The Price of a Name

At home, the cat has a name, and the name changes how we see him.
He waits beneath the table while we speak of ordinary things:
weather, school, plans for a summer holiday, an upcoming film—
the small assurances by which we convince ourselves
that the world is still, somehow, mendable.

Someone reaches down and caresses him beneath the chin.
He closes his eyes, trusting the hand because it has never taught him
that affection can have categories, that compassion can stop at a border
drawn by language, habit, taste, indifference, or the price of a thing.

Under the bright white lights of the supermarket, another language begins.

Here, nothing waits to be loved. Everything waits to be chosen.
Weight, grade, label, price: the clear-cut vocabulary of objects
that have somehow arrived without biographies, without mothers,
without the inconvenient persistence of a face.

We push the cart slowly through the aisles, reading as we go.
We have become mindful consumers,
suspicious of what we cannot pronounce,
trained to turn the packages over and search for the truth
beneath the flamboyant promise printed on the front.

There are labels now for almost everything:
natural, humane, fair, responsible,
ethical, free-range, sustainable, almost honest—
as if changing the adjectives on the packaging
could heal the wounds of the life inside.

We scan the barcode. We compare the scores. We check the ingredients.
We ask where it came from, how far it traveled,
whether the company has learned the vernacular
of our concern, our doubt, our unease.

And perhaps the strangest part:

We already know.

Not everything, but enough that ignorance takes effort.
Enough to understand that somewhere beyond the refrigerator glass
there was once a life moving through a world that mattered—
a life with hunger, fear, warmth, and memory.

Still, the cart moves.
Still, we read.

The market masks what is cruel.
It asks us to be practical, to weigh the alternatives,
to make suffering one more consideration

in a decision already crowded
with price, convenience, habit, and desire.

The receipt remembers what we prefer to forget.

One line for this, one line for that, a discount here, a tax there.
The math is flawless, and nothing appears to be missing
except the life itself.

At home, the cat is sleeping.

His name is still there, almost sacred.
He turns in his sleep and rests his chin on my leg,
as if the whole complicated world might still be trusted
to remain where he left it.

I think of the supermarket then.

A body becomes a product.
A life becomes a flavor.
A death becomes a number on a scale.

And the consumer remains, comforted,
standing beneath the bright lights, holding the receipt.

At home, the cat opens his eyes.

For a moment, his gaze meets mine.

His name rises quietly into the room.

And somewhere, far beyond the walls,
another life waits without a name.