

I'M STILL HERE

When I turned 23,
the world around me sped up-
degrees finished, careers started,
paths unfolding with names like
teacher, nurse, manager,
certified, employed, promoted.

People around me were finding their rhythm-
posting updates that sounded like progress,
moving forward with certainty,
direction, pride.

But me?
I was surrounded by unfinished sentences,
half-attempts, loose ends.
A future written in maybes
and question marks.

I was stuck.
Job to job.
Course to course.
Searching for something
that felt like me.
But nothing did.

I was searching for meaning

in ruins.

In the aftermath of trauma

that clung to me like a second skin.

The world expected me to know-

Who I was.

What I wanted.

Where I was going.

But I didn't.

I had no map.

No compass.

Not even a vague idea

of what I liked,

what I stood for,

who I was beyond survival.

And in the space where identity should have lived,

loneliness took root.

It didn't live in silence,

it lived in the quiet ache

of scrolling through lives that moved forward

while mine stood still.

It lived in the pretending.

Pretending I was okay.

Pretending I had direction.

Pretending I didn't notice

how far behind I felt.

It was the feeling of being lost

in a world where everyone else

seemed to know the way.

Alone in the ocean,

no lighthouse in sight.

But it's hard to say it out loud-

Does speaking it

make it more real?

Does admitting it

draw attention?

Will people finally see

just how far behind I am-

and laugh,

or leave?

What if saying "I'm lonely"

only makes the people disappear faster?

What if saying "I'm lonely"

makes me disappear faster?

But

I'm still here.

Even if I don't have a title,

a house,

or a five-year plan.

I have breath.

I have softness.

And a quiet kind of strength

that comes from surviving

when no one else sees the storm.

I'm still here.

And maybe that's something.

Maybe being lost

is just the beginning

of being found.