



THE KEEPER OF SMALL HOURS

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Abstract:

The prose mirrors the silent, incomplete nature of grief, love and inherited emotional practices. It opposes the conventional expectation that grief gradually reaches its resolution, suggesting that some forms of loss simply need to be accepted and lived alongside. The “small hours” is a metaphor where unresolved and uneasy feelings find rest without any disturbances caused by the routine. The speaker connects this ritual of witnessing her grandmother’s quiet observation and her own current cycle of observing. This suggests an unsaid intergenerational inheritance. The imagery of candle transferring its flame to the other pictures how emotional habits, memories and ways of managing the world pass down between generations without enforcement or deliberate instruction. Finally, the write up proposes that not all traditions need articulation. Some are preserved through quiet observation and willingness to remain without closure.

The Excerpt:

Four in the morning is when silence begins to speak. It is the time before the birds are yet to decide whether morning is worth announcing. The streetlights still hold the ground, remain lit, refusing to admit that night is over. My grandmother used to call this hour *the seam*, where yesterday and tomorrow were held together by a few uncertain stitches. She kept it as one keeps a garden through long winter-with patience, reverence without asking whether anything would bloom.

It was difficult for me to comprehend this as a youngling. Sleep seemed as an obvious answer response to darkness. She chooses the window pane instead. Her tea cooled beside her while watching the neighbourhood with strange fragility one reserves for a picture of someone already forgiven. Nothing happened in that hour. I think that was what she loved about it.

A decade later, within metropolitan spaces that is full of hustle-bustle, I inherited her hour, without realizing. Insomnia, at first-the usual one, stemming from exam anxiety, overdue bills or the faint buzz of thoughts that refuses to settle. Yet, with each recurrence began to take on another quality. I became attuned to the sky’s brief, peculiar blue before the dawn commits to morning, a shade language had failed to name. I had encountered in any vocabulary, blooming and fading within perhaps four minutes, as if the day were embarrassed to be caught rehearsing.

It occurs to me now that grief follows a similar rhythm. It does not announce itself as grief but comes as an echo-solitary hours of slowly recognizing the void before the absence becomes undeniable. My grandmother left for heaven in April beneath the daylight, in presence of those who adored her enough to intrude upon her solitude for one final moment. I didn’t experience her absence until several weeks afterward, in the predawn hours. I found myself standing beside a borrowed window cradling a cup of tea I had allowed to go cold.

Perhaps this is where we misread grief. We expect grief to announce loudly. We look for evidence of sorrow like the sobbing, the customary blacks or whites, voices reduced to whispers, the days spent in bed. We ask the obvious question: Are you okay? A ‘yes’ is considered as evidence accepting the face value. We mistake routine for recovery. We resume work, carry on



responding to ordinary demands of life, stand among celebrations, run errands, laugh at someone's joke and everyone concludes that healing has begun. Even the grieving person may believe it. We are conditioned to recognize grief by what can be seen while its deepest moments occur unseen. It conceals in ordinary things. In instinctively reaching for a second cup before realizing there is no one to share with. In glancing towards a chair, they always occupied. In catching a phrase that sounds like them, thinking that the dead have found their way back. It lingers in supermarket aisles, in familiar recipes, in a familiar scent, at 4 am before the day's noise begins. It is not always sadness. Sometimes it arrives as frustration, a strange fatigue and small lapses in memory. Perhaps this is why we it often goes unnoticed. We want grief to obey beginning and endings as it makes life easier to arrange. We want dates to tell a clean story. But grief keeps no calendar. It follows its own logic. It vanishes for weeks and then returns without warning because a song was playing in a shop, because it was winter, because someone laughed in the exact way she used to laugh. We mistake these moments as setbacks, as though recovery was unidirectional. Maybe it is not.

Maybe grief is the slow education of the body in an absence the mind already understands. The mind knows first: she is gone. The body continues setting the table, hearing footsteps, recollecting birthdays, preserving little spaces for its routines for someone who will never step back into them. By the time body accept what mind has known all along, we mistake quietness for recovery.

On one such night, I understood something that funeral had not allowed me to understand. Grief was not born when my grandmother died. It emerged in those flashbacks when I had not learnt to call it grief. Maybe, that is what grief teaches us, if we allow ourselves to notice that loss doesn't knock open the door. Sometimes it silently sits beside us and wait until that particular hour makes room for it. We learn to carry it all by ourself as no one else can witness it. Perhaps the seam is only a seam — a place where two usual days happen to unite, unremarkable except to the one keeping watch.

Still, I have begun to see it another way. I believe in the darkest hours all unresolved matters of attachment come to rest. Not to find closure-grief seldom offers such ease, but simply for acknowledgement. As my grandmother watched her street, in the same way, I now watch mine. I was passing the ritual down, without knowing to whom just as a candle transfers its light to the neighbouring wick without waiting for consent or without seeking gratitude.

Some traditions cannot be articulated. They can only be endured, at a window, until the birds announce the morning.

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