

3 October, 7:04 a.m.

Before I go home

I used to think leaving the hospital meant the shift was over. Badge off. Doors behind me. Morning waiting outside. But there are nights that follow you home without making a sound.

The unit teaches you to answer quickly. A number changes. A voice calls your name. Your hands know where to go before the rest of you catches up. Then the world outside expects you to become an ordinary person again.

Someone asks whether you slept. Whether you ate. Whether it was a difficult night. You choose the smallest answer because the whole one would take too long.

I want to notice the morning. I want to stand in a kitchen where nothing is asking me to hurry. I want to let silence be silence, rather than waiting for it to break.

Some nights are simply hard. You do not have to turn them into a lesson before you are allowed to rest.

For now, I am going home. That is enough for this morning.

Eleanor

4 October, 8:46 a.m.

The morning after

I put my keys on the kitchen counter and stood there with my coat still on.

The refrigerator hummed. Somewhere outside, a car door closed. Such small sounds. I listened to every one of them.

I made toast and forgot it. Opened the curtains, then closed them again. The daylight felt too bright for someone who had spent the night watching numbers glow in the dark.

My phone lit up. Nothing urgent. I checked it anyway.

I keep thinking about all the things I notice at work. A change in breathing. A hand searching for something to hold. The moment a voice becomes quieter.

Then I come home and don't notice that I'm hungry until my hands begin to shake.

I know how to ask someone else if they are in pain. When I ask myself, I keep changing the question.

Tired? Yes.

Fine? Probably.

Anything else?

I don't know how to write that part yet.

So this morning I ate the cold toast. Put my phone face down. Left the dishes where they were.

The curtains are still closed. I can hear a bird outside. I'm going to try to sleep.

Eleanor