

the last voicemail.

The first time my dead grandmother called me, the town was still underwater.

Not completely.

Just enough that swollen photo albums floated through living rooms like bodies. Just enough that the church steeple looked like it was drowning slowly.

— ♦ —

My phone buzzed at 3:14 a.m.

\| 1 New Voicemail.

Half-awake, I pressed play.

Static crackled softly.

Then;

\| "Ivy, darling, you forgot your birthday cake again."

I stopped breathing.

Behind Nan's voice, I could hear the crooked kitchen clock that used to hang above her stove — three quick clicks, then the fourth delayed slightly because it had been broken for as long as I'd been alive. Rain tapped gently against her tin roof. A kettle whistled somewhere in the background.

Living sounds.

\| "I hid it from your poppy," she laughed quietly. "Though between us, the old man could smell buttercream from another postcode."

The message ended.

Seven seconds long.

My grandmother had drowned thirty-nine days earlier.

Officially, they called it a climate disaster.

That phrase appeared everywhere afterwards; on television banners, government statements, donation websites. Climate disaster. Clean. Efficient. Something people could discuss between weather reports and sports segments.

But the phrase never captured the smaller horrors.

The smell of river mud trapped permanently inside walls.

My mum washing the same pair of jeans in a motel sink because relief payments still had not arrived.



Oh, the strange things floods steal.

Not televisions.

Not furniture.

But, evidence.

The ocean took Nan's recipe book swollen with peach syrup and seawater. It took the pencil marks behind her pantry door measuring my height every birthday since I was six. It took the cream-coloured curtains that smelled permanently of vanilla and cigarette smoke.

Ordinary things.

And ordinary things are the hardest to grieve because nobody puts them on the news.

— ♦ —

At school, our English teacher asked us to write reflections about resilience.

Theodore wrote about volunteers rebuilding fences.

Aaliyah wrote about community spirit.

I wrote;

"The ocean keeps what it wants."

Mrs Watson circled the sentence in red.

"Expand."

But how could I explain that grief feels less like sadness and more like erosion?

The slow wearing-away of every future you once imagined.

Another voicemail arrived during January's heatwave, when dead fish began washing ashore in silver clusters and politicians debated whether some coastal towns were "worth rebuilding."

Long silence.

Violent waves crashing somewhere far away.

Then;

\| "Ivy?"

Nan sounded distant this time. Like the sea itself was learning her voice.

\| "You mustn't let them teach you to forget."

Static swallowed half the sentence.

Then, softer;

\| "The water remembers everything."

— ♦ —

That night, I drove to the cliffs where Nan's house once stood.



Nothing remained except concrete foundations overlooking black water.

The ocean moved below me like something alive and sleeping.

I stood there imagining her kitchen beneath the waves;

the cracked teacups,

the warped birthday candles,

the peach sponge cake dissolving slowly in the dark.

Behind me, the town was rebuilding itself badly.

New roads.

New fences.

New promises from men who would never lose their homes to rising tides.

In front of me, the sea kept coming closer.

And suddenly I realised what terrified me most about the voicemails.

Not that they existed.

But that one day they would stop.

Because sometimes I think climate change is not really about water.

I think it is about disappearance.

The slow, polite erasure of people, places, and memories until all that remains are flood markers and abandoned coastlines.

Until one day, someone stands where your house used to be and says;

“People lived here once.”