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Catalog of Absences

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A short book

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Catalog of Absences is a short book about what was left out. It was made to be read in one sitting, then put back. The sentences stay with the empty sleeve and the late winter. They do not wander off into a story they cannot pay for.

I read the page the next day in a different late winter. The what was left out had settled. It looked less like an event and more like a fact. Facts are easier to credit and harder to decorate. I prefer them.

What I left out was larger than what I put in. The archive cage had corners I did not describe, and a window I refused to make into a view. On the empty sleeve, what was left out stayed inside its own edges. That refusal is the subject, as much as the color is.

If you license the file, you are not buying the archive cage. You are buying a described use of what was left out, for a term, in a territory, in writing. The watermark on this preview is the reminder that the looking is not the license. The empty sleeve goes on being itself after the agreement ends.

I went back to the archive cage in the late winter. The empty sleeve was where I had left it. What I had come to see was what was left out, and it had not agreed to be simple. I set the index card down and did not pick it up again until I had looked long enough.

There is a kind of attention that starts only after the late winter. In the archive cage I kept the empty sleeve clear so what was left out would have somewhere to sit. Silence came and went. I did not turn toward it. When I finally used the index card, the mark was smaller than the decision to make it.

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Close the book and the archive cage does not travel with you. What travels is the sequence: the empty sleeve, the index card, the decision to stop. Silence will be different wherever this file is opened. The rights in the file stay where they were.

Later the late winter changed and the color cooled. I did not correct the empty sleeve. Correction would have been a different book. The index card left a trace at the edge, thin enough to miss if you were only passing. Silence filled the pause, and the pause was part of the page.

The late winter made the archive cage smaller. On the empty sleeve, what was left out held still, which is not the same as being finished. I could hear silence and, under it, nothing that needed a name. The index card waited. Most of the work was in the waiting.

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A record of what was left out is not the thing itself. The empty sleeve took the light and gave a duller light back. From the archive cage I could measure the band with a hand, then with the index card, and the two measures did not match. I kept the second measure. The first one had too much of me in it.

I numbered nothing. A date would come later, on a catalog card, but the late winter inside the work is not a clock time. The index card has no opinion about dates. The empty sleeve only shows that the mark was made, and that it was allowed to remain.

I looked again at the empty sleeve. The what was left out was still there, neither better nor worse. The index card had done what it can do, which is very little, and enough. Outside, the late winter continued without needing a sentence.

A margin is also a decision. I left one, then widened it, then

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stopped before the empty sleeve became only frame. What was left out stayed in the middle, where I could find it again.

Someone will ask what the picture is of. It is of what was left out, and of the time it took to leave it alone. The archive cage is not in the file. The attention is.

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I copied one sentence into the catalog note and deleted it. The note only needs the title, the date, and the fact that the rights are reserved. The paragraph can live here.

The silence changed pitch. I did not rewrite the page to match it. A book that chases the room never gets out of the room.

On the second reading the what was left out looked plainer. Plain is not a defect. It is how a field survives being looked at twice.

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I set the index card parallel to the edge and did not draw. The alignment was the note. The empty sleeve recorded nothing, which I then had to write down in words.

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