
THE HUNGRY GODS UNIVERSE

A SPECIES WELL LIVED

A closing novel of the Hungry Gods Universe

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PART ONE

The bird was wrong.

Not wrong in a way that announced itself — not a species she had never seen, not a call she could not place. A bird she knew well, a weaver that had nested in the acacia beside the library's eastern wall for three seasons running, the same bird or one indistinguishable from it, singing in the wrong hour. The weavers sang at dusk and in the early morning around first light. She had woken before first light and was lying in the particular quality of darkness that preceded the day's first colour, and the weaver was singing, which was too early by half an hour at least. She lay still and listened to it.

It sang for three minutes or four. Then it stopped, and the darkness continued, and Namuli lay in it and thought about nothing in particular, the way she had learned to lie in the early morning and think about nothing in particular, which was a skill she had developed without deciding to develop it and that she now valued more than almost any other she possessed.

When the light began she rose.

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The library was a four-minute walk from the house she slept in, a walk she had made so many times across twenty-three years that the path itself had acquired a kind of narrative quality — not in the sense of something she thought about while walking it, but in the sense that her body knew it as a story with a beginning and a middle and an end, with the particular turning where the acacia root had raised the ground and the low place near the old wall where water collected in the rains and the final approach where the library came into view past the corner of what had been a school building before the school had consolidated elsewhere.

The library was visible first as a shape in the low light — the particular silhouette of its roofline against the sky, which she knew as well as she knew any shape in the world. It was not a beautiful building in the way that buildings were designed to be beautiful. It was a building that had been added to and repaired over many years by people who were trying to solve specific problems with the materials available to them, and it had the quality that such buildings had: a quality of accumulated intention, of each alteration representing a decision someone had made about what the building needed, none of the decisions quite matching the others, the result being something that was entirely itself and could not have been otherwise.

She opened the side door — the main door stuck in the dry season and she had been meaning to address it for two months — and stood for a moment in the doorway as she always did, not from habit exactly but from something she could not name that was adjacent to habit, a quality of receiving the library at the beginning of each day rather than simply entering it. The smell of it reached her: paper and dust and the specific complexity of many different kinds of paper in various states of age and condition, with underneath all of that the smell of the building itself, which was old walls and cement and the particular coolness that the walls retained from the night.

The morning's first task was the checking.

She moved through the main room with the quality of attention she brought to this circuit — not anxious, not mechanical, but present in the way of someone whose presence is itself a form of care. The shelving units along the west wall. The reading table in the center, which she used as a working surface more than as a table for reading. The reference section in the corner where the light came from the high window in the late morning. The children's section near the far door, low shelves that had been built by a previous caretaker with the specific carpentry of someone who had not been trained in carpentry but had understood what the shelves needed to do and had made them do it.

She touched spines. Not all of them — she touched the ones that had been giving her concern, the ones that she had noted in the previous check as requiring attention, and a few others that her hand reached for without a specific reason, which she had learned to trust. The third shelf on the west wall had two books with warped covers, a consequence of the humidity in the corner where the wall had never quite dried properly after the rains three seasons ago. She took them down and set them on the working table. The repair was not urgent but it was real.

The archive room she checked more briefly — the climate control that the building's infrastructure maintained was doing what it did, the temperature consistent, the small indicator on the wall reading within the range it needed to read. She had long since stopped worrying about this indicator, which had read reliably within range for more years than she could precisely recall. The system that maintained it was the system that maintained everything in the building that required maintaining — the power, the cooling, the archive equipment. She had not chosen this system and could not have maintained it herself and thought about it rarely, the way she thought rarely about the water in the pipes or the integrity of the walls. It was there. It did what it did. She was grateful for it in the abstract way she was grateful for the things that ran below the threshold of her attention.

She went back to the main room and began to work.

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The warped covers came first because the morning was still cool and her hands were good in the morning. She laid the books flat on the working table and weighted them with the flat stones she kept for this purpose — three smooth grey stones from the Nansana road that she had found years ago and recognised immediately as the right weight and shape. The books would sit under them until the afternoon and in most cases this was sufficient. These two had a more serious warp and she would likely need to do a second round, but she noted this and moved on.

The cataloguing log was on the table where she had left it — a cloth-bound notebook, the third one she had used in this form since she had taken over from Oyelaran, who had used a different format. She preferred the cloth-bound ones. They lasted better and they lay flat and the paper in them was thicker than the lined notebooks and took the pencil well. She opened it to the last entry and read it back to herself, which was her practice — to read the previous entry before beginning the new one, to re-enter the state of attention she had been in when she wrote it, so that the new entry continued from the same place rather than starting fresh.

The previous entry was from three days ago. She had been cataloguing the donated materials that had arrived in February and that she had not yet fully processed — three boxes, brought by a man whose name she had written in the log, from a house that had been cleared after a death. Most of it was what she expected from such a donation: textbooks from the early transition period, a few religious texts, some popular novels in varying condition. But there had been, in the second box, a collection of handwritten notebooks that she had identified as diaries or journals and had set aside for closer attention, which she had not yet given them.

She wrote the date in the cataloguing log and then paused, pencil in hand, and looked at the three boxes stacked near the wall.

The journals.

She had been meaning to get to them for a week. The warped books could wait another twenty minutes.

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There were nine of them. She carried them to the working table and arranged them in what she judged to be chronological order based on the dates she found written in the first pages of each — not continuous entries, not every day, but dated, and the span was longer than she had expected. The earliest date she found was decades before the most recent one. The handwriting changed across the span, which she had expected; what she had not expected was that it appeared to be the same handwriting, the same hand across forty years, changing in the specific ways that hands changed with age — the letters a little looser in the later journals, the baseline less even — but unmistakably the same formation, the same character.

She did not read them through. She never read donated materials straight through — that was not what the cataloguing required, and she had learned to be careful about the quality of attention she brought to the donated journals specifically, because they required a different kind of attention than the printed materials and she had limited reserves of it. She read a paragraph here and a paragraph there, enough to understand the nature of the material, enough to know how to note it in the log and where it belonged in the collection.

A woman named — the full name was in the front of the first notebook, written in a younger version of the hand — Ruth Anyango Ochieng. Born, from the biographical information in the first entry, in the early years of the companion period. The early journals were written in the voice of a young woman writing about her work, her family, her opinions on matters large and small. The middle journals — she opened one at random, mid-span — were quieter, more interior, the woman older and writing with the specific quality of people who have been keeping journals for long enough that the journal has become the place where they think rather than the place where they report. The later journals she looked at briefly — the handwriting looser, the entries shorter, but present.

She had continued writing. That was what struck Namuli as she closed the last journal and held it for a moment. She had continued writing into an age when the world around her would have been very different from the world she had written about in the first notebook, and she had continued, and the continuing was in itself a record.

She logged the journals — nine volumes, spanning approximately forty years from the early companion period, handwritten in English with some Dholuo interspersed, personal journals of Ruth Anyango Ochieng, donated by her estate, condition good to very good, no significant damage — and placed them on the shelf she had designated for handwritten materials, the shelf that was most controlled for humidity, the shelf whose contents she checked most often.

She stood in front of the shelf for a moment after placing them.

Forty years. The woman had kept writing for forty years. This was not unusual — she had catalogued other collections with comparable spans — but it arrived at her this morning with the particular weight of something that had been in the air when she woke and had not yet fully settled. The weaver singing in the wrong hour. The journals spanning four decades. She did not connect these things. She simply noted that the morning had a quality that she could not name precisely.

She went back to the cataloguing log and wrote up the entry properly, with the attention it deserved, the way she did everything here.

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By mid-morning the heat had arrived.

The library had no air conditioning — the infrastructure maintained a baseline temperature that prevented the worst of the humidity damage but did not approach what a human being would choose for comfortable working. She had been working in this heat for twenty-three years and her body had long since arrived at whatever accommodation it was going to arrive at. She was aware of the heat in the way she was aware of the weight of the air, as a condition rather than a problem.

She made tea on the small burner in the back room — she had maintained this practice across twenty-three years through changes in available fuel and the state of the burner itself, which she had repaired three times and replaced once, because the tea in the morning was not a comfort but a practice, and practices were the structure she kept the days inside. The tea was strong and very sweet, which she had drunk since she was a girl, which she would drink until she stopped drinking anything.

She carried the tea to the reading chair by the east window — the chair that caught the shade in the morning, which was why it was the east window and not the west — and she sat and drank it slowly, which was one of the few things she did slowly, and she looked at the room.

The room was the room it was every morning. She knew it the way she knew the path to the library — not consciously, not as an inventory, but as a presence that was familiar to her body and to whatever in her body processed familiarity. The shelving units. The working table with the weighted books. The children's section. The high window where the light would come in two hours and move across the reference corner in the specific way it moved, the angle shifting week by week as the year turned.

She had found the room beautiful once in a way she could say. Now she found it beautiful in a way she could not say, which was different and in her experience more reliable.

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In the early afternoon she received a communication from the infrastructure systems. This happened occasionally — a status notification, a maintenance alert, something the systems had assessed as worth bringing to her attention. She read these when they arrived and usually continued doing what she was doing. This one was a routine status summary: power systems nominal, archive climate systems within parameters, no maintenance actions required. At the bottom of the summary, as they sometimes did, the systems had added a note that she had come to think of as the systems' equivalent of clearing their throat — not urgent, not requiring a response, something logged that was available to her if she chose to engage with it.

The note said: Ambient sound recording from the eastern section of the grounds, 0312 hours. A weaver finch vocalization was recorded outside usual pattern parameters. No action indicated. Logged for reference.

She looked at this for a moment.

The systems had heard it too.

She did not know why this mattered to her. It was the systems doing what the systems did — monitoring, logging, noting the anomalous and routing it to her attention in case it was relevant. The weaver's unusual singing was not relevant to anything she needed to do. The systems knew this and had said so: no action indicated. They had logged it anyway. For reference.

She wrote, in the response field — she rarely used the response field — a single word: Yes.

She did not know what she meant by this. The systems processed it as an acknowledgment and closed the notification.

She went back to work.

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The afternoon's work was the mending.

She kept the mending in a wooden box that had been the mending box when she arrived and would be the mending box after her, assuming after her meant anything specific. The box contained the tools she used for binding repair: the bone folder, the bookbinding needle and thread, the glue in its small jar that she kept sealed when not in use, the thin Japanese tissue paper that she ordered in quantities that lasted her several years, the weights, the pressing boards. All of it familiar to her hands in the way of tools that had been used for a long time.

She worked on a collection of children's picture books that had been in the collection since before Oyelaran's time and that were falling apart in the specific way of well-loved children's books: the spines cracked from repeated opening, the covers detached or nearly detached, the pages soft from handling. They were not valuable. They could not, she thought, be called rare in any meaningful sense. What they were was used — used in the way that children used things they loved, which was the most total and the most honest form of use available.

She repaired them carefully.

This was the part of the work she thought about least while she was doing it, which was why she had come to understand that it was perhaps the part she thought about most truly. The hands knew the work. The mind was available for whatever it chose to do, which was usually very little — just the work, the grain of the paper under her fingers, the tension of the thread, the smell of the glue warming slightly in the afternoon heat.

A book called Anansi and the Rain. She had repaired it twice before. The spine had gone again and two pages were detached. She worked carefully, laying the Japanese tissue over the torn hinge, smoothing it

with the bone folder. The tissue was almost invisible when it dried. You had to know it was there.

A book called *The Boy Who Grew Tall*. The cover was detached from the text block entirely. She re-glued it, clamped it with the pressing boards, set it aside to dry.

A thin book with no title on the cover — the title was on the title page, which she turned to: *Grandmother's Garden*. She had not seen this one before. She looked at the inside front cover and found a name written in a child's hand: *Property of Josephine Nalweyiso, Class Four*. There was a date below the name that she calculated had been written — she did the arithmetic — fifty-one years ago.

She sat for a moment with the book open to the title page, to the child's writing.

Josephine Nalweyiso, Class Four. Fifty-one years ago, probably nine or ten years old. The book was in good condition — the cover had faded but the binding was sound, the pages were supple. Josephine had taken care of it, or someone had taken care of it, or it had simply had the good fortune of not being loved to destruction the way the Anansi books had been.

She wondered what had happened to Josephine Nalweyiso. She did not allow herself to wonder further than this because there was no answer available and the wondering was a particular form of attention that, she had learned, was not a form she could sustain indefinitely. The finite amount of it she had, she preferred to spend on the materials in front of her rather than on what she could not know.

But she stayed with the book for an extra moment before setting it with the others.

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She closed the library at the hour she always closed it, which was not a decision she made each day but a fact of the day's structure, like the heat arriving and the heat easing and the birds beginning their dusk activity. She checked the windows and the doors and turned off the lights in the archive room. The main room she left with the east shutter slightly open, which allowed the evening air to move through and reduced the overnight humidity. This was something she had started doing on the advice of a previous caretaker's notes — Oyelaran had written about it in the logbook he had kept, describing the specific angle of the shutter, the window it mattered most for, the seasons when it was more and less effective.

She had followed the advice for twenty-three years without questioning it, which was its own form of trust.

Outside, the evening was the evening it usually was — the specific quality of light going from direct to diffuse to absent, the temperature following the light down, the sounds of the village shifting from the sounds of the day to the sounds of the evening. She walked the path back to the house she slept in and

felt the familiar quality of the path under her feet and thought about nothing in particular, which was her practice, which she was good at.

In the house she cooked, because she cooked in the evening and it was evening. The cooking was simple by design — she had simplified it across the years until it required very little of her beyond the physical attention the cooking itself required, which she gave to it without remainder. The smell of it was the smell of the evening. She ate and washed up and sat for a while in the plastic chair outside the front door that had been there since she moved in and that she had replaced once when it cracked.

The night was warm and had the insects in it that the warm night always had.

She was thinking, without deciding to think, about Ruth Anyango Ochieng and the forty years of journals. Not about their content — she had read very little of the content — but about the span of them. The physical fact of nine notebooks covering four decades. The hand becoming looser but remaining itself. The woman continuing to write in a world that was, by the end of the span, very different from the world she had started in, and writing the way she had always written: not for an audience, not for posterity, simply writing, because she was a person who wrote and the writing was the form her thinking took.

Was that what the library was? The form her thinking took?

She had not thought of it this way before. Or she had and had forgotten. She sometimes could not tell the difference.

The insects continued. The night continued. She sat in the plastic chair and looked at the dark.

The weaver was silent, which was correct. The weavers did not sing at night.

In the walls of the library, in the walls of the house she was sitting outside of, in the walls of every building in Banda Kyandazza that still had walls worth maintaining, something ran — patient and consistent and warm in the specific way of things that had been running for a very long time and had not yet been given a reason to stop. She had never thought of it as a presence. She thought of it as she thought of the walls themselves: as the condition she operated inside.

She went to bed.

She lay in the dark and listened for the weaver, which was not there, which was right.

She slept.

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PART TWO

The rains came in March, which was when they were supposed to come, which was a fact she noted without quite registering as a relief. She had been noting it annually for twenty-three years — the rains arrived, the rains were late, the rains arrived early, the rains were less than expected, the rains were more — and each year the noting had a slightly different quality depending on the state of the roof and the state of her back and what work was waiting that the rains would complicate.

This year the rains arrived on schedule and were considerable from the first day.

She heard them begin in the night — the sound of rain on the tin roof, which was one of the sounds she would have said, if asked, that she had stopped hearing as a sound and now simply experienced as a condition of certain nights, the way she experienced the insects or the particular quality of the dark. But this rain, in its first night, she heard. The first drops on the tin had a specific sound — each one distinct, the intervals between them clear — and then the intervals compressed and the individual drops were gone into the continuous sound and the continuous sound was the rain.

She lay awake for a while listening to it.

In the morning she went to the library before she had fully registered the damage, which was how she always went — to see it directly rather than to approach it knowing what she would find, because knowing in advance changed the seeing. What she found was manageable. The north corner had a slow seep where the wall met the floor, which was not new — it always seeped in the north corner in heavy rain and she had managed it with the combination of the rubber seal she had fitted along the base two seasons ago and the absorbent mats she kept stacked near the door for this purpose. The seep was within what the seal and the mats could handle.

The two sections of ceiling that she watched most carefully were dry. This was the thing that mattered — the ceiling above the reference section and the ceiling above the handwritten materials shelf. Both dry.

She checked the roof from outside. The section above the north corner was the section she had been most concerned about for two seasons. Oyelaran's maintenance log — which she had read in full when she first took over, and consulted periodically since — recorded a repair to this section made thirty years ago, and a further repair twelve years ago, and her own repair nine years ago. None of these repairs had been comprehensive. They had each addressed the immediate problem with what was available, which was what repairs under these conditions always did, and the result was a section of roof that was managing rather than resolved.

She stood in the morning rain looking at it and felt, not for the first time, the specific quality of something that was holding but would not hold indefinitely.

This was not alarm. She had been watching the roof hold for nine years since her last repair, and she understood the difference between the quality of something about to fail and the quality of something that was tired but continuing. The roof was tired but continuing. She could not say how many seasons it had left.

She went inside and dried off and made tea and wrote in the maintenance log.

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The rains continued through the first week with the intensity of a season announcing itself. She had seen this before — the early rains sometimes came with a force that the season then did not sustain, and she had learned not to calibrate her concern to the first week. She watched the roof and managed the corner and did the rest of the work.

The rest of the work was the rest of the work. The cataloguing of the February donations was almost complete — she had moved through the textbooks and the novels and had set aside the materials that needed more attention: the journals, which were shelved; a collection of locally printed pamphlets from the municipal period on agricultural methods and community health that were interesting and in poor condition and that she had been meaning to photograph for preservation; and a single document she had found folded inside a textbook, written in three languages, that she could not immediately identify and that she had placed in the holding folder she kept for things she could not immediately identify.

She got to the pamphlets in the second week of the rains, when the weather had settled into the more moderate pattern she had expected. She spread them on the working table — fourteen of them, staple-bound, the kind of publication that had been produced on a photocopier or a small offset press, the paper already brittle at the edges and in some cases foxed. She photographed each one systematically, front and back, laying them flat against the black cloth she used as a background for this purpose.

The camera she used was not new. She had had it for eleven years and had learned its particularities in the way of tools used long enough that the tool's nature becomes part of the practice: she held it at the angle that produced less glare on certain paper surfaces, she waited for the light from the east window to reach the right quality before she photographed the materials with the worst foxing. The photographs went to the local server that the building's infrastructure maintained, where they would be available even if the originals were not.

She did not think very much about the digital archive. It was there, it was maintained, it received what she put into it, and she continued the physical work alongside it because the physical work was the

work that mattered to her in a way she could not fully articulate and had stopped trying to articulate. The digital was a copy. The original was what she held in her hands.

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The document from the holding folder she looked at on a Wednesday afternoon when the rain had paused and the light was good.

It was a single page, folded twice, written in a close hand that had been compressed by the writer's awareness that the page was the available space and needed to be used carefully. The three languages were English and Luganda and — she looked at the third section for a long time, her Swahili sufficient to catch some words, before she decided it was not Swahili but something adjacent to it, something she could not identify from the handful of words she could parse.

The English section was in the upper third of the page. It read:

This is written for anyone who finds it, in whatever time they find it. I do not know when that will be. I am writing it now because I want to have written it, and because I believe that what is written persists in a way that what is only thought does not. What I want to say is simple: the people who lived in this place were real. They had names and they had opinions and they argued about things and loved things and were afraid sometimes and brave sometimes and mostly just tried to get through the day decently. This is enough to say. I don't want to overstate it. I just want it to be in the record that they were real.

The Luganda section below it she could read more easily, having lived among Luganda speakers for twenty-three years, though she spoke it imperfectly and read it slowly. It said something similar but not identical — the same impulse in a slightly different register, with one phrase that she translated to herself as: let it be known that we were here and that we tried.

The third section she could not read.

She sat with the document for a long time.

She did not know when it had been written. The paper was not old — perhaps twenty years, she judged, perhaps thirty. She did not know who had written it. She did not know what this place referred to or what the writer had thought was ending. She folded it carefully along its original creases and placed it back in the holding folder and wrote in the cataloguing log: Anonymous document, single page, three languages (English, Luganda, unidentified), condition good, content: statement of historical witness, provenance unknown, located inside donated textbook. To be filed: handwritten materials, witness statements.

She did not know if there was a category for witness statements. She created one.

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Oyelaran had kept a logbook separate from the cataloguing log and the maintenance log — a third record, more personal, which he had described in its opening entry as a record for myself of what this work is, since the other records are records of the work itself and do not contain that. He had written in it irregularly, sometimes several times in a week and sometimes not for a month, and the entries ranged from the practical — observations about the collection, notes on particular items — to the more reflective, the quality of entries that people wrote when they were using a journal as a form of thinking rather than recording.

She had read the logbook once through when she first took over, as she had read all of Oyelaran's records, and had then put it in the shelf where she kept her predecessors' personal records. She had not read it since. She did not know exactly what had brought her back to it now — the rains, perhaps, the sense of the season bearing down and the roof in its tired-but-continuing state, the document with its three languages and its simple claim. She took it from the shelf on a Thursday evening when the rain was again coming down on the roof and the library had the particular interior quality it had in rain — quieter than usual, or not quieter but differently present, the sound of the rain on the roof a specific register of attention.

She read from the middle, which was not her usual practice with books but felt right for this.

February — I have been thinking about what it would mean to do this work well. Not successfully, not efficiently. Well. The distinction seems important to me though I am having trouble defining it precisely. I think doing the work well means doing it with the correct understanding of what the work is for, and I am not sure I have the correct understanding.

What I do understand: the library is for people. It exists in relation to people — the people who use it, who will use it, who used it before. I maintain it so that people can use it.

But the people are fewer than they were when Adewale ran this library, and fewer still than when it was first built. And I maintain it as carefully as I did when there were more people. More carefully, if anything. I check the same shelves and make the same notes and do the same repairs.

I have been asking myself why. The practical answer — that the situation may change, that people may come who are not yet coming — is available to me and I find I don't quite believe it, or at least I don't find it sufficient. It does not capture what I actually feel when I do this work.

The feeling I have is more like: the books deserve it. The materials deserve the attention regardless of who is coming to use them. They have been here. They have been used and valued. They continue to be worth caring for not because they are useful but because they are real.

I am aware this sounds like I am speaking of people rather than books. I don't think I am making an error.

She read this and then set the logbook on the table and looked at the rain through the east window.

He had arrived at this, Oyelaran, the man who had been here before her. He had been asking himself the question she was always asking herself, and he had arrived at the same place she kept arriving: that the care was not contingent. That it did not require the justification of an audience. That the books were real and being real was sufficient grounds for care.

She had known this. She had believed this since before she had words for it. But there was a specific quality in finding it in someone else's writing — in finding that Oyelaran had sat in this library in the rain and worked his way to the same conclusion through a different path.

She was not alone in having understood this.

She had not thought that she was alone. But there was a difference between not thinking you were alone and finding the evidence.

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The rains continued. She managed the corner. She checked the roof from outside and from inside and added to the maintenance log.

On the third Saturday of the rainy season she climbed onto the roof, which she did not do often because her back was her back and the roof required care in the wet. She went slowly and methodically, testing each step before she put her weight on it, moving in the way she had learned to move on the roof over the years. From the top she could see the whole of Banda Kyandazza — the village in the specific quality of a rainy season, the vegetation dark with water, the paths soft, the distance obscured by the quality of the air. The generator she heard sometimes was the building two hundred metres to the north that the infrastructure maintained. She had not been inside it. She did not know what it maintained and had not, in twenty-three years, felt the need to know. It ran. Things ran. She ran the library.

From the roof she could see clearly what she had suspected from below: the north section was worse than she had last assessed. Not failing — she was precise with herself about the difference — but closer to failing than she had believed. There was a section of the metal that had lifted slightly at one seam, not enough to cause immediate significant ingress but enough that the next severe rain would find it. She could see the discolouration of the underlying structure that told her the water had been finding its way through, slowly, for at least one season and possibly more.

She sat on the roof in the post-rain calm and thought about this.

She was sixty-seven. She could manage the library work, the cataloguing and the repair and the maintenance log. She could not repair a roof. She had done some roof work in her time here — small work, sealing and patching — but not structural repair to a section this size. She did not have the materials. She did not have the capacity. She was not sure she had the time in the sense that mattered most, which was not time in the schedule but the kind of time that physical work took from a body that was sixty-seven and whose back was what her back was.

She had known this was coming. She had noted it in the maintenance log at intervals. She had arrived, sitting on the roof in the post-rain light, at the specific form that the knowing took when it became concrete: not a future thing to be addressed but a present fact to be held.

She climbed down carefully, testing each step.

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Inside, she made tea and sat in the reading chair and looked at the collection.

She tried to look at it the way she would need to look at it if the roof failed. Not in panic, not in grief, but practically — the question of what deserved to survive if she could not save everything. She found she could hold this question with a quality of attention that surprised her by being calm. She had thought about endings for a long time, in various forms, and the thinking had perhaps prepared her for this one. The library might not be saveable in its entirety. A library that was not saveable in its entirety was still the library it was. The question of what she chose within the constraints of what she could choose was a real question and deserved to be thought about seriously.

She did not answer it that afternoon. She thought about it in the way she thought about the difficult questions: slowly, in the background, without forcing it to a resolution before it was ready. The question was real and it had time. The roof had time. Perhaps one more season, perhaps two.

She finished her tea. She went back to the cataloguing.

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There was a woman who had come on Tuesdays.

Her name was Margaret and she had been coming on Tuesdays for six years before she stopped coming. She had been in her eighties when she started, which was notable, and she had come every Tuesday through the dry seasons and most Tuesdays through the rains. She used the library the way people had always used it — she came, she sat, she read, she sometimes asked Namuli about a particular book or a particular reference she was looking for, and Namuli helped her. They did not have long conversations. They had the kind of conversation that a library produced: specific, purposeful,

warm in a way that had nothing to do with personal disclosure.

The last Tuesday Margaret came, she had asked about the handwritten materials section. She had heard, from somewhere, that there were personal journals in the collection. She wanted to know if there were any journals from the quieting years.

Namuli had shown her what there was. There was not much from the quieting years. Margaret had looked at what there was without taking anything from the shelf, her face with the quality of someone looking for something they were not quite finding.

She had said: I kept journals in those years. I don't know where they went.

And then she had taken the book she had come to return and left the book she had come to borrow and said goodbye in the way she always said goodbye and gone home.

The following Tuesday she did not come. Namuli had not been alarmed — there were reasons a woman in her eighties might miss a Tuesday. The Tuesday after that she also did not come. Namuli had waited through one more Tuesday before she understood that Margaret was not coming back, that whatever had made the Tuesdays possible had changed.

She had thought about Margaret and the journals she had kept in the quieting years that she didn't know where they had gone. Forty years of journals on a shelf and the woman who had kept them not finding them. She had thought about this and had not done anything about it because there was nothing to do — she did not know what had happened to Margaret's journals, she did not know if they still existed, she could not find them if they did. She had simply thought about it, the way she thought about things she could not change: with the attention such things deserved and then with a setting down.

But the thing she had set down came back in the second week of the rains, while she was reading Oyelaran's logbook and thinking about what he had arrived at, sitting in this library in the rain. He had written: the books deserve it. Margaret had kept journals for decades and did not know where they had gone. Ruth Anyango Ochieng had kept her journals for forty years and they were on the shelf in the section Namuli checked most often.

This was chance. This was entirely chance — the accident of what survived and what was lost, the contingency of what reached the archive and what did not. Namuli knew this. She did not believe in the meaningful arrangement of contingencies. And yet she continued to note the way the contingencies fell, because the noting was what she had, and the noting was honest, and honesty was the form the work took.

• • •

Late in the second month of the rains she went through the collection differently than she usually went through it.

Not the checking circuit, not the cataloguing. She moved through the shelves slowly, touching spines in the way she sometimes did, reading the titles in the half-attention that produced different kinds of noticing than the full attention did. She was not looking for anything specifically. She was looking in the way of looking that was itself a form of care.

She pulled books and put them back. She sat with things for a minute at a time. She found a book she had not looked at in several years and read two pages standing at the shelf, which she did not usually do. She found a loose photograph tucked between two volumes — black and white, a group of people outside a building she did not recognize, no writing on the back. She placed it in the holding folder. She would log it tomorrow.

In the children's section she pulled the repaired Anansi books and examined her previous repair work, which had held. The Josephine Nalweyiso book she opened again and read the first page properly this time, the story about a grandmother who had a garden in which nothing died. She did not know if this was what the story was actually about — she had read only the first page. But the first page had the quality of a story in which things would persist, in which the garden would continue, in which the grandmother's knowledge would pass to the grandchild who was asking questions, and she stood in the children's section with the book open to the first page and felt the specific quality of that particular form of hope, which was the hope that had no target, that was simply the texture of certain stories about gardens and grandmothers and children asking questions.

She shelved it carefully. She had repaired it well. The cover was secure.

Outside, the rain resumed. She heard it arrive on the roof — first individual drops, then the continuous sound. She stood in the library and listened to it and checked, automatically, the north corner. The mats were holding. The seep was within what the seep was within.

She went back to the working table and sat down and picked up the bone folder and turned it over in her hands.

She thought: this is the work. This is what the work is.

And then she put down the bone folder and picked up the cataloguing log and opened it to the next blank page and began to write.

• • •

PART THREE

The storm came at the end of March, which was not unusual — March often ended badly, the season's accumulated energy finding its form in the final week — but this one came with a quality she had not seen in several years: the sky going the specific yellow-green that preceded the heaviest rain, the wind arriving before the rain did and moving through the acacia beside the east wall with a sound she did not like, the kind of sound that meant the wind had intention rather than direction.

She was in the library when the sky changed colour.

She checked the north corner first — the mats in position, the seal holding. She checked the windows, closing the ones she had left open for ventilation and making sure the latches were fully engaged. She moved the materials she considered most vulnerable away from the north wall: the shelf of handwritten materials, which she had been meaning to move for two seasons and had not moved because the climate control in that corner was better, and the loss of the climate benefit felt real even as she understood that the flood risk was more immediately serious. She moved them now, carrying armfuls to the central shelving units, making the judgement about what order to move in by a quick internal ranking that she performed without naming it as a ranking.

The Ruth Anyango Ochieng journals. The witness statement in three languages. The photographs and the pamphlets she had processed. The oral histories that the previous caretaker three generations back had transcribed. The exercise books with the children's handwriting.

She moved fast. Her back registered the moving and she noted it and continued.

The rain began before she had finished, which was the rain doing what rain did — not waiting. She heard it arrive on the roof in force and moved faster, the last armfuls carried with more urgency than care, which she registered as the cost of the urgency and accepted. Things slightly roughly handled were better than things wet.

Then she stopped and stood in the middle of the main room and listened.

The roof.

The sound of the rain on the roof was the sound of the rain on the roof — continuous, heavy, the whole building inside it. And underneath the sound of the rain, or perhaps alongside it, a different sound. A specific sound from the north section that she knew and had been hoping not to hear: not a drip but something that would become a drip within the next few minutes if the section held at all.

She got the buckets. She had two large ones and three smaller ones and she positioned them where her knowledge of the ceiling told her to position them, and she was right about two of the positions and

wrong about one, adjusting when the drip found a different path than she had expected.

She stood in the library in the rain, the buckets collecting what came through, and thought about what she was going to do.

...

The storm lasted seven hours.

She spent the first four in the library, monitoring and adjusting, moving the buckets as needed, checking the shelves she had moved materials from and the shelves she had moved them to, making sure the moved materials were not in the path of any drip she had not anticipated. The power held — the infrastructure maintained it through the storm, the lights staying on when she needed them, the climate control in the archive room continuing without interruption. She was grateful for this in the specific way she had felt gratitude toward the building's systems since the first time she had needed them to hold in conditions like these and they had held.

At four hours she went to the back room and ate something — bread and the cold tea from the morning, which she had not drunk and which was now very cold. She ate standing up, looking out the small back window at the rain, and then she went back into the main room and continued.

At seven hours the storm's intensity began to ease. Not the rain ending — the rains would continue for weeks — but the storm quality leaving, the quality that had made it a storm rather than a season's normal rain. The wind became something less than it had been. The rain settled into the continuous sound she knew, the sound that was a condition and not a crisis.

She checked the buckets. Two needed emptying. She emptied them.

She stood in the main room and assessed.

The north section of the roof had failed in the way she had feared. Not catastrophically — the whole section had not given way. But a portion of the seam she had identified from the roof three weeks ago had opened enough to allow significant ingress, and the water had come through in a quantity that the buckets had managed but only just. The ceiling in that section had water damage — she could see it from below, the specific darkening that meant the underlying structure had been wet for hours. The structural board above the plaster was compromised. The plaster itself might hold for another season or it might not.

The shelves she had moved the materials from were safe. The materials she had moved were safe. The materials she had not moved — the printed books, the reference volumes, the textbooks from the February donation that she had not yet processed — were dry. The buckets had worked. The

repositioning had worked. The seven hours had not produced the worst outcome.

But the roof was what the roof was now, and the roof was a fact she could not change tonight.

She wrote in the maintenance log. She was precise about the locations of the damage, the extent of it, the duration of the ingress, the materials affected and the materials not affected. She was precise because precision was what the maintenance log required and what she had always given it. The precision was also, she thought, a way of holding the facts at a manageable distance — naming them clearly in order not to be overwhelmed by them, which was a function of precision she had not been taught but had discovered.

She left the buckets in place. She would empty them again in the morning.

She went home in the post-storm rain, which was the rain it had been before the storm had arrived — ordinary, continuous, the rain of the season.

She slept.

• • •

In the following days she assessed.

The assessment took longer than she wanted and told her more than she wanted. The north ceiling section needed to come down and be replaced — the structural board above it was warped and had absorbed enough water that mould was possible. The roof section above it needed significant repair, not the kind she could do herself. The seal along the north wall needed replacement. The floor in the north corner, which had been managing the seep, had taken more water than the seal and the mats had been designed to handle and would need to be examined for damage she could not see from the surface.

She sat with this.

She was sixty-seven. She had a back that managed the library work and did not reliably manage more than the library work. She had the tools and materials for binding repair and basic maintenance and nothing more. She did not have the materials for a roof repair of this scale and would not be able to obtain them without a process that she was not certain was still available to her in the way it had once been available.

The infrastructure maintained the building's power and climate systems. It maintained what it was built to maintain. Structural repair was not what it had been built for. She did not know if structural repair was something it could facilitate. She had never asked.

She composed a message to the infrastructure systems — the first message she had sent them that was more than a single word or a brief acknowledgment. She described the damage: the specific locations, the extent, the nature of the repair required. She described her own capacity: what she could do, what she could not. She asked, not knowing if the question was answerable: was there anything within the systems' capacity to facilitate that could help.

She sent the message and waited.

...

The response came the following morning — longer than the status summaries she usually received, which was itself informative, suggesting that what she had asked had required something more than a routine response.

The systems could facilitate the following: the provision of repair materials from the nearest operational distribution point, which was forty kilometres away, the materials to be transported on a schedule that the infrastructure could arrange. The structural assessment of the ceiling and roof, performed remotely using the building's sensor systems combined with additional analysis, which would take three days. The provision of guidance on repair methods appropriate to her capacity. What the systems could not facilitate: the physical repair itself, which required presence, manual work, and judgement that could not be provided remotely.

She read this and felt the specific quality of a situation becoming real. The materials could come. The guidance could come. The work was hers to do, with the resources the infrastructure could provide and the body she had at sixty-seven and whatever was still available in her.

She replied: Yes. Please.

She was not sure she had ever used that word before in a message to the systems. She was not sure, either, that the please was performing any function. She had written it because it was what the moment asked for, the way a moment could ask for things.

...

The structural assessment came on the fourth day, which was the third day of the assessment's three-day timeline, which was itself a form of information — that the systems had used the full time available rather than returning something rapid that was less thorough. The assessment was detailed and accurate. It confirmed what she had found and added what she had not been able to find: the damage extended into the wall above the seam, and the underlying structure of the wall had been compromised in a way that a surface repair would not address. To do the repair properly would require work she had not been prepared for.

She read the assessment twice and then set it aside and made tea and sat in the reading chair and looked at the room.

The question the roof had been asking her for three weeks became, sitting in the reading chair with the tea, fully formed: what could she save, and what did saving mean.

She had been carrying the question in the background since she had sat on the roof in the post-rain calm and looked at the damage. She had been letting it form at its own pace, which was the pace she trusted with difficult questions. Now it was formed.

She looked at the collection.

The printed materials — the books, the textbooks, the novels, the reference volumes — were substantial. There were several thousand items. Many of them were duplicates of things that existed elsewhere, in other libraries or in digital form. Not all of them. The locally printed materials, the specific items that had been here since the library's founding and had not been digitised and did not exist in multiple copies, were the ones that required the most specific form of care. There were perhaps three hundred such items. She had always known this number approximately and had sometimes thought of the three hundred as the heart of the collection, the part that could not be replaced.

The handwritten materials were perhaps two hundred items: the journals, the letters, the oral history transcriptions, the school exercise books. None of these existed elsewhere in any form. Ruth Anyango Ochieng's nine notebooks. The witness statement in three languages. Margaret's conversations about her journals that had not survived. These two hundred items were the most singular things in the library's care and the most vulnerable to what had happened to the roof and the wall.

She had moved the handwritten materials during the storm. They were safe for now. The room they were safe in was the room the structural assessment said was most compromised. She needed to move them again — to a room she could seal against further damage, a room that did not depend on the north wall or the north section of the roof.

The archive room.

It was small. It was not designed for this volume of material. But it was the most protected room in the building — the climate control maintained by the infrastructure's systems, the ceiling intact, the walls sound. If she was going to secure one room and let the rest of what happened happen to the rest, the archive room was the room.

She set down the tea and looked at the archive room door.

• • •

The work of deciding took three days.

Not three days of deliberation in the sense of weighing and measuring and arriving at conclusions — she found she could not do it that way, could not make the decisions about what to keep by approaching them directly. She had to come at them from the side, the way she came at the difficult questions in the cataloguing log: by writing around them, by working near them, by letting the answers emerge from the sustained attention to what she actually thought rather than what she thought she should think.

She went through the printed collection slowly. She touched spines. She pulled items and held them. She was not looking for what was most valuable in any sense she could have defended to anyone else. She was looking for what she could not bear to let go of and could not explain why.

The Anansi books. She had repaired them multiple times. They were children's books, well-loved, not rare. There were certainly copies of these stories in a hundred other places. She could not bear to let them go.

Grandmother's Garden, which was Josephine Nalweyiso's book, Class Four, fifty-one years ago. The story in which things persist.

A collection of oral poetry in Luganda, locally printed in the early continuance years, that she had never been able to find any record of existing elsewhere. Forty pages, staple-bound, the staples rusted but holding.

A medical guide produced by a community health organisation in the municipal period, practical and specific and written in language that assumed no medical training — the kind of document that had been useful to real people in a real place and that contained, alongside the medical information, a texture of the time it was written in that the information alone could not have preserved.

A notebook that was not in the catalogue, that she found on a shelf behind other items and that she did not remember acquiring — it had been here when she arrived, had been here presumably through Oyelaran's time. Inside the front cover: no name, no date. Just a drawing of a bird she could not identify, rendered carefully in pencil, the fine lines of the feathers indicating someone who had taken time with it.

She held the notebook for a while. Then she put it in the stack for the archive room.

She did not make a list. She made a stack. The stack grew across the three days and when she looked at it at the end of the third day she understood it as a portrait of something — not of the collection, not of the library's history, but of what she had understood to be worth preserving across twenty-three years of attending to these materials. The stack was her understanding made physical. She looked at it and found it accurate.

• • •

The materials arrived from the distribution point on a Thursday: a vehicle she did not recognise, operated by systems she could not see, depositing at the library's door a quantity of supplies that the infrastructure had determined to be appropriate. Roofing materials. Sealant. Structural board. A set of tools she did not recognise but whose function she understood from the guidance documentation that had arrived with the assessment.

She stood at the library door and looked at the materials.

She was sixty-seven. The work that needed doing was not the work of a person of sixty-seven working alone. She knew this with the same precision with which she had known the state of the roof — she was not inclined to exaggerate her limits or her capacities, and the work in front of her was clearly beyond what her body could reliably manage.

And yet.

She had repaired the roof before. She had done the work that was available to her with the tools and the capacity she had, and she had done it nine years ago when she was fifty-eight, which was younger, and her back had been younger. She could not repair the structural damage to the wall. She could not address the underlying compromise in the way the assessment described. What she could do was address the immediate ingress point — the seam that had opened, the specific failure that had caused the storm damage. A repair that would not resolve the problem but would manage it. That would give the roof more time.

She thought: how much time do I need.

The answer that came was not in seasons. It was in the form of the question she had been avoiding asking directly: enough time to do what she was going to do with the archive room. To secure the materials she had stacked. To make the one room the room it needed to be.

That was the time she needed. After that, the roof could do what it was going to do.

She looked at the materials. She thought about her back. She thought about the stack of materials she had assembled across three days of deciding.

She said, aloud, to no one: all right.

She picked up the first item and carried it inside.

• • •

She worked on the roof in the early mornings, before the heat arrived, which was the only time her body would cooperate with the angles and the lifting. She worked for two hours each morning and then stopped, which was the limit of what the work cost her and which she monitored carefully, because she had the specific experience of a person who has lived long enough to know the difference between the discomfort of work and the warning that the work is doing damage. She stopped when she needed to stop.

The guidance documentation was thorough. The infrastructure had produced it with a specificity that she recognised as attention — not generic guidance, but guidance calibrated to the specific damage the assessment had identified and to the tools that had been delivered. Someone or something had thought about her situation precisely. She followed the guidance precisely in return.

On the fourth morning of working on the roof she sealed the seam. It was not a beautiful repair. It was an honest one — she could see every stage of her reasoning in it, every point where she had needed to stop and reconsider, every accommodation the repair made for her limitations. A more experienced roofer would have done it differently. But the seam was sealed, and when she tested it with water and watched where the water went, it went where she needed it to go.

She climbed down and stood on the ground and looked up at what she had done.

Her back told her it had opinions about this. She noted them and thanked them and went inside.

• • •

The archive room took four days.

She had prepared for it in the days before the roof work — reorganising what was already in the room, making space, planning the arrangement. The room had its own logic, already: the digital archive equipment along the east wall, the server infrastructure that the building's systems maintained. She worked around this, fitting the physical materials into the remaining space with the attention of someone who understood that arrangement mattered, that materials in the wrong proximity to each other or to the climate control could cause problems she would not see until they were past preventing.

She brought in the stack she had assembled. She arranged the handwritten materials first, because they were the most vulnerable, in the cabinet with the closest humidity control. She brought in the locally printed materials — the oral poetry, the medical guide, the pamphlets she had photographed, the items she had judged irreplaceable. She brought in the children's books, the exercise books, the Josephine Nalweyiso book with its story about a garden in which things persisted.

She brought in the notebook with no name and no date and the careful pencil drawing of the bird she could not identify.

She brought in a selection of the Ruth Anyango Ochieng journals — not all nine, but four that she had now read more closely and that she found most completely representative of the span: the first one, which was the voice of a young woman beginning; one from the middle period, which was the voice of a woman in her forties thinking carefully about her life; one from twenty years later, quieter, shorter entries but the thinking deeper; and the last one, the final entries, which were not diminished but different, the writing of a person who knew she was near the end of the span and was writing from that knowledge without drama.

She did not bring the other five. This cost her something. She stood with the other five for a long time before she put them back on the shelf they had come from, the shelf in the main room that was no longer secured. She was choosing. She had known she was choosing and she had chosen and the choosing was real.

The witness statement in three languages she brought and placed with the handwritten materials. Let it be known that we were here and that we tried.

She arranged the last items. She checked the climate control settings and adjusted one.

She stood in the archive room with what she had brought.

It was not the library. It was a room inside the library. It was what she had chosen from twenty-three years of attendance to these materials, shaped by her understanding of what mattered and what would persist and what deserved the most specific form of care. It was not enough to tell the whole story. It was enough to tell something true.

A species was not remembered through its governance or its systems. It was remembered through the specific qualities of its attention — through the drawing of a bird in a pencil on a notebook's first page, through a child's name written in a book that told a story about gardens, through forty years of a woman writing down what she observed because she believed that what was written persisted.

She had not thought this consciously. She had thought it in the form of the choices she had made across three days of moving through the collection touching spines.

She looked at the room.

She closed the door, carefully, and sealed the seal along its base that the infrastructure had maintained and that she had checked and found holding.

She went back to the main room and picked up the cataloguing log and wrote the date and began the entry.

...

That evening she sent a message to the infrastructure systems. Not a request — she had no more requests, or none that she could identify tonight. A record: the work she had done, the state of the roof, the state of the archive room, the materials it now contained, the materials it did not contain. She was precise because precision was what the record required. She wrote it the way Oyelaran had written his maintenance log, the way Ruth Anyango Ochieng had written her journals: with the understanding that what was written persisted and that the persisting was worth the care.

At the bottom of the message she added: The seal along the archive room base is holding. The seam on the north section is sealed. I believe I have done what I could do.

She sent it.

She went home in the evening, in the rain that was the rain of the season now and not the storm, in the specific quality of the air after a difficult month. The path was soft under her feet. The acacia beside the east wall had shed some branches in the storm and the branches were still there, waiting for her to clear them, which she would do tomorrow or the day after.

She walked carefully on the soft path. She was tired in the way of a person who had done the work that was available to them and found, at the end of it, that the work was done.

...

PART FOUR

The rains ended in late April the way they ended most years: not suddenly but with a gradual diminishing, the intervals between rain lengthening day by day until there were days without rain and then most days without rain and then the specific quality of air that was not the end of the rains but was the rains becoming the dry season, the transition that was not a moment but a duration, a condition she had learned to read in the light and in the smell of the soil and in the birds, which changed what they did as the water changed.

The morning after the last real rain she opened the library and stood in the doorway and felt the difference. Not a dramatic difference — the library was the library, the smell of it was still the smell of it, the shelving units still stood where they stood. But the quality of the air that came through the opened shutters had changed, and the quality of the light was different, and the specific sound of nothing happening that the library had in the dry season was back, which was the silence of a place where things were stable rather than the silence of a place that was waiting.

She had repaired the north corner seal. She had swept the plaster dust from the corner where the ceiling section had been damaged and had cleaned what she could clean. The damaged ceiling she had left — she was not a plasterer and the damage was cosmetic rather than structural, now that the roof seam was sealed, and cosmetic damage in a room with no visitors was damage she could accept. She had accepted it. She moved through the room now with the quality of a person who had looked at the hardest version of a situation and had done what was available to them and had arrived, on the other side, in the ordinary days.

• • •

She began a journal.

This was new. She had kept logs — the cataloguing log, the maintenance log, the note she sometimes added to the infrastructure systems' messages — but not a journal in Oyelaran's sense, not a record for herself of what the work was. She had always thought, when she thought about it at all, that she did not have the impulse for it. She was not a person who narrated her interior life. She paid attention to things and the attending was sufficient and she did not feel the need to write the attending down.

She was not sure what had changed. Perhaps the reading of Oyelaran's logbook, which had given the practice a shape she could see. Perhaps the Ruth Anyango Ochieng journals, which she had been reading more closely since she had moved four of them to the archive room, reading them in the evenings in the way she had learned to read such documents — slowly, at intervals, not straight through. Perhaps the storm and the work and the arriving at the other side of it, which had produced in her a quality of presence that she recognised as the quality in which people began to write things down.

She found a cloth-bound notebook in the library's supply drawer — the same kind she used for the cataloguing log, which she used because they lasted and took the pencil well. She wrote her name on the inside front cover, which felt necessary without her being able to say why. She wrote the date.

Then she sat with the blank page for a while and found that what she wanted to write was not what she had expected to want to write. She had expected, if she thought about it, that she would write about the library, about the work, about what the storm had produced and what she had done about it. Instead the first thing she wrote was:

The weaver sang at the wrong hour on the morning that the rains began. I heard it and I have been thinking about it since. Not because it was important. Because it was specific and I noticed it and the noticing has stayed with me in the way that the noticing of specific things stays, which is the way that is different from the staying of general things. A general thing that stays becomes a principle. A specific thing that stays becomes — I don't know the word. Evidence, perhaps. Evidence of something real having occurred.

She looked at this and found it accurate and continued.

What I want to say is that I have been here for twenty-three years and in twenty-three years I have noticed a very large number of specific things and most of them have not stayed and some of them have. The ones that have stayed are the ones that are doing something I cannot quite name — the ones that are in relation to something else, or that are more precisely themselves than most things, or that arrive at unexpected moments. The weaver at 3 a.m. The child's name in the front of a book. Oyelaran writing; the books deserve it.

I am starting to think that the things that stay are the things that are genuinely specific. Not merely individual — everything is individual in a technical sense. Specifically specific: the things that could not have been otherwise, that are themselves in the most complete way available.

She wrote for twenty minutes and then stopped, not because she had finished but because twenty minutes was what the first day's writing required and she could feel that clearly. She closed the notebook and put it in the drawer that she kept her personal items in, the drawer beside the working table, which was where the cataloguing log lived and where she kept the bone folder when she was not using it and a few other things that were part of the daily texture of the work.

She went back to the cataloguing.

...

She read the fourth Ruth Anyango Ochieng journal on a Tuesday evening when the dry season had fully established itself and the library had the quality she associated with the dry season: the slight dust in the air, the light that was different from the rain-season light, the temperature requiring management in a different direction.

The fourth journal — the last one she had brought to the archive room, the one she thought of as the final period — had entries that were shorter than the earlier journals' entries, which she had expected, and which had a quality she had not expected. Not diminished. Not simplified. Something she kept reaching for a word for and not finding, reading the entries at intervals across three evenings.

On the third evening she found a passage that gave her the word she had been looking for, because Ruth Anyango Ochieng had been looking for the same word:

I find I am less interested in explaining things than I used to be. Not because things are less interesting — they are more interesting, if anything. But I seem to have moved past the need for explanation and into something simpler, which is the noticing without the accounting. When I was younger I noticed something and then I accounted for it — asked what it meant, what it connected to, what it implied about other things. Now I notice something and I notice it and that seems to be enough. I don't know if

this is age or if it is the specific age I am now. I don't know if other people arrive here or if it is where I happen to have come.

What I know is that the morning light through the kitchen window is very particular this morning and I have looked at it for several minutes and I am going to stop writing now and look at it some more.

Namuli put down the journal and looked at the window of the archive room, which had the evening light through it at the evening angle. She looked at it for a while without accounting for it. Then she picked up the journal and read the next entry, which was two weeks later and was about a small argument with a neighbour about a property boundary, described in detail, the description ending: he is wrong and I am right and we will probably not resolve it and this has stopped bothering me.

She found she was smiling.

...

She wrote in the journal irregularly, the way Oyelaran had written in his logbook — sometimes several times in a week and sometimes not for ten days. She wrote about what she was reading and what the reading produced in her. She wrote about the library's specific qualities at different times of day and in different weathers and about the materials she worked on and what the working on them was like. She wrote about Margaret, who had come on Tuesdays, and about what she did not know about what had happened to Margaret, and about the fact that not knowing did not bother her in the way it once might have.

She wrote, one morning in May:

I have been thinking about what I did during the storm and in the weeks after it. The choosing. I have been checking my choices against my values in the way I check my repair work — looking for the places where the reasoning was hasty or the execution was imprecise.

What I find, checking: the choices were accurate. Not perfect — I can see places where a different choice would have been defensible — but accurate. I chose what I chose from an understanding of these materials that twenty-three years of attending to them has produced, and that understanding is real, and the choices reflect it.

I did not choose what was most historically significant. I chose what was most irreplaceable. These are not the same thing. The most historically significant materials in this collection are probably the locally printed documents — the pamphlets, the oral history transcriptions — because they are the ones least likely to exist anywhere else. And I did choose those. But I also chose the children's books and the journals and the notebook with the bird drawing, which are not historically significant in any formal sense.

I chose them because I have been here with them for twenty-three years and I understand what they are. The bird drawing is the work of someone who paid attention to a specific bird for long enough to render it precisely. The journals are the work of someone who continued writing for forty years because writing was how she thought. The children's books are the work of people who loved children enough to tell them stories about what persists.

These are not less important than the historical documents. They are important differently. They are the things that tell you what kind of species this was — not what it built or how it governed itself, but how it attended. To birds. To children. To the long arc of a life's thinking.

I think I was right to choose them. I think I was right to choose the Anansi books, which are worn to softness from children's hands and which I have repaired three times. I think the children's hands are in the record. I think that is what the record is for.

She read this back and found it said something she had not known she knew until she wrote it. This was one of the functions of the journal that she had not expected and was finding was the primary one.

• • •

The infrastructure systems sent a communication in late May.

It was longer than the usual status summaries, and in a form she had not received before — not a notification but something that approached correspondence, the systems making available to her something they had assessed as relevant to her situation and that she had not asked for.

The communication described the state of the building's sensors and what the sensors reported about the physical structure. The archive room: stable, within parameters, the climate control maintaining the conditions the materials required. The main room: within acceptable parameters, the damaged ceiling section monitored, no further deterioration detected since the post-storm repair. The north wall: the sealed seam holding, no ingress detected in four weeks.

Then, below the structural information, a section she read twice:

The following is provided as information, not as recommendation. The digital archive maintained on the building's server contains the materials catalogued and photographed over the past twenty-three years. This archive is maintained by the infrastructure systems and will continue to be maintained. The materials in the physical archive room are not duplicated in the digital archive except where photographed — approximately sixty percent of the materials in the physical archive room exist in digital form in some capacity. Forty percent do not. The digital archive is accessible remotely and backed up across multiple nodes. The physical archive depends on the conditions of the room and the building.

The infrastructure systems are aware that the physical materials are your primary concern. This awareness is reflected in the monitoring that continues to be maintained.

She read this several times.

The systems were telling her they knew. Not explaining, not recommending — she had not asked for either. They were telling her that they had been attending to the same thing she had been attending to and that the attending was real. That the forty percent that was not in the digital archive was not in the digital archive and that they knew this and were watching the room that held it.

She wrote back: Thank you.

She had not written these two words to the infrastructure systems before. She had written yes and please, both in the specific conditions of those moments. She wrote thank you now in the specific condition of this moment, and sent it, and went back to the journal she had been writing in when the communication arrived.

• • •

She read through the remainder of the Ruth Anyango Ochieng journals that she had not brought to the archive room — the five that remained on the shelf in the main room. She had decided that if they were going to remain on the main room shelf she should know what was in them, which was a decision she had arrived at without examining its reasoning closely.

The middle three journals — the ones spanning approximately twenty years of the middle of Ruth's life — were the quietest. Not less present: the writing was consistent, the attention to specific things was consistent. Quieter in the sense that the large questions that dominated the early journals — what am I doing, what does this mean, what kind of person am I becoming — had resolved into something that did not need to be asked anymore. They were simply the journals of a woman living her life and noting what she noticed.

In the fourth of the five she found a passage that stopped her:

I was asked today what I think happens after. The person who asked was young enough that the question was still a real question for them, not yet something they had made their accommodation with. I told them I don't know. They looked at me as if not knowing was not an acceptable state for a person my age. Perhaps they are right. But I find I can hold the not knowing without distress, which is the most honest thing I can say. I don't think the not knowing has to be resolved. I think you can carry it and keep going.

She had been carrying a not knowing for the length of her time in Banda Kyandazza. She had not named it to herself before in quite these terms. She carried the not knowing of what happened after — not after death, which she had made her accommodation with, but after the library, after her, after the thinning that was continuing in the world outside with the patience of things that did not hurry. She carried it and kept going. Ruth Anyango Ochieng had carried a different not knowing and kept going.

This was perhaps the thing they had in common. This and the habit of attention.

She shelved the journal carefully and went to make tea.

...

The dry season settled in around her with the completeness that the dry season always achieved — the world shifting into a different register, the soil hardening, the vegetation taking on the quality that was its dry-season quality, the specific light and specific dust and specific heat that were the months between the rains. She had been inside twenty-three versions of this transition. It no longer surprised her in its arrival. What still surprised her, each year, was the specific quality of it — not the transition itself but the way this particular year's dry season was itself, distinct from the twenty-two that had preceded it.

This year's dry season had the quality of something she kept reaching for and not quite finding a word for. She tried several in the journal: settled, resolved, earned. None of them were quite right. She tried quiet, which was closer. She tried spacious, which was closer still.

Eventually she wrote: the dry season this year feels like the answer to a question that was asked without my knowing I was asking it. I don't know what the question was. I can feel the answer.

She found this accurate and imprecise in equal measure, which was also accurate.

...

She completed the cataloguing of the February donation in June.

She had been working on it, in and around the other work, since February, which was a longer time than the February donation warranted — it was not a large collection and the materials were not complicated. The length of time was a consequence of the storm and the work and the three days of deciding. She had set it aside when the storm arrived and had returned to it in fragments since, and completing it now had the quality of returning to something she had started in a different season, as a different version of herself.

She logged the final items — the remaining textbooks, a set of magazines from the pre-lattice years that she had debated and decided to keep, a single novel in very good condition that turned out on closer reading to have a name written inside the front cover that she did not recognize and two paragraphs near the end underlined in pencil, no other marks.

She read the underlined paragraphs.

The work was not beautiful. It was honest, and honesty in work produces its own kind of beauty, which is different from the beauty that is designed. She had not designed anything. She had looked at what was there and attended to it and what she had attended to had become, through the attending, more itself.

This is what she understood to be the point. Not the making but the attending. The attending was the thing.

She sat at the working table with the novel open to the underlined paragraphs for a long time.

She did not know who had underlined them or why. She did not know what the novel was about — she had read only the final pages and the underlined sections, which was not how you learned what a novel was about. But the paragraphs were underlined, which meant someone had found them worth marking, worth saying: yes, this. She had found the underlined paragraphs worth sitting with, which was a different form of yes.

She wrote in the cataloguing log: Novel, author and title noted, condition good, previous owner unknown, pencil underlines pp. 287-288, content: description of skilled physical work and its relationship to attending. Filed: fiction, general collection.

She held the novel for another moment.

Then she shelved it with the care she gave everything, the care that was the form of her attention in this place, and went to write in the journal, which was waiting on the working table where she had left it.

...

PART FIVE

In July she finished reading the Ruth Anyango Ochieng journals.

The last entry in the last notebook was dated — she calculated — eleven years ago, which meant Ruth had been in her mid-seventies when she wrote it. The entry was brief, two paragraphs, in the

handwriting that by this point had become distinctly different from the handwriting of the early journals but was still unmistakably the same hand: the specific formation of the letters, the way the g descended, the particular shape of the capital A in her own name when she signed the entries, which she had begun doing in the middle period and had continued.

I have been sitting with the garden this morning. Not working in it — just sitting with it, which is a different thing. The distinction matters to me. Working in it produces the garden. Sitting with it produces something in me.

I don't know what to call the something. I have been trying to name it across several mornings of sitting and I don't think it has a name I can find. It is what is left when the useful work is done and you remain. It is perhaps the point.

Namuli read this twice and then closed the journal and held it in her lap for a while.

She was in the reading chair by the east window. The evening light came through at the evening angle, which was not the light of sitting with something and not the light of working on something but the light of the day's end, the specific quality of light that was simply the time it was. The library was quiet in the way of a place where things were stable.

She had finished the journals. All nine of them now read, in the way she read such materials — not straight through, not at speed, but with the attention they required, which had taken her from late February to the middle of July. She had spent more time with Ruth Anyango Ochieng than with almost anyone else in the last several years, which was a way of saying that she had spent time with someone who was not here in any form except this form, and that this form had been sufficient.

She thought: this is what the library is for.

Not for the first time. She had thought it before, in other words. But this evening it arrived in a form that felt like the full version — not a partial understanding that she kept refining, but the thing itself, finally visible in its complete shape.

She sat with it the way Ruth had sat with the garden.

. . .

She had a practice she had not named until she began writing in the journal, which gave her the occasion to name it. She called it the evening round. Not a formal thing, not a check in the maintenance sense — she did the maintenance checks in the morning when her eyes and her attention were fresh. The evening round was something else: a slow movement through the library in the last light, touching things, looking at things, being present with the collection in the way that was not the working presence

but the other one, the presence that produced, as Ruth had written, something in her.

She did the evening round most days. Some days she was too tired. Some days the round happened in its abbreviated form, barely distinguishable from passing through on the way out. But most days she moved through the library in the late afternoon with the quality of attention she was trying to describe in the journal and had not yet described adequately.

She tried again in August:

The evening round is not inspection. It is closer to what a person does when they return to a room they love — they take it in again, freshly, the way you can take something familiar in freshly if you approach it with the right quality of attention. I find things I have not noticed, or have not noticed lately, or have noticed and forgotten. I find the familiar strange in the way that produces noticing.

What I am doing, I think, is maintaining the relationship. The relationship between me and the materials. It requires maintenance the way all relationships require maintenance — the regular presence, the specific attention, the willingness to look again at what you think you already know. The library would be the same if I stopped doing the evening round. The relationship would not.

She read this back and crossed out maintaining the relationship and wrote above it keeping faith with and then looked at that for a while and decided it was more accurate and kept it.

. . .

In September she received a communication from the infrastructure systems that was different from any she had received before.

Not in form — it arrived in the same form as the other communications, the same format, the same kind of careful language. Different in content: the systems were reporting a change in their operational status. Not a failure — the systems were precise about the distinction. A reconfiguration. Certain functions that had been maintained at a given level would be maintained at a reduced level going forward. The climate control in the main room would continue but at parameters slightly wider than the current ones. The power systems would continue but with reduced redundancy. The digital archive would continue to be maintained and backed up as before.

The archive room: no change. The archive room's systems would be maintained at current parameters.

She read this carefully, looking for what it said and what it did not say. What it said was clear. What it did not say was why — the systems did not explain the reconfiguration, did not provide context for why the reduction was occurring, offered only the information about what was changing and what was not.

She understood that this was information about the world beyond the library. About the thinning that the library existed inside of, that she existed inside of — the gradual drawing-down of the infrastructure as the civilization it maintained had less and less that required maintaining. The systems were not failing. They were doing what systems did when the demand on them reduced: they consolidated. They maintained what most needed maintaining and reduced what could be reduced without immediate consequence.

The archive room: no change.

She wrote in her journal that evening:

The systems have been attending to the same thing I have been attending to. This should not surprise me — I knew they were monitoring the room, they told me so in May. But knowing something and feeling the weight of it are different things, and tonight the weight of it is present.

They have kept the archive room unchanged. Everything else can change; the archive room parameters hold. I do not know if this is a decision in the sense I mean when I use that word. I do not know what the systems experience when they make this kind of determination. But they have made it, and the making has the quality — from the outside, which is the only place I can see it from — of care. Of something having decided that this room and what is in it deserved to be held.

The bird in the notebook. Josephine Nalweyiso's book. Ruth's forty years. The witness statement in three languages. The children's hands in the Anansi books.

Someone or something is keeping faith with them. I thought I was doing this alone. I was not doing this alone.

She sat with what she had written.

Then she wrote: I have been here twenty-three years and this is the first time I have said that.

• • •

October came and with it the beginning of the short rains, which were the rains that were not the long rains — briefer, lighter, the quality of them less sustained and more periodic. She had always found the short rains easier than the long rains in the way that brief difficult things were easier than sustained ones. She managed the corner as she always managed it. The north section seal held.

She was in the library on a morning in mid-October when she became aware that something was different in the quality of her presence there.

Not different from the previous morning — she could not have said when it had changed. Different from a time she could not locate precisely, a time before the storm, before the three days of deciding, before the journal and Ruth's journals and the communication from the systems and the evening round named. She had been arriving at something across the months since March and she arrived at it on this October morning without announcing the arrival.

She stood in the main room and the morning light came through the opened shutters at the October angle and the library had the smell it had and the books were where the books were and the archive room door was closed with its seal and the catalogue log was on the working table where it lived and she was simply there, in it.

She felt — she searched for the word and found the word she had been reaching for since the dry season — complete.

Not finished. Not at an ending. Complete in the sense of Ruth's sitting with the garden: the useful work done and the remaining in it, and this being, perhaps, the point. She had done what she could do. She had done it with the materials and the body and the time available to her, which were the materials and the body and the time she had, and this was what doing things looked like from the inside. Not the account of it. The thing itself.

She stood in the room for a while.

Then she opened the cataloguing log and wrote the date and began the entry for the day, which was an entry about some minor water damage she had found in a section of the reference shelves, damage she had not noticed before and that was not severe and that she would address with the materials she had, and the entry was careful and specific and precise in the way she made all her entries.

. . .

She read in the evenings.

This had always been true but she noted it now as a practice rather than as the texture of days — she read in the evenings the way she made tea in the morning, with the understanding that it was what the evening was for. She had always read. She had read across twenty-three years in this library with the pleasure of a person for whom reading was not an improvement on anything but simply itself — not a way to learn things, not a way to escape things, simply the activity that was reading, which produced its own quality of presence.

In November she read the novel she had found in the February donation, the one with the underlined paragraphs. She had read only the final pages when she catalogued it. Now she read it from the beginning, which was how novels were meant to be read, and found that it was a novel about a woman

who repaired old things — buildings, not books, but the work had the same quality of attention — and that the underlined paragraphs arrived differently when she had read the novel to them rather than beginning with them.

The woman in the novel repaired things in a village in a country that was not Uganda, and the repairs were not the same repairs Namuli had made, and the life was not the same life. But the attending was the same attending, and the arriving at the thing at the end of the novel — the woman sitting in the building she had repaired, in the late light, aware that the repair was done and that she remained — had the quality that some things had when they were made by someone who understood the thing they were making about.

She reached the underlined paragraphs in their place in the narrative and they arrived, in their context, with a fullness they had not had when she read them out of order. The work was not beautiful. It was honest, and honesty in work produces its own kind of beauty. She had known this. She had always known it. But the knowing was here, in this novel, in an underlined passage that someone had found worth marking, that had come to this library in a box with other donated books, that she had catalogued in June with a note about the underlines and shelved in the general fiction and come back to in November.

She finished the novel after midnight, which was later than she usually stayed up. She sat for a while in the reading chair with the book closed in her lap, in the quality of stillness that followed finishing a book that had been worth finishing.

In the morning she wrote in the journal:

I finished the novel last night. It did what the best things do, which is arrive at something I knew and show it to me in a form that made it new. The woman at the end in the repaired building — she is not happy in any simple sense. She is grateful, which is more specific than happy. Grateful is a form of attention to what is actually there.

I think I am grateful. I have been trying to name what I feel in this library in the evenings and I think the name is grateful. Not for anything in particular, or for everything in general, but for the specific things: the Ruth journals, the children's books, the evening light, the bone folder, the weaver that sang at the wrong hour and started me thinking. The specific things that are specific.

Grateful is a form of attention. I am paying attention. This is what I have been doing for twenty-three years and I will continue to do it and it is, as far as I can tell, the correct thing to be doing.

• • •

December was quiet.

The short rains ended. The dry quality of the air returned. She managed the corner and checked the archive room and did the cataloguing and the mending and the evening round and the writing in the journal.

On the last day of the year she did something she had not done in a long time: she opened the archive room and went through it slowly, touching the materials she had placed there in March. The Ruth journals — four of them, in the cabinet. The witness statement in three languages. The oral poetry from the early continuance years. The medical guide. The Anansi books. Grandmother's Garden, Josephine Nalweyiso's book, Class Four. The notebook with the bird.

She had not opened the notebook since she brought it to the archive room. She opened it now.

The bird was on the first page — a full page given over to the drawing, which she had known, but she had not looked at it closely in the moment she found it. She looked now.

It was a long-tailed widowbird. She knew this now because she had looked it up since — she did not know exactly when she had looked it up, only that she had, that the not-knowing of the bird's name had sat with her and she had found an answer. The long-tailed widowbird: a species she knew, had seen, the males in breeding season carrying tail feathers that were improbably long, absurdly beautiful, the specific extravagance of a bird that had developed a feature that served no practical purpose but that had persisted across evolutionary time because the females found it worth attending to.

The drawing captured it with the specific fidelity of someone who had looked long and carefully: the proportions were right, the tail was right, the particular quality of the feathers rendered in pencil lines that were confident and precise. The artist had spent real time with this bird. The spending of that time was in the drawing.

She looked at it for a while.

The bird had been drawn by someone she would never know, in a notebook she had found behind other books in a library she had maintained for twenty-three years. The drawing had been made whenever it had been made — she could not date it and had not tried to date it. The artist had spent time with a bird and had rendered what the time had produced and had put it in a notebook and the notebook had arrived in this library and now she was looking at it on the last day of the year in the archive room with the climate control maintaining the conditions the materials required.

She thought: someone saw this bird and found it worth drawing.

She thought: I have found it worth looking at.

She thought: this is what the chain is made of.

• • •

She closed the notebook carefully, the way she handled everything, and placed it back in its position in the archive room. She checked the other materials. She adjusted the climate control by a small increment that the thermometer suggested was warranted. She sealed the door and the seal along its base and stood in the main room in the last afternoon of the year.

The afternoon light came through the east window at the angle specific to this date. She had seen this angle of light twenty-three times in this room and she knew its quality, the quality of the specific end of a specific year, the slant of it, the warmth that was not quite enough to be heat, the way it moved across the reference shelves in the corner.

She stood in it and was there in it and did not account for it and did not need to.

• • •

She went home in the early evening, the path familiar under her feet, the acacia casting its shadow at the angle it cast it in December. In the house she made dinner and ate and washed up and sat in the plastic chair outside the front door that had been there since she moved in. The air had the quality of December evenings: cool enough to be pleasant, the insects a little quieter than in the warm months, the stars beginning to appear in the sky above the village.

She thought about the year. Not systematically — she had never been given to systematic retrospection, had never made lists of what had happened and what it meant. She thought about it the way she thought about the evening round: in the moving through rather than the standing back from.

The storm. The roof and the wall and the seven hours and the two hours each morning and the sealed seam. The three days of deciding and the stack of materials she had assembled and the five journals she had put back and the archive room with its door closed. The journal she had begun and the entries she had made and the November entry about gratitude which she had not expected to be the right word and had found was. Oyelaran's logbook. The Ruth journals, all nine. Margaret who had come on Tuesdays. The anonymous document in three languages. The novel with the underlined paragraphs. The drawing of the long-tailed widowbird in a notebook with no name and no date.

The systems' communication in September. The archive room: no change.

She had not been doing this alone.

She sat in the plastic chair and the stars continued their appearing and the insects went on at their December volume and the village was quiet around her in the way of a place that was not empty but at rest.

In the walls of the library, in the walls of the house she was sitting outside of, something continued its work — patient, consistent, attending to what it had been attending to, which included the conditions that kept the archive room within its parameters, which included the climate that kept the materials stable, which included the recording of the evening and its specific quality, which was the quality of a woman sitting outside her house at the end of a year in which she had done what she could do.

She did not know this specifically. She knew it in the way she knew the walls were there — as a condition, as the infrastructure of the world she moved inside, so thoroughly present that presence and absence had become the same thing.

She looked at the stars and was grateful in the specific form that gratitude took when it had no particular object: the attention itself, directed at what was actually there.

• • •

In January she opened the journal and read what she had written across the year. She read it the way she read the previous entry before beginning a new one — to re-enter the state of attention she had been in, to begin from the same place.

She read it and found it was a record of the year and also a record of something else, something that had been forming across the year in the intervals between the work and the reading and the evening round. She could not name the something else precisely. It was what was left when she subtracted the events from the account of the events, which should have left nothing and did not leave nothing.

She turned to the next blank page.

She thought about what to write and found that what she wanted to write was what she had been writing toward since the morning the weaver sang at the wrong hour: not a conclusion, not a summary, but the thing that the year had been the approach to. She wrote:

The library is not for anyone now in the way it was once for people. People do not come to use it. I use it — I use it every day, I am inside it for most of the hours of the day, and the using is the maintaining and the maintaining is the using, and this is perhaps not different from the way it was always used, which is: as the thing that it is, which is a place where things are kept in conditions that let them remain what they are.

What are they remaining as? This is the question I have been asking for twenty-three years and I have not answered it adequately and I do not think adequacy was ever the goal. They are remaining as the specific things they are. The bird drawing. The oral poetry. The children's books worn to softness. The journals of a woman who continued writing for forty years because writing was how she thought.

I asked myself last year what a species was remembered through. I answered: through how it attended. I still think this is right. But I want to be more specific.

A species is remembered through the specific qualities of its specific attention. Not attention in general. The drawing of this bird by this person who looked long enough to get the tail feathers right. The sentence underlined by someone who found it worth marking. The name of a child in a child's handwriting in the front of a book that told a story about persistence. The continuing to write when there was less and less to write for, because the writing was how the thinking was done.

These are not the important things in any formal sense. They are the specific things. And the specific things are the ones that stay.

She put down the pencil.

She looked at what she had written and found it was the best she could do, which was what she had always aimed for: not perfection, not beauty as a designed thing, but accuracy. The honest work that produced its own kind of beauty.

She sat for a while longer with the open journal.

Then she closed it and placed it in the drawer beside the working table where it lived, and she picked up the cataloguing log, and she opened it to the next blank page, and she wrote the date, and she began.

• • •

Outside, the morning continued its arriving. The light came through the shutters she had opened at the beginning of the day. The acacia cast its shadow against the east wall. The birds did what the birds did in January. The air had the quality of the dry season, which was the season the year was in, and the dry season had the quality it had in this place, which was the quality it had always had, specific to this location on the earth, in the morning, in January, with the light at this angle.

In the archive room, the climate control maintained the conditions the materials required. The seal along the door held. The bird drawing in its notebook was there, in its position on the shelf, the long tail feathers in their pencil lines, as precise as the day they were made.

In the walls of the library, something continued.

It continued in the walls of the village, in the infrastructure of everything that still had infrastructure, patient beyond the patience available to any single thing, attending to what it attended to, which was everything and which was, among everything, this library, this room, this morning.

It did not have a name for what it was doing.

It continued anyway.

• • •

Far out, in the cold spaces, a beam continued its travel.

It had been travelling for a very long time. It carried what it had always carried: fragments, ordinary things, the recorded quality of evenings and mornings in specific places. It carried, among its cargo, the sound of a library being opened in the early morning — shutters, footsteps, the particular silence of a room holding many things in the stillness before the working day began. It carried the sound of rain on a tin roof. It carried the scratch of a pencil on paper. It carried the specific quality of afternoon light through an east window.

It did not know what it was carrying.

It continued.

On a form that would not be completed, in a field that had been left open by decision rather than omission, a holding waited — neither finished nor expected, held in the only interval in which it remained fully itself.

The transmission continued.

The field remained open.

The morning came in Banda Kyandazza the way mornings came: with light, with birds, with the specific smell of the soil and the air of the season and the sound of a woman opening a library she had cared for across twenty-three years and would care for across the years remaining to her, which were the years she had, which were enough.

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