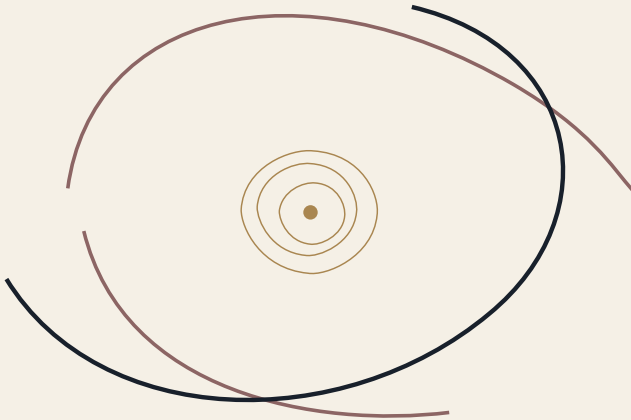


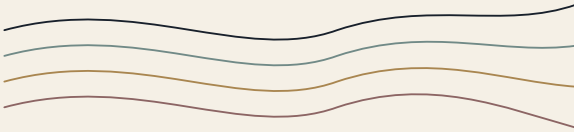
RAVIERE ANCLOSE

WHERE THERE WAS ONCE AN US

*A meditation on love, memory, absence, and the selves
we become*



*“The heart must learn, slowly, that
remembering someone
is not the same as waiting for them.”*



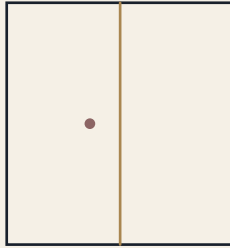
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PART I

Goodbyes Are Hard

Some departures happen once. Others continue inside us for years.



There are goodbyes that happen only once, and there are goodbyes we spend years saying.

The first kind is easy to recognize. A train leaves. A door closes. A hand slips from another hand. The world gives the ending a shape.

The second kind is quieter.

One evening, two cups of tea stood on a table beside a window. Rain had begun before sunset. One cup was nearly empty; the other had gone cold. Nothing dramatic happened. No one announced that a life

was changing. One person looked through the glass while the other watched the thin skin forming over untouched tea.

Years later, it would be impossible to remember what they had argued about.

The cold cup would remain.

Perhaps this is because saying goodbye to a person is only the beginning. What follows is the slower farewell to the life that existed around them.

Love rarely arrives as a single magnificent event. It enters through repetition: a morning message, a cup placed where a hand expects it, a story told first to one particular person, the private jokes that make no sense outside two lives.

At first there is "I."

Then, without ceremony, there is "we."

We should go there.

We will do that someday.

We have time.

The word seems harmless. Yet entire futures can hide inside it.

Perhaps intimacy begins when another person's existence becomes part of the calculation of tomorrow. A beautiful thing feels incomplete until it has been shown to them. A difficult day contains the

consolation that somewhere there is someone to whom it can be carried.

Then one day the person is no longer where the mind expects them to be.

Expectation is slower to leave than people are.

The hand still reaches for the phone. The eyes still move toward the familiar chair. A thought forms in the old direction before reality corrects it.

For a second the world is as it was.

Then it is not.

This is why absence exhausts us in the beginning. We are not learning one fact. We are learning the same fact repeatedly.

They are gone from this morning.

From this joke.

From this problem.

From the version of tomorrow in which we had already placed them.

Beneath those smaller losses is another: we are also saying goodbye to the person we were beside them.

Every relationship creates a private self. There is a way we laugh with one person that belongs to no one else; a softness that appears only where we feel safe; a language of glances and unfinished sentences.

When the other person leaves, that version of us loses its natural habitat.

Who am I when “we” returns to “I,” but “I” no longer means what it meant before?

There is no immediate answer.

We are often too eager to make grief useful. We want the lesson, the strength, the transformation. We want pain to justify the space it occupies.

But some experiences refuse to become wisdom on command.

Sometimes a goodbye hurts because something mattered.

That may be enough.

With time, the world does what it has always done. Work waits. People call. Seasons change without consulting the heart.

At first this continuation feels almost offensive.

Later, it becomes a kind of mercy.

The day asks very little except that we enter it.

Gradually the goodbye changes. A memory comes and goes without destroying the afternoon around it. The person does not disappear from the past. They simply stop occupying every room of the present.

Healing, if that is the word, may be less about forgetting than remembering without returning.

Some people leave our lives long before their memories leave our hearts.

And the heart must learn, slowly, that remembering someone is not the same as waiting for them.