WHAT THE EMPTY CHAIR KNOWS.

- Amisha Patel.

I thought grief would announce itself.

I thought there would be a day
When the sky would look different,
When the clocks would stop,
When the world would understand
That something had been taken from me.

There wasn't.

The next morning,
The milk still boiled over.

A dog barked somewhere outside.
Someone argued on the phone.
A bus arrived exactly when it was supposed to.

The world had the nerve
To be ordinary.

And I hated it for that.

I hated the sunlight
For entering the room
As if nothing had happened.

I hated the empty chair
For remaining only a chair.

Because I knew what it meant.

There are objects that become witnesses
After someone leaves.

A cup.

A photograph.

A shirt that nobody has the courage to move.

A chair that stays empty
Long after everyone has stopped expecting
Anyone to sit in it.

People think grief is crying.

Sometimes it is.

But sometimes grief is reaching for your phone
Because something funny happened,
Then remembering
You no longer know where to send it.

Sometimes it is hearing a familiar laugh
In a crowded place
And turning around too quickly.

Sometimes it is making a cup of tea
And, for one ridiculous second,
Making two.

Then standing there,

Staring at the second cup,

Feeling foolish
For forgetting
And heartbroken
For remembering.

That is the part nobody tells you about grief:

Your body remembers
Before your mind does.

Your hands remember.

Your eyes remember.

Your heart, that stubborn thing,
Keeps setting a place
For someone who is no longer coming.

And memory is not always kind.

Sometimes it gives you a face
So clearly
You almost reach for it.

Then it takes the face away.

Sometimes it gives you a voice
And you spend the rest of the night
Trying to hear it again.

I used to think remembering
Was a way of keeping someone alive.

Now I know
Memory has its own cruelty.

It brings them close enough
To miss.

There are days
I am angry.

Not because I have stopped loving you.

Perhaps because I haven't.

I am angry at all the conversations
That ended too early.

At all the ordinary days
I thought we had in abundance.

At the questions
I never knew would become impossible to ask.

At the future
That quietly changed its shape
Without asking me.

And sometimes—

This is the part I am ashamed to admit—

I have a good day.

I laugh.

I forget for a few hours.

I come home lighter.

Then I remember.

And for a moment,
I feel guilty
For having lived without missing you.

As though happiness
Were a betrayal.

But I am beginning to understand:

Love does not ask us
To remain broken
Just to prove it was real.

So I let myself laugh now.

I let myself celebrate.

I let beautiful things happen
Without apologising to an absence.

I carry you differently.

Not like a wound.

Not like a ghost.

More like a sentence
I have memorised so completely
That I no longer need to read it
To know it is there.

You have become
Part of the way I look at things.

Part of the tenderness
I give away without thinking.

Part of the reason
I stay a little longer
When someone says,

“I’m fine,”
But their eyes disagree.

Maybe this is what grief becomes
When we stop fighting it.

Not forgetting.

Not healing in the neat,
Beautiful way people promise.

Just learning
That a heart can make room
For two truths at once:

You are gone.

And I am still here.

Both are true.

Both hurt.

Both are mine.

So I no longer ask

When I will stop missing you.

I think that is the wrong question.

Some people are not meant
To become memories we outgrow.

Some absences
Become part of our architecture.

You leave,

And somehow,

A room remains.

I enter it sometimes.

I sit quietly.

I don’t always cry.

I don’t always smile.

Sometimes I simply stay there
Long enough to remember

What it felt like
When the room was full.

Then I get up.

I open the door.

I return to my life.

Not because I have left you behind,

But because I have finally learned
That carrying someone
Does not mean
You have to stop walking.

And perhaps that is all grief is
In the end—

Not the death of love,

But the strange,
Beautiful burden

Of having loved someone
So deeply

That even after they leave,

Your life keeps making space

For the shape of them.