

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.

4.

The smell of rain on pavement.

The sound of toast popping up.

The way your hand fit mine when neither of us were thinking about it.

The cat blinking slowly from the windowsill.

A friend laughing in the middle of their own sentence.

Wind chimes that played a song only the trees seemed to recognize.

The time we got lost and didn't care.

How we made a wrong turn and found a meadow full of bees and secrets.

How quiet the world became right before snow.

How loud it got when we danced in the kitchen.

I want to remember that the good things were not always big.

That sometimes a moment can be everything.

The sound of your voice saying, "You're okay."

The look you gave me like I was more than my worst day.

The feeling that, even briefly, this life was not just bearable—but beautiful.

5.

I sit in the silence after the last door clicks shut.

The air still holds warmth—voices that haven't quite faded, laughter that clings to the couch cushions.

I don't move.

Not yet.

I like the way the room feels full of ghosts I know.

There's a plate on the table with one bite left.

I don't throw it away.

It feels too personal, like interrupting a sentence mid-thought.

I run my hand along the back of a chair someone leaned on all night.

It's still indented—still holding the shape of someone I love.

The quiet is thick.

But not lonely.

Just honest.

Like the room and I are finally breathing the same air.

I think about the things I didn't say.

How I almost told her I'm tired all the time.

How I wanted to ask him if he's really okay.

How I watched them laugh and wished I could bottle it.

I'll clean up soon.

I will.

But for now, I just want to sit here in this stillness I didn't know I needed, and remember how it felt to be surrounded—and seen.