In the time of which I’m writing, I lived in the blue cabin, the cabin at the end of the road, the cabin into which I’d been born and in which I’d always lived. Every day was cloudless and temperate, and there was never any rain, but the grass remained green, and the trees kept their leaves, and the spring and the streams continued to flow. This did not seem remarkable.

For a while, there was no change. Then people began to move away. On my morning walk I would see another car missing from its driveway, the blinds drawn on the house, and after that I would not see the man and woman and children, or whoever, who lived in that house. If I knew the people well, I would try to peer between the curtains, as if to find some clue to why they’d left or where they’d gone. I don’t understand why I did this, because I knew it was futile.

Then, with fewer people, the businesses began to close. The last one was the grocery, but I was prepared. In expectation I had stocked up on food with long shelf lives, especially cans. I could last at least a year before running out. The empty cans and packages began to pile up, but the trash collection had stopped, so every day I included the dump on my walk. I stood on the hill at the south end and tossed my trash down into the pit.

The village got more and more quiet as the birds and animals left. My dog found fewer smells to investigate, and seemed confused. Despite the lack of rain, the scents were disappearing. He walked next to me, without sniffing the air or dropping his nose to the ground. He became a sight dog, instead of a nose dog.

Then the power failed. I had relied on it for light, and for cooking, and now I had to burn wood. I started chopping wood every day for my fire. The worst thing was not being able to see at night. Some nights, especially moonless ones, there was no difference between opening and closing my eyes, unless I looked at the stars, which, in spite of the lack of clouds, seemed dimmer than in the past. They didn’t provide enough light for me to walk. The darkness was a physical presence, like black velvet pressing against my eyes and skin. I learned to light a candle before the sun set, and to have a torch nearby, if I needed to walk at night.

It was as if the world were ending, and yet all these events felt natural and even to be expected. I had the dog for company, and in the evening I would talk to him, him sitting looking into my eyes and seeming to listen, until real darkness settled and we went outside to watch the stars.

I had dragged an armchair into the meadow next to the house, since there was no rain to ruin it. Every evening I sat in the chair, the dog curled in my lap, and watched the stars circle though the sky. Some nights I watched them until morning. I seemed to need less sleep. Those mornings, my legs would be numb from the dog sleeping on my lap all night, and I needed some time before I could walk again.

To start each day we would breakfast and go for our walk, and throw the trash into the dump.

Then the dog disappeared. He was nowhere to be found in the village. I was about to leave, to search for him, but after several days he reappeared, entering through his door at dawn, and except that he ate more than usual, we resumed that day as if nothing had happened, taking our morning walk. When we returned, the girl was sitting on the stoop and the dog went to her as if he knew her, wagging his tail, and she scratched him behind the ears. She looked at me without smiling or frowning, her face not expressionless but ready to assume whatever emotion was fitting.

I greeted her and asked whether she was hungry. She nodded yes, and pointed to her throat and made a sign with one hand, a sign that meant nothing to me. She made a movement of something coming out of her mouth and shook her head no. I asked whether she was mute, and she nodded yes.

After she’d eaten, we went for a second walk, and I explained to her the history of the village and the people who had lived there, and how they had begun to disappear until I was the only one. I said I did not know what was happening outside the village, and that the electricity had failed. She nodded and made some signs with her hands, which I did not understand. When we returned to the cabin, she used paper and pen, and wrote that the same thing had happened in her city. She did not know where everyone had gone. When the city was empty, she had walked for several weeks. I was the first person she’d seen.

I asked what her name was. She wrote “Lily”, but that it no longer mattered, because there were only two of us, and no one to confuse her with. We might as well simplify our language. Then she began to teach me how to sign, which was difficult for me, because I had never spoken anything but English. Sometimes she laughed at me, noiselessly, but I didn’t mind, because there was no malice in her. She explained that my signs were funny, and sometimes they said other things than I meant. She would correct me and then we would go on with the lesson. I wondered why I had to learn to sign, since she understood me perfectly well, and she could write when she wanted to tell me something, but I didn’t ask, because she made it plain that I had to learn. Finally I saw that by learning Sign, I would gain the way of understanding her and carrying on conversations: she would sign, and I would speak.

The food stock diminished, so the two of us began entering houses and taking from them. We never took anything except the food and left everything else untouched. That continued until the day we entered a house with a grand piano. Lily went directly to it, sat, and began to play. From that time, we included the house on our daily tour, even the days it was out of the way. Her playing, which she described as rusty, improved. She began to spend hours every day practicing. Often, I would collect the food while she played, and come to listen when I was done.

At first I didn’t notice, hearing the music, how dissonant the sound was, dissonant not because the notes clashed, but because I had heard only silence for so long. All batteries had failed, and there was no electric current, so there was no recorded music, and no cars, no aircraft overhead, no lawn mowers, nothing. Even the girl did not speak, and the dog had given up barking. To hear the piano was exotic. At first I didn’t know why the music made me uneasy, but then I figured out the reason, and felt relief, and could enjoy the music.

She usually began with classical pieces, and then worked her way to popular music, meaning everything from ragtime and show tunes through jazz to “Yesterday”. I don’t know much about music, so I can’t say what all they were. She seemed to have an infinite number of pieces memorized, and the shelves behind the piano held sheet music and books of music.

After some time, she told me she wanted to move into the house with the piano. I was reluctant because the blue cabin was the only house I’d ever lived in. So she moved by herself, and after a few days of missing her company, I moved too. She was very happy, and signed that she was glad, and she’d been thinking of moving back. I said nothing, thinking I would stay with her.

For a day, all was well, but she was playing her music in ever-longer sessions. I started to feel uneasy without the sound; when I went outside the silence was uncanny, and I couldn’t wait to get back to the music. The dog was unwilling to stay with me all the time, as he always had, and took to wandering off on his own. I found myself increasingly with only the company of the girl and her music, reading books I’d borrowed from the library, and from other houses. I found myself bored, a feeling I’d rarely experienced, and began to think about filling a backpack and leaving, to find out what had happened to other people in other towns. When I proposed the idea to Lily, she refused absolutely. She insisted that everyone else was gone, that we would find no one, that the journey would end in disappointment.

The number of houses left that we hadn’t taken food from was shrinking, and I planted a garden with seeds I took from the local nursery. Still no rain, but the soil remained moist enough for the plants to grow. Again, I was incurious and did not wonder how such a thing could be. This gap in my thinking seems inexplicable now.

Lily’s time on the piano continued to increase. When she wasn’t playing, she sat at the piano, reading music. The only times she left the seat were to eat, go to the bathroom, and sleep. Her body changed – the muscle tone disappeared, except in her forearms, which looked like they belonged on a weight lifter. When she stood, her shoulders curled in and she stooped. Her buttocks were flat and slack. She had been thin the first day I saw her. Now she was skeletal. I told her, in Sign so she would be more likely to listen, that she needed to get out of the house and walk with me, but she simply shook her head and continued to eat her soup. That was her favorite food: soup. She ate little else.

She began to coax sounds from the piano that I did not think the instrument could give, sounds of groaning and screeching and weeping. I began to spend my time outside, these sounds disturbed me so. Then came the day she played all day, so loudly I thought she might break the piano. I went for a walk.

The sun was dim, and the sky was gray instead of blue. I didn’t think at first what might explain this. I walked about twenty miles, as far as I ever had, before turning around and coming home. I spent the night in the blue cabin, afraid to hear the music Lily was playing. In the morning I forced myself to go to her house. She was asleep, leaning forward, her head against the piano, above the keyboard and below the music. I shook her awake. A long dent ran across her forehead. She looked at me as if she didn’t recognize me, then she looked at the keyboard and her face opened up and she began playing. This time the music was serene. I could not listen to it, though; there was something underneath, a hint of chaos.

I went back to the blue cabin and lived there, unable to watch Lily’s deterioration. The sun grew dimmer, the sky grayer with what I recognized as clouds. Every day I checked on Lily, morning and evening, feeding her and giving her a bath, and trying to make sure she slept in her bed, though I usually failed at that. She waited until I left and then went back to the piano. The next morning I would find her slumped there, in any of a variety of postures.

Then came the day I could hear her music even from the blue cabin, a mile away. The music rose and rose, louder than it possibly could, and I stepped outside to listen better. The dog came with me, and also seemed to listen, turning toward the house and tilting his ears forward. We stood for what must have been hours, unmoving. The music was triumphant, as if written to celebrate a victory. I heard other instruments in it, and thought that she must have put a record on the machine, but then remembered that there was no electricity. The only way to hear music was to make it, on the piano.

Then came the end, a series of crashing chords with varying pauses between, to a final chord that hung for almost a minute and died away. I woke from my trance and looked up. The sky was dark with clouds, lightning flickered inside them, and rain began to fall. I stepped onto the porch.

The rain lasted through the afternoon and into the morning, and on. I found a raincoat in my closet, dusted it off and put it on, and walked to the house. Lily was stretched on the floor in front of the piano, thinner and paler than ever. She did not respond to my voice, or my touch, or my hand shaking her shoulder. She would never respond to anything again.

I straightened her limbs and rolled her onto her back and sat in the hard chair, keeping vigil and waiting for the rain to end. It did not. The next day, concluding that waiting was futile, I dug a hole in the back yard of the house. I carried her from the house to the grave and laid her as gently as I could in the hole, and shoveled the mud back over her. Later, I would set a board at the head of the grave with “Lilith, musician” carved in it. I did not know her birth date, and I wasn’t even sure what the current year was, not that it mattered.

Chilled, I went home to the cabin then, and boiled water in buckets in the fireplace, and took a warm bath in the big galvanized tub, in front of the fire. I shaved my head and threw the hair out the window, in case the birds came back and looked for material for their nests. I fasted for a week and did not leave the house. I did little except stare out the window. The dog came and went, and I fed him when he emptied his bowl. Late evening, he would settle down next to me on the floor, his nose on his paws, and let out a sigh. In the morning, when I woke, he would watch me for a while, and then leave. I was barely aware of his presence.

In the end, hunger drove me to the garden, and I gathered some plants – lettuce, potatoes, some carrots. I stopped at the abandoned gardens of those who had left, and gathered some more, as well as apples from several trees. Plants had sprung up all around, many of them good to eat, and I noted where they were, and decided to walk the entire village after I’d eaten.

I made a soup from the vegetables, and ate it and the apples. My stomach felt stretched, and I fell asleep. When I woke, the moon was up, and visible through a hole in the clouds. The rain had diminished.

From that day, the weather became regular, and rain came every third night. The season was always like late spring, in temperature, and fluctuated very little. I had to do nothing to grow the plants I needed, only pick them and prepare them. Many of them were vegetables I did not recognize, which had never grown there, which I’d never seen. The gardening and botany books I looked into did not tell me what these were.

My health improved. Though I’d always been well, now my body felt indestructible, though otherwise no different. My strength was much greater than before, and I found that I could run long distances without tiring. I began to do this, to see how far I could go. The nearest city, forty miles away, was easy for me to run to. No one lived there, which did not surprise me, and the buildings had begun to decay, which did, since the buildings in my village were perfectly preserved. I thought about raiding the city for food, but decided not to, as there was plenty to eat in the village.

I have not gone back to the city since then, nor anywhere else. I have chosen to remain here, and though my health continues to be good, my body has changed and it’s clear that before too long I will die. The dog died many years ago, if the word “year” still has meaning. It is necessary that someone know how all this happened, if there is anyone still alive, and if they should happen by. I will leave this history here, on the table, and go out back and dig my grave, although I have no way to inter myself, when the moment comes. If anyone should read this, please cover my remains.