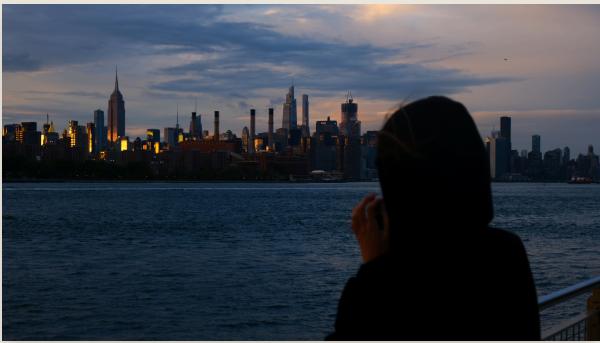


On Living Alone



I began living alone, for the first time in more than twenty years. No roommates, no relatives, no family. Just myself. Truly, all alone.

The first few days felt unbearable. Loneliness arrived with a physical force, pressing so hard that I called friends and asked them to come stay with me, to sleep beside me for a few nights. Loneliness is frightening; it exposes how fragile a person can be. I have always been solitary, even when living with others, often keeping to myself. And yet, in those first days, loneliness was simply terrifying. After a few weeks, the fear almost completely disappeared. Looking back, it feels instinctive, almost animal—like a bird distrusting a new nest. Only after it absorbs familiar scents does it begin to feel safe. Once the fear faded, life resumed its rhythm, and what appeared was not solitude as an idea, but life as it actually is: cooking without reason late at night, cleaning at dawn, a schedule turned upside down. With no one else around, there is no second body enforcing order. No one to regulate time, no one to witness disorder, no one to ask for explanations. Slowly, I discovered the pleasure of living alone. Fragility receded. A sense of safety returned. Solitude offered a kind of freedom that felt maximal and intact. This was the life I had imagined at the beginning—a space no one could enter uninvited, where I alone decide who is welcome.

Yet living alone also sharpened my understanding of life's most basic demands. I began to see how much energy it takes simply to keep life running. Laundry must be hung to dry. Floors must be mopped. The sink needs cleaning. The shower breaks without warning. Meat must be chosen carefully. Two meals must be eaten each day. Ingredients spoil if left untouched. Rice does not exist unless it is cooked. And after every meal, knives, plates, and pans must all be washed. None of this was unfamiliar knowledge; what astonished me was the sheer volume of these small tasks when faced alone.

