildings moving stones at the edge of a dirty band of sky below a brighter bowl of blue pyramid quiet as diurnal rotation killing all these sounds imperceptibly.

### **Jabr Citadel Meets Mari on her Birthday**

Sand mixes with clay bricks, independent crusaders blown through old mortar, buffing the surface hit hardest by battering wind off the wide Euphrates swirling despite dams on both sides of the border. Ruined by weather or warriors chipping away at the towers like so many jerboa slowly nibbling through Eid, leaving teeth marks for roofs and walls. Like the once indigenous creature, you crack seeds, sunflowers, leaving the husks with the empty shell of the mosque unaccustomed to women scaling it, charging the iron ladder, its skewed rungs gapped as the ruins, yanking the rope and climbing to the crude entrance where a teenage boy in jeans stares at the feat and watches you climb inside the minaret until you arrive, a dark bird flapping its wings to keep from being buffeted against the precipice and thrown from the high window, the last casualty of old skirmishes, a victory no Ottoman will claim over this renegade Armenian celebrating forty by challenging all assumptions.

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