

The Horror of Something Absent

The morning after feels cold and distant.

Not loud, not broken. Untouched, as though the world had learned how to keep moving while mine had stopped.

At four in the morning, silence becomes a body. It sits beside you. Waiting,

watching,

breathing when you cannot.

I stand beneath the shower until the heat spreads across my skin in waves of crimson. Steam swallows my bathroom whole until I barely see my own reflection. Disappearing inside it feels easier than *surviving myself*. I keep waiting for the water to wash away something it could never touch.

I stand at the kitchen window making coffee while the morning sun rests against my skin. The warmth of it somehow feels *wrong*. Lost in between my thoughts, someone from the other room speaks to me, and I answer without even hearing the question. Somewhere in that small ordinary moment, something inside me begins to rot silently.

I didn't know it then, but grief had already settled into the house long before death arrived.

But only one of us stopped breathing.

And it wasn't me.

Your voice stays behind like an echo, haunting the house long after you are gone. It never returns in full conversations, only fragments. Pieces of breaking glass that have already become broken, small enough to carry and sharp enough to wound.

The way you laughed after saying something serious stays with me. I only realise now laughter could be something to mourn.

On Sunday mornings you would call us to sit beside you for prayers, your fingers gliding slowly across the japamala as your voice filled the room. I never knew the prayers well enough to follow. I used to watch your lips move instead, believing there would always be another Sunday to learn...

There wasn't.

Your mug still waits beside the sink.

The lipstick stain clings to the rim like a proof of your existence. Even the porcelain refuses to forget you.

I wash every other cup in the house.

Washing your cup feels too much like admitting you aren't coming back.

The holy prayer beads lay on top of her half-read Tripitaka. Every evening she would smooth each bead between her fingers before whispering another prayer. I had been memorising the rhythm of her hands. Now the beads wait in perfect silence, like interrupted sentences neither of us get to finish.

It's unbearable. Grief. It doesn't fit neatly inside words like sorrow, sadness, or ache. It is wide and restless like the ocean. Some days it arrives quietly, a small wave touching my ankles

before pulling away again. Other days it rises without warning and drags me under before I can catch my breath.

Pain is not a crashing tide. It floods quietly.

Through the house,

through her room, across the hallway,

through me.

It carries her voice, her smell, the shape of her laughter. It takes everything I think I have already lost and somehow leaves a trace of her everywhere at once. In the unfinished letter I wrote to you, which is still sitting on top of the bedside table. In the kitchen with her family recipe book that lies open on the kitchen bench. The turmeric stain on the bench's corner. How you always laughed whenever you forgot where you left the spoon. I keep thinking that if I cook your recipes the same way, maybe the house will remember your voice before I forget it. Now, I would give anything to hear the laughter that interrupted the silence again.

Grief is strange.

It snatches away people you hold dear to you, while making them impossible to escape.

It's unfair how I get to live.

People speak about acceptance as though it arrives gently.

It doesn't.

At first, grief looks like resentment. I had resented every ordinary morning that arrived without you, every conversation that continued as though the world hadn't changed.

Towards *me*.

Toward every moment I had thought would return, every moment that I took for granted because I believed time was *endless*.

Weeks have now folded into months. The house has grown quieter.

Or perhaps I simply learned how to hear its silence.

One night I open my notebook and write something I never plan on anyone else to read. The house is dark except for the lamp beside me, the hallway silent and empty. The only thing that echoes is the ticking clock. Even the walls look exhausted.

It's not a goodbye... but not closure either.

It is evidence of a person, a version of myself, who has once been loved by someone... someone who no longer exists within the same world as me.

It begins something like this:

Dear me,

I resent you.

Death never scared me — it felt kinder before you left — but sometimes it still doesn't scare me since I haven't been alive for a long time. Why can't I let you go, when every part of you still feels alive, when your voice is still echoing in my ears?

I have experienced grief before, yet I was not prepared when I lost you. When I did, I realised that you had so much to teach me. How little time I had to learn all that you had to say.

What about your wish for me? What about the promise I made to you? What about them? I am so sorry I took you for granted, I am sorry if I ever failed you. I wish you had enough time with me. I wish I hugged you one last time, but only if I knew how cruel life would be, how unfair it is that I must live without you. I want to yell. I want to scream. I want to cry. I am terrified of ghosts, yet I would welcome you with open arms, if it meant I could have you by my side. But the fear of something unseen has been replaced by the horror of something absent. I am not afraid of what the dark might answer me, but only the person who wouldn't. I can no longer talk to you, so I am writing this for you. I hope you know that I have ripped a piece of my soul for you, in the hopes it will keep you alive till the day I come to you and make myself whole again.

Love 

Bri

I remember finishing that letter and staring at it for a while, waiting for relief to arrive, but it never did.

Morning slips through the curtain without asking whether I am ready. The sun rises without permission. I despise that too.

How dare the world move on after taking someone from you?

That's the strange thing about grief.

It doesn't meet you all at once.

It's hollow. Or sometimes it swells like swallowed glass inside my throat, sharp enough to cut every word before it leaves my mouth.

And resentment stays longer than sadness ever does. Sadness feels clean compared to it. Sadness mourns you, but resentment mourns every version of myself that existed before I lost you.

The person who believed time was generous, who thought love alone can protect people from disappearing.

Everyone speaks about you like you're a memory. I still speak to you like you're not.

Once, I turned around so quickly after hearing someone say my name that my chest hurt afterward from the hope it would be *you*.

I think grief makes a fool of people like that.

Or maybe it simply keeps them alive?

I don't know when mourning stops feeling like a sharp pain and starts feeling heavy instead. Some mornings still feel cold and distant, exactly like the first one after it all slipped away. Some parts of me are still standing there at four in the morning, waiting in the quiet, hoping I might see you again.

Perhaps grief is simply learning to live inside a world where someone exists everywhere except beside you.

Some mornings, I still wake up before sunrise. Four o'clock.

Silence becomes a body again.

It sits beside me.

It no longer asks me to follow.

I still miss you.

I still turn around.

But I know what waits behind me is silence, not you.

Perhaps grief isn't the sound of breaking glass. Perhaps it's learning to live with the broken pieces.