***The Weight of Light***

On evenings when the kids have gone to bed and the TV glows in the corner, Aaron sits in his chair with a book open, unread. His wife watches the screen, smiling at the occasional absurdity, while folding laundry with the assurance of someone who trusts her life. He watches her movements, graceful even during ordinary tasks, and feels the tug of tenderness that first drew her to him. That part is true; he does love her.

At the office, he is diligent. Colleagues know him for his punctuality, his careful humour, and his habit of leaving the pub early. They assume devotion to family sends him home. They're not wrong, but not right either.

There are moments when the weight of his other longing presses against him so forcefully that he feels it might leave a mark on his skin. A glance held too long in a café, the brush of a stranger's arm on a crowded Luas, a voice on the radio that stirs something he cannot name aloud. These moments leave him shaken, not because they diminish his love for his family but because they complicate it beyond any tidy shape.

On Sundays, he walks the children to Mass. They race ahead, their laughter ringing against the church's grey walls. His wife sits beside him in the pew, her shoulder warm against his. The priest reflects on fidelity and the sanctity of vows. Aaron lowers his eyes to the kneeler, tracing grooves in the polished wood. Fidelity, he thinks, is not a straight line, but uneven, wandering, hesitant, true.

Once, years ago, when his daughter was nine months old, he permitted a brief departure from the life he had built. It happened suddenly, without planning, and ended the same way. He came home hollowed out, relieved and bereft all at once. He promised himself never again, not because his longing vanished but because he could not bear to fracture the trust that gathered at the kitchen table, in bedtime stories, in the soft weight of his daughter's head against his chest.

Now he carries it within like a second pulse. It doesn't show. He helps with homework, pays bills, and mends the back gate. He laughs at his son's knock-knock jokes, admires his wife's new haircut, and lies his head beside hers each night. From the outside, the picture is whole.

Walking home along the canal at dusk, he imagines another life, one where he could step fully into the part of himself kept folded away. The water glimmers with reflected streetlight, beautiful and unreachable. He allows the ache to rise in him for a moment, then turns back toward his front door, where the hallway light glows.

Love, he knows, is not diminished by what cannot be spoken. Just like light through glass, it bends, refracts, adapts. It survives not in purity, but in compromise, in the weighted space between longing and restraint.

Fragmented, imperfect, splintered, but still shining, he carries it as best he can.