

1.

At first, silence.

Then birdsong I hadn't heard in years.

The refrigerator hummed like it had always done.

The house didn't know the difference.

I walked outside and the sun looked me in the eye as if I'd finally arrived. A

neighbor waved like we were both survivors of some strange, unspoken war.

There was no endless scroll, no tapping for more.

I saw my hands for what they were—not tools, not conduits—but extensions of thought.

I dug into dirt, found the texture of something real.

Books waited like patient dogs.

Paper smelled like time.

I remembered my own handwriting.

It had changed.

The sky turned orange, then purple.

I didn't photograph it.

I just watched.

And when night came, I stared at the dark until it stopped being empty.

2.

Under a canopy of orange sky, I watch two owls sit on a branch.
I almost miss the silent flutter of wings as one departs,
a lone feather hitting the dead grass the only sign it was ever here.
It was so beautiful, the way things were before it left.
I almost missed the silent flutter of a part of me leaving;
grass up to my ankles and cuts kissed well again, my childhood supposedly infinite.
Life was so beautiful, the way things were before it left,
Disney princess dress stained by silver paint.
Grass up to my ankles and cuts kissed well again, my childhood supposedly infinite.
The girl who built a rocket ship to meet the man on the moon,
Disney princess dress stained by silver paint.
Where have you gone, sweet girl? When will you be back?
The girl who built a rocket ship to meet the man on the moon,
a lone piece of cardboard lying in the dead grass the only sign she was ever here.
Where have you gone, sweet girl? When will you be back?
Under a canopy of orange sky, a lone owl sits on a branch.

3.

The lights are too bright.

Everything hums with artificial life.

A man in pajama pants stares at a box of cereal like it's asked him a question.

I understand.

In aisle four, a worker stocks soup as if nothing outside this building matters.

Maybe it doesn't.

A woman whispers into her phone by the frozen food.

Her voice is soft, but her eyes are wide.

It's always the eyes.

I buy bread I won't eat, juice I don't want, because choosing something feels like control.

At the register, no one says anything.

We all just beep and go.

The machine thanks me.

I want to thank it back.

Outside, it's raining but in that quiet way that makes you feel like the world is exhaling.

I sit in the car, eating crackers, watching the droplets crawl.

Everything hurts, but not in the way that needs fixing.