

The Alchemy of Light and Color

The child on the porch swings her bare feet
above dusted boards,
sunlight threading through the gaps like silver wire.
I lift the camera,
and the moment collapses into a rectangle:
her laughter pinned beneath glass.

The dog pauses mid-leap,
tongue curling toward a dandelion seed,
and in the photograph, it will never move again.
The river that carved its bed across the meadow
becomes a ribbon of memory,
its voice muted in silver halide and shadow.

I keep a drawer of images:
my grandmother's hand folded over mine,
the flicker of candlelight in a hospital room,
the snowfall that came when I was alone.
They feel alive,
yet I know each photograph is a stillborn echo
of what cannot be held.



Even the wind that bent the reeds yesterday
pauses in exposure,
its breath captured in gelatin and light.
I wonder if the lens sees differently than the eye:
or if the world is always made
by the mind as much as the retina,
as Edwin Land showed:
red and white, two records,
folded by brain into full color,
a harmony born from comparison,
from the quiet negotiation of shadows and light.

And still I photograph,
knowing life itself is always
the negative of what I cannot keep.
Every smile, every shadow, every storm
exists to end in a photograph;
yet in that stillness
I glimpse the pulse behind the glass,
the alchemy that turns retina and cortex
into the living color of memory,
and remember that the world, even frozen,
is incandescent, fleeting, real.

—David Lee