

Dear E,

I finger your gifts. Gray pearls, star fruit, a novel in a locked box. Water droplet on a compass, a cipher I cannot crack. Elusive as the inscription on the flyleaf, or your missing pocket watch. Every morning I listen for your footsteps but hear only the sound of our neighbor with the garden shears, how he trims away, trims away. Borders have fallen. Our house is crumbling in the night. The tide turns back upon itself, hieroglyphic. My wrist still brandishes runes, pale reminders of our uncharted depths. I am untethered, lost in the ether. Come pull me back to shore.

Dear E,

The house keys are missing and I cannot enter or leave. I wake in our bed, run to the window to see who can release me, but no one is there. Some nights I find myself wandering the back yard, looking for a lit window or a stone to throw at the back door. Your postcard always in my pocket. Eleven stamps, no return address. No way to get back, to stop the recurring accident, to learn the combination to the locked box. A black dog stalks me in my dreams. He runs into the street chasing a slip of paper with all the instructions, every answer nestled in the clutch of his dark muzzle.

Dear E,

Everywhere I look: crossing guards and bees. Sugar maples that turn yellow in a single day. On the back of each leaf, another set of instructions: *Follow the mast lights, the hills. Use the sandpipers as guides.* I carry a photon in my pocket for safekeeping and luck. What I left behind: mittens and regrets. How many times must I lose my way, entangled in weeds and underbrush? Still, there's no turning back—every crossroad beckons, every atlas must be inspected. Even the radio static brims with information: *Track the lost ones to the shore. Look for a red house with an open door.*

Dear E,

The tilt of the earth has become trackless, a changing equation, like November's numberless days. I stand at the entry to our garden, a shaft of light warming my clavicle, each bone in my body counting itself down. But the sums in my head have been heavy, and my feet are stuck to the ground. I believe in a light larger than regret, a cipher that can right what has fallen to ruin. A prayer for the unrepentant. Put aside your map, love, and make your way back. Smother me in kisses and seize my breath. I've saved it in a jar near the pond, a constellation of last chances clustered in vanishing drops.