

The photographer

History:

He'd forgotten his way to the bodega on West 72nd,
Keys discovered in strange places,
The hand that once steadied his Canon now weak and slow.
Four months passed before they found it:
A walnut-sized mass burrowed in the left hemisphere,
Pressed against memory, holding him in its covert grip.
After the surgery, they told him it was gone,
But a year later, he returns for the verdict.
Has it crept back?

Comparison:

He used to live by the rhythm of light,
Capturing dawn slipping over the Hudson,
Sun flaring through sycamores in Central Park.
The world was composed of highlight and shadow,
Sharpened by shutter speed, brightened by aperture.
Now he measures light differently—
How it seeps into him, unbidden,
How its radiation alters him,
How it could leave scars, like film exposed too long.

Technique:

Inside the machine's narrow maw, he is still,
The faint scent of disinfectant mingling with cool metal.
Mechanical sounds envelop him, shutters snapping.
Light flashes in pulses he cannot see but imagines all the same.
Held in place, pinned like a photograph,
Is this what it feels like to be developed?
Exposed, layer by layer, as the machine reassembles him
From the inside out.
Light rendering him bare.

Findings:

The contrast begins its slow journey,
Ink winding through narrow vessels.
Halos bloom across synapses,
The unseen made seen.
Nothing new intrudes;
Only the faint echo of a once-lingering mass,
Etched now in soft grays and whites.

Impression:

Residual scarring, stable—
The shadow rests, dormant in its hollow.
With a lifted chest, he calls his husband,
Delivers the news with a breath he didn't know he held
Six months, they say, before he must face the light again,
Six months to capture sunsets on the High Line,
Measure time in daylight's sweeps,
Until he returns to ask the machine for more.

—Kellen Vu



Illustration by Sarah Riedmann