

Some mornings I wake clean,  
as if my body rinsed the past from itself overnight.  
I open my eyes in my small, warm home  
and remember I am twenty two, loved, and safe,  
a woman with keys of her own,  
a bed that does not hold its breath.

Other mornings, the light touches me wrong,  
and I am pulled backward through myself.  
In the first few seconds after waking,  
I am fourteen again,  
a child hiding under covers thin as trust,  
believing fabric could muffle a father's temper,  
believing being quiet could keep me unhurt.

I live between these versions of waking.  
The days my brain remembers I am grown  
feel strangely shallow,  
emails, errands, the small choreography of survival.

I tell myself this is adulthood,  
this quiet maintenance of need.

But when my mind slips  
and I feel fourteen beating beneath my ribs,  
the world grows deeper, more tender,  
more mine.

Pain has a way of telling the truth  
even when it whispers in the wrong tense.

I used to fear these mornings,  
the ones where I inhabited the girl  
I never asked to be.

I tried to outgrow her,  
to treat distance like healing,  
to believe forgetting was the same as becoming whole.

But forgetting never freed her.

So now, when the morning chooses her instead of me,  
I let her speak.

I let her remember what she survived  
and what she deserved  
but did not get.

Because woven into her fear  
is hope I never honored,  
a small ember she protected  
until I could escape,  
until I could build a life soft enough  
to return to her safely.

And she deserves to see it.  
She deserves to walk through the rooms  
she once begged for,  
to rest in a home where anger does not echo.  
She fought so I could have this,  
the love, the safety, the quiet.

And on the days she rises in my place,  
I meet her gently,

tell her we made it,  
and feel proud of both of us.