

FOOTNOTE

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There is no language without deceit.
—Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*

This is not a story. For I, a cat, am utterly indifferent to those bastilles of language with which humans trouble themselves. It follows then that this is not a story about a catastrophe, or a force majeure (what is this human penchant for names and categories?). Certainly this is not a story about lightning. You may think of this, at most, as something of a footnote, the ramblings of one aging cat, utterly forgettable, and included here offhandedly.

If I were to begin (which I will not do here) it would be in the twisting alleyway where nightly I observed the peculiar workings of humans. Each window served as a portal into their strange realms, dizzy with colour, sorrow, delight. Here was a gathering of uproarious laughter, here a woman, a sink. Here a figure bent over some pages, searching in vain for a word. Despite my feline detachment, a part of me, perhaps unknown even to myself, was captivated by these fragmented yet profound glimpses—the drudgery and joy that comprised a life.

They viewed the world through a prism of self-made merri-ments and misgivings, blind to the cosmic dance that unfolded around them. Yet occasionally, a pair of human eyes would meet my gaze beyond the window pane and, for one brief moment, be everything. This is how it was in the beginning (if there had been a beginning): I was the watcher and the guardian of their worlds, gazing upon them, over time, with affection.

If the middle of a story requires an event, I would speak now (perhaps) of the lightning strikes that began that frightful day. Like every afternoon, I had made my way to the grassy hill for a nap beneath the sun. I had fallen into a dream about life on Mars, and chasing mice, and God, when I was jolted awake by a noise so agonizing that at first I could not identify its source. Then came the pain. The countless strikes, the flashes of light, my fur cinched down to the bone. In my weakened state I staggered through dust and debris to check on the people of the twisting alleyway.

The air was thick with ruin when I arrived. Careful and deliberate, I weaved my way through rubble, each step revealing a scene of death and injury more harrowing than the last. The ground beneath my paws littered with remnants of life before. As darkness descended, I bore witness to a cruel mosaic of suffering behind windows now shattered. Even the shadows seemed to me in mourning, their edges blurred with sorrow.

That must have been some months ago by now. In that time I have seen more agony and tenderness than I can begin to recount here. Today, the blows of lightning still fall overhead and a droning, synthetic buzz has long replaced the song of the trees. This is not an end and this is not a story, for I, a cat, have no use for things so shape shifting, so futile, as words. I exist in the spaces between them—in the pauses of a prayer, in the colours of a dream, on ledges, in laughter, in light. On any given day, you can still find me here, in this twisting alleyway. The guardian of my people. We remain.