

# Hope & Other Beautiful Things

By Maverick L.  
Malone



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## **If it doesn't go according to plan, I plan to burn**

We agree to meet first thing, when Sunday slips into Monday, before tomorrow has a chance to toil us away or tear us to shreds, to convene before bed and discuss, and plus, I have a lot to contend with. You know, research, hypotheses, thesis and all that.

I hear the screen door slamming and there I am on the enclosed back porch, the artificial sacrificial light of a laptop with 35% battery already aglow on the edge. Small feet padding behind, I kiss tiny fingers, hands. Someone is up late because of the word *need*. I think of The Many Uppercase Reasons I do what I do. Why ALL CAPS SONGS and I meet so late at night in dreams. The future by the name of a flower has a number one chart topping single on that playlist. I sing it often. Both of us asked for change this time: more than loose, more than Lincoln, more than *more*.

I follow *more* into the woods behind my house. People deemed much more important than I are there, already writing words into the night, letting those paragraphs guide us like solar powered camping lanterns, Maglite flashlights with four D batteries, the latest iPhone model that can throw its glow ten feet in front of you.

Then there is me, trailing behind as the blind learning to be blind, with a handful of fireflies in a mason jar hung from the notch on a stick, protected, held carefully out in front, stepping cautiously, one two three steps always disappearing. And still I go, trudging into the forest with everyone else; and when they get too far ahead, their shine much louder than mine, fed by the “right” kind of importance, fueled by the “right” kinds of eyes, *I will keep*.

The difference between a flashlight and a firefly is one is born of earth. Even when it dies, it is compelled to return. There is an insatiable hunger for keeping, despite the hurt, despite the burn, despite the blind.

Some of us are flashlights. *Some of us are fireflies.*

And so I keep. The light will remain, I will gather more fireflies, I will make a fire from the night and send smoke signals to the sky. If I'm destined to die on some hill, then let it be the one finally found after they smoke me out of that forest on fire from the blaze of my own words.

Let it be for change.

Let it be for fireflies.

***Let it be for her.***

*For the fireflies*

When you have nothing else, have patience,  
have compassion.

When you have nothing else, *have hope.*



# That ~~one~~ *first* time I published a rejection letter

Dear Maverick,

Thank you for entering our annual chapbook prize competition. Unfortunately, your manuscript did not win publication, but we appreciated the opportunity to read it. We always expect a high level of quality in these books, and this year's entries did not disappoint. 2,160 manuscripts were entered, and so many of them were so good.

Two thousand manuscripts submitted translates into roughly 40,000 individual poems that we've read over the last three months. Given the quantity of poems, and that many of them are already published, it's very difficult to consider them individually in this context. If you'd like to submit any of these individually at some point, please feel free, following the regular submissions guidelines—we won't mind reading anything again.

We also still have no idea which manuscript is yours, so if you'd like to enter a revised version next year, you're also free to do that. (I'm just trying to anticipate what are always common questions.) There were a great number of manuscripts that we would have been proud to publish—we simply chose the three that we loved the most.

Anyway, thank you again for entering the competition. I hope you enjoy the winners, and your subscription to *[our poetry publication.]*

Cheers,  
Tim





# Dear Reader,

This book began the same way as all of my others: first as poems on the notes app of my phone, which then grew a garden in a word document. This one, specifically, was edited down to thirty-six handpicked poems from one such document arbitrarily titled “Hope and other beautiful things” and then submitted to a nationwide poetry chapbook contest in which the winners would receive publication and distribution to thousands of subscribers. It *would* have been massive exposure. It *would* have been a spotlight chance. It *would* have been a lifechanging event. It became none of that *because it was always destined to become so much more.*

After months of waiting and hoping for a new door to open for me and these words that I worked so incredibly hard on and poured my heart and soul into, I finally got an email. *THE* email. You know the one, I’m sure. The one that begins with “Thank you.” Thank you, *but*. Thank you, *but unfortunately*. *That one*. The gut wrenching one that, in a single swift curl of a palm, can crush a dream to dust...*if we let it.*

I won’t lie. It stung. It was my first official rejection letter as a writer since embarking on this journey and going all in. That rejection letter had me staring at the question mark tattoo on my wrist and raising all kinds of thoughts about my “enoughness.” Tim said I wasn’t enough. The people judging this contest said I wasn’t enough. My cruelest self of decades past saw her opportunity and came rushing to the surface, echoing their judgment: “Look at all the work you’ve done. You put your best out there and even now, *you are still not enough.*”

For a day, I believed them. For a day, I sat with that heaviness and questioned everything because nothing

had yet happened for me even in the tiniest sense over the last few years. While other writers and poets in the community were seeing increased book sales, getting reviews and opportunities, or at least seeing social media growth, I was stagnant. The one book I had published so far was stagnant. My social media was stagnant. I was still being told no. I felt like I was shouting into the great, expansive nothingness and it was getting me nowhere.

I struggled that day. On top of the internal and personal struggles I had been feeling on a writer level, on a mother level, on a *human* level, I felt exhausted, stressed, depressed, disheartened, defeated, and invisible. Everything was already overwhelming in my personal life with what I was dealing with at the time and that letter pushed me over the edge. I felt the rush of those limiting beliefs and let the tears flow, about everything – not just the rejection email. That email was a metaphor. It symbolized so much more. It was a mirror held up to my own face asking me, “So what are you gonna do about it?”

Apparently, I was going to cry some more. I walked into the kitchen, slowly opened the door to the fridge, bent over the fruit bin and sobbed into a carton of strawberries. Then came the words from a sweet, tinny voice across the room. There’s nothing worse than your 5-year-old asking, “Mommy what’s wrong?” and having to swallow your emotions in the moment, put on your big girl pants, and defeatedly whisper, “Nothing, baby. I’m fine.”

I doubted my path, my purpose, my passion. I doubted if I’m making a difference at all. I doubted if anything would ever happen for me or if I’m destined to live the small, quiet life of a 9 to 5 divorced mother moonlighting as a writer, crying into a carton of strawberries. I rode that emotional wave *and I rode it hard*. And even now, from pages and miles away, I can hear you. “Oh boo hoo! One rejection letter. Come talk to me when you get your 78<sup>th</sup>.” But I’m a poet who is

prone to magnified emotions and dramatics – what can I say? It's those “firsts,” you know? *They matter*. And sometimes they cut deep.

The next day, in a moment of clarity, I heard another voice – this time, it was the one I'd been building for the past two years; the only one that can pull me out of that dark place: *my own*. She lifted me to my feet and gently told me *to keep*. Keep going. Keep hoping. Keep believing. She told me that Tim is not the keeper of wisdom or truth, especially not mine. She said that there will always be people that tell us no. It's part of life and thank god it is *because it fosters growth*.

It became a lesson. It became expansion. It became a question. It became “what if.” What if I published the book anyway? What if I added more poems and made it bigger? What if I began said book with Tim's rejection letter? *What if rejection became part of the message?*

Really, it couldn't be more perfect. What better lesson of believing in our dreams and holding out hope than tuning out the naysayers and doing the damn thing anyway?

This is not a “Fuck you. No one tells me no” kind of motivation. This is not a salve for a bruised ego. This is not a tit for tat “Haha, I'll show them” sentiment. This is simply publishing the proof of hope. This is an example of keeping. This is not letting a beautiful message go to waste. This is hitting submit on something I poured so much of myself into that I feel deserves to exist in all her fullness, in a world that desperately needs the message. ***This is believing in that message.***

I am grateful for the people that tell me no because it forces me to pivot. It strengthens my resolve and conviction. It builds a thicker skin and it integrates the lesson. This is laying the foundation for that second, third, seventy-eighth time I may be told no. For a book all about hope, dreams and the many beautiful things

that abound in this strange and backwards world, I see that “no” was only the beginning.

*Rejection.* Even you are beautiful. Thank you for the lesson. I will keep: the light, the hope, the beautiful things. They will continue to come, each one in their own time.

And Tim? If you’re out there, thanks for the input, but I think I can take it from here.

*Cheers,*

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Maverick L. Malone". The signature is written in a fluid, connected style with a mix of uppercase and lowercase letters.

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## *GLW on the 111*

I never go looking for the magic  
it just has a way of finding me  
in an endless game of hide and seek  
these simple bits of story  
like the Queen T-shirt you wore  
or the picture frame  
hanging on the back of my apartment door  
and a slow dance to “Golden Hour”  
across the creaking wooden floor

somehow, it all showed up one day  
impermanent permanence impressed upon me  
paradoxically  
like ink on skin and ink over pages  
a story on me mirroring the story in me

as written in the stars  
I wrote it in a notebook  
these momentary apparitions  
no more separate from dreams than the part of me  
that knows only love in a hopeful heart

the beginning of a story always was my favorite part

***The preponderance of moments this life  
hasn't lived but that doesn't mean they  
don't exist***

Do you ever feel memories you haven't experienced in this lifetime? I'm talking the kind that ripple gently on the surface of your mind, like a live watercolor on parchment where the paint isn't yet dry and the sky is blushing gold and you have this... *this feeling* in your soul? It's hard even for a poet to describe but I will try.

At work, I sit facing a large four pane window. From here, I can see the parking lot, the pink dogwood trees prematurely blooming, and the star of every clear morning's show – the sun and his light parading proudly through the office. When the rays hit just right, I get glimpses of images, some momentary reminiscence of perhaps another life. I've lived many, and though I have inklings of some of these, today's has the word *Grecian* surfacing.

I picture myself bathing mid-morning in a white room, wistfully staring out the window into the indescribable blue of the Aegean. She is so inviting, so calming, *I want to drown in her*. I hear the intermittent sounds of limbs moving around in the bathwater. My brown hair is piled on top of my head, adorned with fresh laurels and puffs of bougainvillea. There are small glass vials of lavender and rose oil and *this light, this light, this light*, floods the room in the softest shade – I am bathing in it too.

The colors outside my office match this view: pastel pink, mauve, cornflower and powder blue, amber, ivory, gold. I don't know what this Greek version of me has planned for the day but it feels like decadent peace, reading, learning. It feels like soaking my mind in art, philosophy,

music. It feels like crumbly feta, slick olives, and smooth elegance for breakfast. It feels like life is easy, simple, there is so much gratitude for *just existing*. It feels like so many layers have been stripped away without the distractions of modern day. It feels like my heart melting into a warm pool of fragrant orange blossom wax. It feels like little nectar sips of fulfillment and flaky phyllo dough satisfaction. It feels like the cells of my body are peonies opening their petals to drink in the sun's nourishment.

I take this memory and let the words gather where they may, sentences and phrases giving soliloquies of their day. I imagine the beginning of these speeches as if each letter has just been born, breathing slowly, like the rise and fall of a sleeping infant's chest; her tiny pink rosebud lips, little fingers and hands, everything peaceful and delicate. *It feels like a blessing.*

Though this place is nothing my present-day mind can recall, it is somewhere I've been once, somewhere my spirit must know of.

It feels like a message. It feels like wisdom. It feels like being chosen.

It feels like being kissed and held by the magic of a poem.

## *The Dream Poet*

At sixteen I wrote:  
*"the dream poet  
shapes stars from air  
and swallows them whole*

*her poems are not written  
but painted in colors  
that stain the mind"*

eighteen years later  
I fire up that machine

I find...  
I think...  
I know...  
I believe...  
there's more to this than *just* imagination  
it is never *just* a dream

it exists to exhibit what's possible...  
and shows up when it wants to lead

## *A quick note...*

The next poem you are about to read began like this:

I sat down to drink coffee alone on the porch; heard “that broke my life into song” in my head; fell in love with this phrase; jotted it down; read pages of someone else’s words; sipped my coffee; listened; noticed a single wisp of dandelion in the wind swirling past that sparked my own words; immediately wrote the following poem, “When the moon sings.”

This is ultimately what I want to teach people to do, what I want to inspire people to do: to make perspective from paper and hold on to it, to make connections, *to keep going*.

Life is full of so many hard moments but these are the moments that make us. Without struggle, without challenge, there is no change and no reflection.

I want to teach people how to make art from a single moment, how to find a poem from the tiny almost unnoticeable dandelion seed, to hear the music in the silence and to navigate the night simply by telling my story and making my art.

But there is no manual for this and no predetermined set of standard rules, so it makes that hard. It will be different for everyone but I hope - I desire - that through my voice, I am an example of how hard moments and pain become passion and purpose.

It’s like the 500 miles Clarissa Pinkola Estés talks about in the La Loba section of *Women Who Run With the Wolves*. You can’t stop at 500 miles. It would be easier to stop there because we become so exhausted, so tired,

and we think, “This is good enough. It’s not Eden but there’s water. It’s not heaven but there’s a little less hurt.”

# Don't settle for only intermittent magic when it can become your life.

It is the one who soldiers on for that 501st mile, that last push, that births the moon and lights up the darkest room. That returns water to the desert. That makes song from silence.

If I can go from a fragile, fragmented, terribly fearful girl afraid to sing in a broken world, to this, a woman who roams wild with her wonder and turns everything to song and magic, wanting only to share that with the same world that once cracked her painfully and brutally open, *anyone can*.

That's the miracle, cracking open. Revealing what has been within you all along. But you have to be willing to try.

You must be willing to travel through darkness to find it.

## *When the Moon sings*

I am sitting on the back porch overlooking the sandy creek, listening to the chirps of birds and crickets. My small dog pads across the floorboards in a skittering of paws. My feet rest on the brown rattan coffee table in a symphony of creaks. The coffee is cold and the coastal Florida air is slightly crisp, a kind of comforting morning chill carried on the wind when she blows through the slats in the railing and finds her way to my face, as if tilting my chin to say, “Follow your own advice. Look up.”

The sky is peppered with long, skinny clouds like stretched dough. The moon is still out. Proud. A lone dandelion seed jetés past, turning through the air and escapes through the railing. Off into the distance of slash pines it goes. I wonder about the dandelion puff from which it came, if it was willingly separated, destined to become wish from some small child’s imagination, or if it was ripped away unexpectedly and thrown into the hungry mouth of wind, searching for yet another soft place to land like the rest of us.

And there it follows, my mind, doing what she so often does, making connections, frantically gathering dots and drawing novel constellations among them, anointing each with a beautiful name: Remembrance, Hope, Perspective.

I am reminded of where I now sit, nestled among the quiet that sounds so different than what it once was: a cold, dead thing that could make even the snow want to leave, where only the tiniest pinpricks of light would every now and then find their way. Brief flashes of warmth as if to remind that there was something more but I had to learn how to listen first, how to turn my eyes



into telescopes with string lights gathered from the  
fragments of myself I kept going back for.

I think about how many dandelion seeds make up the  
whole, how many it takes to comprise a person like me,  
how many wishes I made once upon a star that are now  
something of ladies-in-waiting to be rendered real when  
the timing aligns.

I think of the moon in broad daylight and the heat that  
fills my chest, the poems that flood my head, when I find  
myself suspended in a moment like this, turning the key  
on memory and reflection.

There is always something changing here, hope that  
feasts on connection no matter how small; on every kind  
of dream, every kind of thought.

Such music in the quiet now.  
How miraculous. How magical –

the silence

that broke my  
life into song.

## *The Five Most Beautiful*

five

the crest of each wave culminating in thousands per  
second

how together as one they look like entire schools of fish  
arching up and out of the water

breathing and undulating only momentarily  
in shadows that play peek-a-boo with the sun

four

the way that same sun glitters on the surface of the ocean  
in an interpretive dance of light that never speaks twice  
every moment

a new song

three

how the sand looks like cinnamon sugar  
tinted the softest and subtlest shade of lilac  
in the early dusk

two

the silhouette of fifty seagulls against sky  
as they glide along the horizon  
enticing the other twenty-five perched on sand  
to take off while some of the others return to land  
another natural dance

one

the fullness and gratitude  
ever-present here (she gestures outward)  
and here (she points to her heart)  
and the peace in the knowing  
that love is never far

## *Starcatchers*

*for Lilly*

out of gravity's pull  
we are lifted up!  
up!  
up!  
into the expansive unknown  
starcatchers in the dark  
we hunger for those pinpoints of brilliance  
to build our fortress of stars  
lit with the greatness of a million dreams  
an expansive universe of wishes  
we collect and preserve  
protecting their delicate luminosity  
from the dark hands of doubt  
and the harsh realities of a world  
so swollen with hate

and should these little lights dwindle  
we will cradle them in our palms  
and shape newborn dreams from the stardust  
breathing life anew out of darkness

## ***Rise of the Mermaids***

you don't need to hold your breath anymore  
*let it out*  
you've been hidden underwater but you're surfacing  
now  
an echo can still be heard  
even twenty thousand leagues beneath the sea  
something calling, luring, encouraging  
intoxicating and melodious if you ask me

sip on that  
each one unique pressed into sheet music of soul  
your notes won't sound like anything this world has ever  
known  
are you ready to pull it out?  
can you let it go?  
deep breath  
*now.*

break rules like waves  
remind everyone why it is you came  
position your mouth against the pale cheek of sky  
and leave a kiss, an energetic imprint  
tell her what it is you wish  
ask for wings  
*sing.*

the high pitch like a dog whistle fills my ears  
Pavlovian siren call  
what does your dream sound like?  
*it is coming.*

the inevitability  
is Aeolus and his breath propelling a lost and weathered  
ship to shore  
Atalanta hunting down stories, insatiable for more

Bastet prowling for your most powerful secrets  
moving stealthily between shapeshifting scenes  
a quiet shuffling  
morphing into the low hum and rush of drums  
Daedalus hammering  
sparks flying  
meticulously redesigning  
liftoff  
*weightless*

soar so close to the sun this time  
he is burned by your own light  
*let it out*  
soar so close to the sun this time  
you become him

## A32

I will always pick the window seat, content  
to stare for hours tucked into the bend of time

pondering the magnificence of the universe  
stretching on in all directions

shapeshifting on a loop  
transfigured and transformed

a vast field of snow one moment  
an endless ocean of sky the next

puffs of clouds suspended in brilliant blue  
like bobbing helium balloons

casting ink blots of thoughtful shadows  
on the patchwork earth below

a blindingly bright reflection  
of the luminescence of the soul

## *Sand Pebble House*

from the water  
the six-story beach condo at night looks like a doll's house  
I see lights on in some of the rooms  
enough to glimpse silhouettes and shadows within  
but the majority are dark  
empty  
forgotten

I see a person, maybe a woman,  
standing at one of the windows  
I wonder if she sees me

I imagine most of the occupants are off with family this  
holiday weekend  
and those that remain are vacationers or vagabond  
wanderers  
like myself  
those too who have escaped to the coastline  
perhaps in search of riches  
the kind we can only find within ourselves

I see this building lit up and wonder  
who else might be in there right now  
thinking, dreaming, wanting  
who might be laughing and dancing  
who might be crying  
who might be surrounded by others  
who might be alone  
who might be sharing a bed  
and still feel a chasm of separation

I spin around in the water to face the vast blackness of  
night  
both of us now turned towards what lies beyond  
both of us waiting and believing

both of us refusing to give up on the North star  
and the hope and healing  
born from the tiniest drop of a single dream

and I can already tell from the way she is lingering –  
both of us  
filled with enough love  
to overflow the ocean in between



The following poem was compiled unexpectedly (as many of mine often are). I was sitting in a café, organizing this manuscript when I began overhearing snippets of conversation from the group of older women at the table next to me. They had a deck of tarot cards on the table and apparently gathered annually to pull cards for the new year as an act of faith and good fortune. A beautiful ritual.

“In the spirit of Barbara,” I heard one of the women say, as she opened the deck. My ears soon began selectively picking up bits of their conversation, which I quickly began typing for safekeeping, to follow where they would later lead me. The quoted italics below are pieces of that conversation that fluidly and effortlessly wove a poem from my fingers. I have no idea who Barbara is (or was), but I suspect she had something to do with all of this.

So this one is for her and for those women.  
Thank you for your unexpected magic.

### *In the Spirit of Barbara*

Late afternoon and I finally  
haul my laptop and writing materials from house to car  
make my way downtown to the Uncommon place  
I come to sometimes because it's quiet  
can hear myself think, ya know?

except today it's slightly more challenging  
says eyes here (screen), hands here (keys)  
ears – torn between  
the big band and bells on the stereo blaring post-  
Christmas music  
and the table of three older women chattering  
over two o'clock tarot in the middle of the coffee shop

their hum a little louder than the thump of drums backing  
soaring vocals  
still, I settle  
still, I hear it

*“In the spirit of Barbara”*  
the deck taken from its protective box  
the women brewing  
a little magic at the coffee shop, holding court  
this annual meeting to pull cards for the new year  
traditions among friends, among souls

I don’t look, too obvious – just listen  
imagine the cards are angelic and gilded  
lightweight, shiny foil squares  
the Sistine in a wise palm that knows much of love  
but believes there is always more to learn

*“This is such a wonderful game of chance”*  
that unmistakable shuffle  
the reverence of quiet connection  
sacred intention setting

*“What do I need to hear?”*  
the opening line cast  
far into some otherworldly majestic realm  
Go Fish for stars

A card for artistry:  
*“...part that really speaks to me is the bird of creativity.  
I can be so scattered right now in my creativity because  
there’s this thing in my head  
of you better do this and that and this. I want to slow down  
and focus on different media one at a time.”*  
*“I truly believe everyone is an artist – it’s just been  
squelched out of us.”*

A card for light:

*"I don't know what to do with it, but I love it."*

*"You want to be it."*

A card for believing:

*"This is something I need – faith"*

*"A new guitar and a new keyboard to teach myself music*

*–  
faith that I'll be able to feel it."*

I think

what magic, what chance

why I chose this café of all options

what brought me here

what brings us anywhere

the closing remarks of the group cut through

the last dregs of coffee gone cold at the bottom of my  
paper cup

illuminates the lifecycle of a poem that has become  
chapel:

*"We are all getting what we need."*

*"You have to let it go."*

*"Did you know she wrote a song about it?"*

Indeed.

She did.

## *The Magic of Rain*

*right as rain*

the rippling reflection of violet and magenta crepe myrtle  
trees

in sepia pools and puddles on concrete

an inverted memory made tangible in her whisper

liquid sagacity on skin sinking in

a bedtime story of hushed spirit

a thrush of benevolent songs

fine-tuned along the hoods of cars and pavement

the congregation of crystal dewdrops

resting on pews of verdant grass, clover, ferns

illuminating the sanctitude of their purity

the compassionate way

such rain brings a serene surrender

asks only for your ears

your eyes

your heart

a cleansing of every shard of sorrow

every grain of grief

a reprieve

a hope

a healing

*write as rain*

## *Quantum Superposition*

they said it wasn't possible

to be in two places at once

but how do you explain

the body summed up in geography

and the little corners we've carved out

while the heart breathes superimposed

over places we yearn to go

and the head makes a home among clouds?

## ***Boy, why are you crying?***

When they ask, “***Why am I crying at this?***”

I encourage it.

I applaud the loudest for the highly sensitives, the emotional creatives, the clash and boom storm-music soloists, the turning blood and guts to gold artists, the daringly and radically different, the tender neurodivergents, the believing in the unseen and speaking it into existence ageless children, the feeling the richness of all your feelings feelers.

So yes, my god my god, cry and keep crying. Spotlight that noticing with your firefly spark, your candle glow, your lighthouse beacon. *Cry at absolutely everything.*

Cry at the orchestra of sunrises and flowers tilted towards sky. Cry at first kisses and last goodbyes. Cry at the various stages of stars – shining, fading, falling. Cry at the symbolism of the moon in the epic of night. Cry at how impossibly beautiful and deeply tragic life is. Cry at the simplicities you have been gifted: breath, language, love.

Cry at the limping goose with the broken leg trying to catch up to the rest of the flock. Cry at the tiny brown moth whose life you saved when you carefully caught him in your bathroom and released him unharmed back into the wild. Cry at the three little girls in a line holding hands hiking the gravel path, toddling behind their mother like wide eyed ducklings. Cry at the enormity of every small thing because it's reflective – so too are you the patina aged copper pennies of long-awaited monumental change.

Cry because you value all creatures, the hierarchy erased. Cry because you know only love and will never understand hate. Cry because you still feel hope even

when drowning in despair. Cry because you repeatedly choose to be caring, generous and kind. Cry because you see beauty when others are incredulously blind.

Cry because there were too many times you couldn't. Cry because you're finally allowing yourself to. Cry because you know healing is not weakness. Cry because you're human.

Cry because this life is making meaning out of you.

## ***Let It Be***

everyone speaks to being on top of the world but have  
you seen it from the bottom?

let it be from bare earth, eyes cast towards Orion and the  
Little Dipper

from the sidewalk pointing out globed planets  
in an attempt to discern Jupiter from Mars billions of  
burning miles away

from curiouiser and curiouiser rabbit hole mazes  
deep beneath cracks in concrete opening into the  
antithesis of tunnel vision

from ground zero of the rubble of your smoldering past  
from the billowing future hoisted from the mast  
that knows how to harness the high seas of left and write  
at last

from the half sipped horizon of black caffeinated candor  
in a cup

from the hidden majesty beneath zebra striped iris petals  
folded over in a love drunk sigh

from the shade of the singing Canary and Phoenix palms  
in a silhouette kiss of sky

from the persistent resilient shoreline and her relentless  
restless waves

from beach grass meadows and vast painted desert  
spaces with more than enough room to roam

from new foundations formed from your own beautiful  
body that feels like home

we climb and scale and rush and run

just to reach the apex from the bluff

so savor those bold beginnings from the bottom

let the journey be enough

## *Happy to Serve You*

what is it that draws us into ourselves? and what extracts us?

the hustling morning whistles for my attention and we are suddenly swept in a rush

the comb as it moves feverishly, gathering my daughter's hair into a ponytail

the lunchbox packed fat and happy with cheese and apple slices

the shoes shoved onto feet and the overpowering mint slicked over teeth

the brown wool sweater with its woven image of a blue and white coffee cup pulled onto my body  
a familiar frustration, a comfortable itch

what is it we carry day in and day out?

tides washing up unto ourselves

moon-blistered and night-bristled by the unrelinquished hope

that morning might reveal what is it we missed

while we tarried too long and forgot

to flip the eggs, burnt the toast

busying ourselves on the inside of a "what if" world

despite my refusal and penchant for absentmindedness

I am dumped like the contents of my bag

the keys I can never find, the crumpled receipts I keep

the extra straws and napkins I grab

never really knowing why;

I never asked

another Monday slips into the chair opposite me at the table

notes the exposed chaos without commentary

sips the same coffee I can't seem to cut out of my life

a necessary ritual, simple magic



she is soft spoken in that regard

she tries, she tries  
a head nod, a you there, a quiet and kind reminder  
counted out like coins, patina prayers  
metallic minutiae of persistent wishes  
*what is the ordinary offering me?*

a long pause –  
*and will I take it?*

## ***Just a Seashell?!***

*for Shell – IYKYK ;)*

*how dare you!*

she is the sateen concavity of calcareous exoskeletons!  
a crescendo of tide pool melodies from harmonious  
waves!

Neptune's mixed media for painted summer shores!  
crustacean safe haven in violet uproars of thundering  
savage storms!

glittering trinkets and glowing treasures from loving  
Mother Earth!

sacred omens and beautiful blessings bedazzled in the  
sand

emerging and disappearing at will with Poseidon's  
sleight of hand!

a playful symphony of spiraled scallops in a butterflyed  
beach parade!

a mulluscan metaphorical ode to the first chapter of a  
name!

no, she is *never* a mere seashell;

do not refer to her as such!

and never, ever in conjunction

with such a word as *just*!

## *The Peace in the Piece*

I wake up and go walking along the canyon I call home  
all day I am gone  
picking desert marigolds and reading by the river  
learning to exhale like the wind  
holding the panorama of my life within this skin  
that only ever wanted to be held  
in the same way the heavens  
can cradle both the sun and moon at once  
so easily balancing the scales of sky

it is here  
I am swept up in the sanctity of earth and air  
and when I return  
the sunset tucks me in the four poster bed  
of an early evening awash in cinnamon and amber  
that yields to the unfolding infinite onyx night  
sparking in a show of celestial flair  
like tiny lamplighters in the dark

and though the hour is no longer golden  
I shall remain so  
and so  
I shall remain

## *Open to Interpretation*

days stacked in lucid translucence  
translucent orange blossom honey  
honeyed Florida sunshine  
sunshine in a square of garden  
gardens blooming thistle thoughts  
thought of you when I wrote this

this might seem like disjointed incidence  
simply speaking  
but go on  
I dare you to digest the significance

go on  
I dare you to find its meaning

## *Feeling Tense*

“I’m feeling a little tense today,” she said.

“I went to bed in the past  
and woke up in the present  
but I’m still dreaming of the future.”

## *A Season of Change and a Reason to Write*

a cloud stops by and I get on  
because I am curious where she will carry me  
she asks me  
“if you could go anywhere right now, anywhere at all,  
do anything, anything at all,  
where would it be?  
what would it be like?”

I settle into her fluffy silver and blue puffs  
pulling them closer around my body like a down  
comforter  
and bury myself in a dream  
she leads me to a beach where the sun is just beginning  
to sing  
in a spectacle of soft orange and amber  
dancing and sparkling across blue and purple waves  
a familiar feeling for a familiar day: warm but not hot  
the kind of warmth that permeates every vein and every  
organ  
like a slow gentle melt from the inside

here  
a group of us are having brunch on the beach –  
everyone seated on multicolored cushions  
gathered around a low lace-covered mahogany table  
with silver domed platters and mismatched china  
toile porcelain and silver and brass spoons and forks  
among flower petals scattered like confetti

I smell the food before I even see it: butter, honey,  
cinnamon  
towers of stacked biscuits in a pool of blueberry  
preserves  
warm banana brioche French toast  
sparkling cider pouring into coupes

slices of crusty baguette heaped with spiced eggs  
the golden yolk gently pooling out

I take my seat at the head of the table  
nestled against a stack of vintage pink and white striped  
hat boxes

I open the largest one and crown myself:  
a fascinator made from an impressionist painting –  
seafoam, peach, pale pink and powder blue  
a pastoral scene where roses and birds all hum a  
different tune  
in a crescendo of a promising spring  
this place I'm trying to reach

the brushstrokes give way to velvet  
give way to silk  
give way to satin in a spiraling flock of origami birds  
taking flight from the foundation of paint

as I clip it to the side of my amethyst hair  
my dress changes: lilac chiffon draped sleeves  
and fabric flowing down past my feet  
the whole thing covered in a hundred tiny purple lilies

I feel like Monet if he were his own painting  
I feel like the cloud I rode in on  
I feel like a rusty chest that waited patiently for decades  
at the bottom of the sea until it was finally found  
a million rubies and sapphires all spilling out  
I feel like an emerald-skinned mermaid surfacing for the  
first time  
I feel like the rainbow ombre shine and silver sheen of  
an oil slick  
I feel like the satisfying final line of a stanza

I gently tug at one of the birds from my hat and pluck it  
from the others

she rests gently in my palm, motionless  
I kiss each of her wings and whisper a prayer over her  
beak

she begins to breathe  
she beats her wings and takes off  
flitting around the other guests who begin to don their  
hats  
each one shaped from my own mind:  
the caramel fedora dripping with streaks of melted  
chocolate  
anointed with a four-foot single owl feather;  
the wide brim hat covered in pink fur  
two tiny rhinestone cat ears poised on the top  
and a magenta racoon tail cascading down the back;  
fascinators of verdant green and peacock blue  
overflowing with deep plum and magenta ostrich  
feathers and strands of ribbon;  
a top hat made entirely of gingerbread with pink and  
white frosting;  
an oversized lemon rose splattered with pastel paint  
a tiny nest of orange and pink canaries peeking from the  
petals

we clink our glasses  
and I make a toast as I eat the same:  
a perfectly browned slice of warm, thick sourdough,  
slathered in honey  
I take a bite and it tastes like imagination  
six flavors melting together in harmony all at once;  
something that looks sweet but tastes savory  
before changing back to sweet

the slice becomes cake  
indulgent chocolate with raspberry sauce, garnished with  
mint  
resting upon the plate

I take another bite and savor it  
feeling the velvet caress my tongue  
like the hopeful moments filling my head  
like the love flooding my heart

I raise my glass in a salute to sky  
grateful that little cloud stopped by  
“to the dreamers,” I say, tears welling in my eyes,  
“*you have always been my why.*”



## *The Persistence and Perspective of Gypsophila*

The farmhouse table is strewn with dried flowers: baby's breath, lavender, and buttercup ranunculus bundled in glass vases. Quicksand roses the color of well-loved paper spilling over the top of the antique typewriter. Scattered scarlet petals and loose leaves awaiting the artist to arrange them onto canvas or into frames, to be married with sketches and faces and figures. To be transfigured, transformed. To be reborn.

You ask why I keep "*dead flowers*," stating they are not beautiful. And in that moment, I realize how vastly different our perspectives are. I am astonished that one could look at a pressed daisy or a dried bundle and not marvel at her wonder; how she was once an elegant bouquet for a bride, an uplifting gift of hope for a grieving loved one, an affectionate display of thoughtfulness and acknowledgment in a single stem.

The beauty in a dried flower lies not in the once vibrant brilliance of her hue or her fragrant scent; not her ample blooms or her burgeoning petals presented in a show for sun; not her lively dance of dewy morning kisses or the way she plays maestro to a host of buzzing bees and chirping birds with the orchestration of her unfolding petals.

The magnificence of the *dead flower* is that her beauty, her elegance, her grace and splendor are all perfectly preserved – that she is not dead at all. She is very much alive: immortal, in fact. She is poetry, emotion, and wisdom encapsulated as a singular moment in time.

*You* may look at the faded hue of her smile and see a decaying thing. *I* look at her faded hue and still see her as she once existed. I look at her and listen.

The miracle of the dried flower is that she asks simply to be loved, not only for what she once was, but even more so for what she has become.

## *Green Noise*

It was bound to happen eventually  
you had to break the house in somehow  
you knew this was coming  
you've been here before  
the bathroom floor and deep breaths over radio silence  
now every pothos and succulent knows  
the familiar sting of stomach pins and needles  
the process of how butterflies become blisters  
making the shower scald feel like a caress  
oh, but listen and lean in a little closer  
let me tell you a secret all the wise ones know  
sometimes it gets worse before it gets better  
but the best part is  
it always does  
get better, I mean  
because grief  
it cannot survive in a body like yours for long  
light always finds a way  
and if you're patient,  
the rain will even teach you to dance

## *If at first you don't succeed (part I)*

7 what if life can be distilled by saying  
11 it's a paint by numbers game  
9 blank shapes filled with colors of our  
6 choosing until the image renders itself  
2 complete and sometimes we pick hopscotch  
12 instead of cereal box  
10 make a mess, move outside the confined  
6 borders provided  
3 each finger joining cracked pepper with  
3 whisper, summer peach with pine forest  
9 fossil becomes riverbend  
11 changing course where we fall  
4 in love with the stars because we've  
6 mastered backstroke, shavasana, astronomy  
10 **look up**  
5 notice how night makes the skin glow  
1 a series of choosing  
7 creating in service to the soul  
12 trial and error and fudging the rules  
12 out of order becomes backwards book  
8 a line a circle an ending a beginning  
3 my hands flipping open every paint pot  
11 enamored with the sound of the lid  
6 snapping open closed open pop  
6 pinky dip drop smear streak dot dot  
12 paint dollop claiming the territory of my fingerprint  
3 calling itself mine just as I keep rearranging the shades  
2 searching for the one without a name  
1 who will write my own across the top

## *Change Seats (part II)*

12 paint dollop claiming the territory of my fingerprint  
3 calling itself mine just as I keep rearranging the shades  
12 out of order becomes backwards book  
11 changing course where we fall  
12 trial and error and fudging the rules  
3 my hands flipping open every paint pot  
6 pinky dip drop smear streak dot dot  
6 snapping open closed open pop  
11 enamored with the sound of the lid  
9 blank shapes filled with colors of our  
6 choosing until the image renders itself  
3 whisper, summer peach with pine forest  
9 fossil becomes riverbend  
3 each finger joining cracked pepper with  
6 borders provided  
10 make a mess, move outside the confined  
2 searching for the one without a name  
1 who will write my own across the top  
8 a line a circle an ending a beginning  
5 notice how night makes the skin glow  
2 complete and sometimes we pick hopscotch  
12 instead of cereal box  
11 it's a paint by numbers game  
1 a series of choosing  
7 creating in service to the soul  
4 in love with the stars because we've  
6 mastered backstroke, shavasana, astronomy  
7 what if life can be distilled by saying  
10 *look up*

## *Untold*

there is a bottleneck of stories just clamoring to get out

I can sense them  
roaring, snarling, slinking, trumpeting,  
flapping, squawking, stamping, bleating,  
bellowing, growling, laughing, howling

for now  
I will feed them bare-handed between the bars of the  
cage  
these morsels and bits of magic that I've made

for now  
I will keep persistently tinkering and toiling away  
forging freedom's key for their inevitable escape

soon  
I will grant them all asylum on the page

## *Art class from the point of a pen*

It's iconic, isn't it? Van Gogh's *Starry Night* of soul, a thousand swirling lights burning up through his body, exposing the divine.

It makes an impression for a reason. He created something beautiful from an asylum, from such a tortuous, dark place and isn't that the most human thing there is? To persevere through the pain and paint the night and take the calloused and bloodied red and turn it into diaphanous boundless blue? To pluck stars like guitar strings and make them sing? It makes you think, we're all in some sort of asylum here, aren't we?

Some are still there, some have escaped, and some are just now learning to shape the key with paint but if Van Gogh can turn *that* into *this* then maybe we can look a little harder within to find out what our own starry night is, to do the bravest thing we can think of, and to me...that is to believe.

To believe that the asylum can become sanctuary, can transform into the blinding luminosity of svelte moon-glow soft to the touch and infinite planetary brilliance in present moments strung like freshwater pearls from words that have ceased to seethe and burn but have become cool melted mercury, quicksilver tongues no longer collecting dust, sharpened by unyieldingly patient trust, carving out windows from the steel cages that imprisoned us.

A vision is a precious commodity, a rapturous rarity, a beauty to behold and when it is birthed from the expansive universe of a wild mind that is not afraid to go there, the best thing to do here is share and share alike so that a single starry night can go forth and multiply as blissfully brighter days; so that pain is no longer the currency exchanged; so that paint on canvas can exist in every kind

of shade; so that love, hope and truth are the famished flames that consume and the asylum is forever changed.

What is a starry night if not an honest, awestruck poem painted from our deepest pain?

Are you willing to get messy? Can you be covered in that paint?

Van Gogh made it famous...*but it is you that makes it brave.*



***Wild Things go all kinds of places, but they  
always end up here***

a Wild Fantastic  
yes, I've mentioned this place before  
so step inside (the rhyme is fine)  
if you want to hear some more

such an imaginative sphere  
there in the back pocket of mind like a pool table  
(if it were a water bed)  
fluidity and flow  
waiting for your shoot-and-strike next big move

those who wander here do not feast of fear  
only love working from the inside out  
outer space inversion  
topsy turvy creativity coercion one cannot control  
to paint, to sing, to dance is the natural rhythm  
(the only one we know)

think a shimmering silver assemblage  
that grows hungry for love that lasts  
think Eden think Elysium  
think every wonder of the world contained  
in a maze of copper catacombs

the discovery *is* the game  
and the latest craze is called *questioning*  
is called *noticing*  
is called *waiting*

draw the medicine from your brain  
the spiraled tangled mass of words  
of visions of ideas  
like birds of prey out on the prowl

look out now!  
to catch you must be quick!  
you must *allow, allow, allow*.

## *Late for bed*

I read at the riverbank until the sun goes down,  
tucked in for the night but I  
am still not tired. My wilder parts want  
to swallow dawn but it's much too far down  
from here and besides I have a dog to let out,  
so for now I linger, leaving pieces of me behind  
on these rocks; skipping poems like worn stones  
into the evening waves. I gather  
my things and eventually make the hike  
back to the parking lot; drive the thirty minutes home;  
unlock the door; greet the dog;  
run the bath.

I relax and allow:  
thoughts, reflection, memories;  
dab the rose oil on my hips,  
place a few drops on my wrists,  
climb into bed with Pablo and Plath –  
I can never choose just one.

They coerce  
my eyes to flutter closed but my mind and I  
wander awestruck and faith filled –  
we are still not tired.

There is too much life to be lived.  
There is too much love to be given.

***Falling in love with the world is like this***

*after "Breaking Trance" by Mark Nepo*

feeling the breeze through the open bathroom window as  
it kisses my wet skin; I kiss back  
a displaced but familiar scent hiking the middle of a  
forest in the Pacific Northwest  
watching a sunset from a rooftop deck in sweat pants  
and wool socks  
moss that feels springy underfoot  
dark mint chocolate melting on my tongue  
the slow bubbling caramelization of marshmallows on a  
rotating stick  
beach stargazing and painting your face in the sky  
the many forms of flame: bonfires, birthday candles,  
passion  
waking up to a chilly cabin room when I'm covered in  
flannel and a quilt  
museums with floor to ceiling masterpieces and benches  
positioned in front of frescos  
napping in an apple orchard at the turning point of fall  
saying goodbye, leaving for eleven days, and feeling  
the all-encompassing warmth of missing someone from  
2,133 miles away  
the welcome home embrace  
gratitude for the many ways I've changed  
feeding feelings to attentive ears  
peeling oranges and sucking the juice from each slice  
one hand softly reaching for another's  
hearts connecting: love filling every crevice of this life

***I plant myself in a poem and she grows roots. Before long, I have an entire grove***

Seek the sacred.

She is there, hiding in plain sight waiting for you to arrive. At morning's first light, she is there, lovingly wiping the sleep from your eyes and handing you her own, a glistening lens of rainbow fractal prisms in which to view the world.

This kind of perspective has the magical ability to transform: everything is a lesson, everything is a metaphor, everything is a simile exactly like the one hanging from your lips in a good morning kiss. Mornings are the highest caliber of sanctity. This is the most important meal of the day for the mind, where she can so easily reflect and rewind, without being too shrouded in ominous London fog. Mornings are half-drunk caramel-colored cups of coffee with a trail of scattered cinnamon already making shapes and stories along the inside of the rim: a horizon of spotted mountains, a stippled crescent moon, a secret language told entirely in constellations. Mornings are warming thoughts of someone's image materializing in your head, how so easily you can conjure their eyes or their heart or their scent. Mornings are bowlfuls of freshly washed berries with an indulgent dollop of whipped cream and a shower of sprinkles because *why not celebrate a Monday?*

In the mid-afternoon, treat it as if it were a flashing yellow stoplight and a Children At Play sign: *slow*. We so eagerly wish to escape the cage of the day and before we know it, she is gone in a flash. A disappearing act you can never get back, when afternoons are the very definition of magic. Afternoons can be many colors besides golden and

in fact, even the drab gray and black ones are some of the most wonderful. Think of rain on a roof, think of thunder outside illuminating the storm within you. There is beauty there, too. Think of a sky in the brightest shade of blue. Think of picnic blankets on grass and reading beneath a tree and the spirit softening to new possibilities. Think of the view from the top of the parking garage. Think of pick-me-up lattes and hot buttered croissants. Afternoons are surprise texts and the anticipation of waiting for a face and an embrace. Afternoons are the parade before nightfall's Broadway play.

Oh, and isn't she a show, indeed! In the early evening, remove your shoes and dip your toes into the gentle flow of cool water in the creek. Catch the sunlight bowing to the earth as she stretches her rays like arms through an audience of oaks. Listen as the curtain of night goes up and the performance begins with every cicada crooning and each speckled frog croaking. Evenings are pure poetry to which my own could never rival. Evenings are soul revival at the church of shower steam. Evenings are cups of aromatic hibiscus tea. Evenings are a hundred good feelings moving through every small moment of intimacy, especially every time we hold hands just to make sure there is something still there to hold on to. Evenings are practicing my words aloud and imbuing every sound with intentional emotion that stands out, proof that magic abounds, that *the sacred is always around*.

I lead with my voice. The throat knows the way.

And if I can't carry a tune in a bucket, I'll put a poem in its place.

## *Because If It Does Not*

does it not make your mind writhe and spiral and sing?  
does it not elevate you to places you've never been?  
does it not lead you into the forest, encouraging you to  
get lost?  
does it not quietly cradle the parts of you that hurt the  
most?  
does it not burn you in the best way?  
does it not pump you full of purpose?  
does it not say your name like a sacred incantation?  
does it not spill the very contents of your cognition just  
to see the mess it makes on the floor?  
does it not send you running to define unfamiliar words  
like you're feeding a nest of baby birds, hungering for  
grammar and punctuation?  
does it not shove you into a time machine and mash  
buttons on the keypad,  
content not to know the destination?  
does it not punch holes in your flesh like a sieve and let  
the grief seep out?  
does it not run its fingers through that sorrow and turn it  
into the Mona Lisa?  
does it not hold a megaphone to your ear like a call to  
prayer?  
does it not light the pyre of every old version of yourself  
ready and willing to commit such arson?  
does it not dive into the cobalt abyss and still manage to  
emerge with gems each time?  
does it not magnetize beings to your message, longing to  
be soothed by the sounds  
cresting quietly over alliterated scintillated syllables?  
does it not connect, reveal, burn, heal, alchemize,  
theorize,  
aggrandize, expand, contract, breathe and bleed?  
does it not taste like plump and ripened infinity?  
does it not reflect to you your own all-encompassing

divinity?

does it not illuminate the verities of humanity in the  
boldest, most mysterious way?

does it not brew a cathartic and medicinal tonic  
from letters steeped in questions of why you came?

does it not remind you just how much you were always  
absolutely

irrefutably

positively whole?

then friend,

it simply isn't true writing

if it does not feed your soul



## *Heard it in a Dream*

The opposite of Parseltongue is Flowermouth, and I am fluent. It is the utterance of goodness, where every word is nectared sustenance and bees buzz eternal in a heart-dance heady hum. Press your ear to the petal and she'll kiss you in a whisper. Noise is what happens in the background when you aren't paying attention, but *sound* is what wakes us up and draws us toward ourselves. *Can you listen closer?*

Love is its own language, yes, but Flowermouth is something else entirely. It is the ability to draw you near with only a glance, turn silt to gold, ash to rose, despair to hope. It is how I speak when spoken to, even more so when no one's listening, sing when flying solo, alchemize every kind of stubborn pain, conjure change from a groggy dream. Allow me to explain.

In Flowermouth, *angeline* is a word that is both noun and adjective, used interchangeably, meaning "innocent artist." Not *angelic* like "exceptionally kind or sweet" but say it with me – *an-gel-ine*. In Greek, it means messenger of God, but I prefer...messenger of truth, of heart, of beginnings. Perhaps you reject that portion entirely, "*god*," it is not important but at least worth the mention. After all, the Greeks were very wise, but the definition to which I will now describe refers to a similar kind of kindness, innocence, purity. Not in a religious sense – no not at all, but an artistic one.

You see, all artists are messengers.

When we speak and say, "They are angeline," we mean they are a painter of soul, a music maker of their innermost messages with the purest of intentions, a curator of ethereal cognition and a powerful voice for

change. Their art does not come *from* but *through*. As above, so below, they are a receptacle for truth and it pools and pours and spills.

*Angeline* is swearing allegiance to your soul, ferociously committing to your own growth, diving headfirst into the mysterious depths on the unknown. *Angeline*, absolved of shame and guilt for they have shed it many times, an honest and just student of humanity who chose life to consider its complexity and unearth a deeper meaning. Decided to do just that – teach, sing, paint, proclaim of all that they have found, of all that they have learned. To feed the throngs of thrashing hungry baby birds whose minds have not yet hatched, whose hearts do not yet know kindness. To invite and invoke. To find and share joy. To plant genesis in a poem.

Love, release the old stories from your ribs, and let the sun hold you open. Let it grow you. Let it pour from your piano, your paintbrush, your pen. Catalogue every new memorable experience, every wonderful thing you will ever love. Become a seasoned scholar of Flowermouth, evergreen and angeline in perpetuity.

Gatherer of hope and other beautiful things, bearer of the light your soul brings, songbird of the wonder your voice sings – *you*, your hallowed highness, are the precise messenger this world needs.

## *Heritage*

*for my ancestors*

the miniature Jewish prayer book, worn and weathered  
from the refuge of his back pocket  
all those long nights spent in a war that wasn't concerned  
with the love he left back home  
sent letters instead  
with the fringe satin pillow cover  
she placed at the coveted center of the bed  
letting his memory, his words  
hold her when his arms could not

the porcelain geisha with the broken hand  
the painted paper fans  
trinkets of far off lands she longed to go  
a miniature violet vase in a Versailles scene  
an amber glass elephant with his trunk proudly in the air  
a Viennese dish with two waltzing lovers  
she loved to surround herself with beautiful things  
as I do now with the picture of her youth  
encased in sterling silver  
sitting tandem with her treasures

their memories have faded through the years  
faces harder to recall  
the corners furling with sepia tones blurring  
and the lines of their smiles a little less defined  
but the feeling lingers  
the stories remain true  
effortless and ever-present  
the love  
eternally coming through

## ***When can we do that again?!***

I read a meme today that said  
“Due to personal reasons, I will not be reincarnating on  
earth again”  
and I laughed and said with conviction  
“Oh, I absolutely will!”

so I offer you this:

be in love with life  
be in love with turning everything into an adventure  
making tea becomes a countertop lecture  
on the contemplation of mass-produced wisdom printed  
on a sachet  
going for a walk becomes a hunt for leaves in the shape  
of hearts  
and flowers that hold encyclopedias of knowledge  
even the 9 to 5 grind becomes a NASA countdown  
until you can rocket out of those doors and into waiting  
arms

be in love with laughing  
until it physically hurts in the most beautiful way  
with smiling even through the rain  
with crying at some point every single day –  
to let everything you’ve been holding in finally escape

be in love with the luminous moon in her darkest night  
and the blinding sun at his brightest and boldest  
and the way they need each other to make sense  
be in love with the words that come  
when you have waited an entire week for them to show  
up  
when it only took ten minutes of quiet and stillness  
to open those floodgates and be swept away  
be in love with learning the hard way

be in love  
with the shape of your changing body dancing naked  
through the house  
while eating handfuls of popcorn straight from the bag  
be in love with showering to music at full blast  
be in love with simplicity:  
phones in airplane mode  
spending all day doing nothing  
the unmistakable, intoxicating smell of books

be in love with change and risk  
be in love with hope  
be in love with new perspective

be in love with the way a dress gently caresses every curve  
and be in love with acceptance when it doesn't  
be in love with brightening someone's day  
with witnessing their growth  
with the changing definition of "home"  
with the art of letting go

be in love with the kind words from friends when your  
world  
feels like it's coming to a burning, abrupt end  
be in love with the concept of phoenixes  
of fire  
of birth  
of death  
be in love with transcendence  
be in love with how a single phone call or a text  
can so easily reestablish connection

be in love with winter:  
the crispness of morning and the crackling fireplace  
the patterns made from frost on windowpanes  
the emanating warmth from an extended embrace

after weeks of not seeing their face  
be in love with the death in all things  
before new life can take its place

be in love with the intensity of every sense:  
velvet palms clasped tight  
soft kisses in painted moonlight  
fragrant blossoms singing at your bedside  
be in love with those same flowers long after they have  
died  
be in love with crying  
be in love with exhales and sighing  
be in love with the process of refreshing  
redlining  
redefining

be in love with fireflies coming alive at dusk  
be in love with a smile lighting you up  
be in love with the pause you are offered every time you  
feel stuck  
be in love with thunderstorms and the lessons revealed in  
rain  
be in love with water in every form for cleansing such  
deeply rooted pain  
be in love with the way 4:00 pm light looks  
coming through the blinds of a one room beach efficiency  
and the sand that inevitably finds its way into everything:  
between each toe even though you rinsed them clean  
before coming inside  
sprinkled along the bedsheets  
clinging desperately to every article of clothing  
refusing to be shaken  
be in love with that sand and its stubborn determination

fall in love over and over and over again  
with life  
with things

with people  
with places

let every granule of that love come through  
don't brush it away  
*keep falling in love with you*

## *Thought Bubbles You Can See*

I like to write poems  
love letters to no one, really  
on the backs of paint chips at the hardware store  
tucked in the title pages of bestsellers  
front and center  
on the coveted main entrance table  
scrawl quotes on little slips of paper  
left haphazardly around town  
affirmations on post-its  
stuck to sleek glass reflections  
and lipstick outline smiles  
when you just need one to borrow  
graffiti hearts and grand slam truth  
on the inside stall doors of gas station bathrooms  
doodle caricature cartoons  
filling every inch of cardstock squares  
rewrite the lucky lotto numbers on fortune cookie slips  
exclamation marks on extra-large tips  
conjure some simple magic  
when the earliest part of a day  
so soon  
begins to rip  
and the only thing left to hold on to  
is knowing somewhere, a kind stranger  
is holding on to you



## ***True friendship is pointing out each other's chin hairs***

Is mentioning that one elusive piece of spinach between her teeth when she smiles that no one else was brave enough to; is texting at midnight to make sure her flight safely landed; is gathering emergency contacts and addresses when she solo travels; is offering the coveted final bite of sticky toffee pudding; is singing Wannabe down every Backstreet; is saying “that’s what she said” and erupting in fits of laughter because she actually did, in fact, say it; is paying her way with no expectation in exchange only for her joy; is encouraging the tears over everything: starfish, sunsets, men; is texting her from upstairs that you need a ten minute hug; is hiking together far ahead of the rest; is giving constructive feedback and honest opinions; is name dropping her in a podcast; is writing her a poem; is reaching out when *mother* becomes too nuanced and difficult; is *sistering* by supporting, by encouraging, by connecting over the humanness of it all.

## *This Came Out of Nowhere*

waking up the muse is a quiet stirring  
a subtle whirring of hummingbird wings  
defying gravity in the concavity of carnivorous minds  
Venus fly traps of a different kind  
slow motion shut-ins as I run from room to room  
opening every window in this house  
with its one floorboard that continually creaks  
refusing to remain silent  
this seam ripper across stitched lips spilling blue ink  
from an exploding pen from thoughts chewed on too  
much  
like bitten half-moon fingernails pressed  
into old hands made new again  
tracing and replacing the dinosaur DOS programming  
that just couldn't compute anymore  
as if certain identities were always  
planned obsolescence

the heart becomes the cipher of an ancient hieroglyphic  
spirit  
gulping secrets down slow just to rewrite their stories  
freed from a gilded sarcophagus that was only ever good  
for gazing  
feeding the eyes rather than the mind  
shades the endings in brilliant acrylics instead of hand-  
me-down grays  
and all those parts that couldn't stay dissolve into  
pixelated punctuation  
carried off by the contour of a copper ingenue  
who sits at her typewriter at the back of my brain  
and pushes the phrase of the day up through my throat  
just to watch the inner mechanics I can't see  
light up like a pinball machine ping ping pinging  
all the right words in effortless timing  
senseless until

the hour is ten steps in the past and patience  
transfigures confusion  
to clarity  
at last

## ***In All Things***

I used to think love only a summer's day  
a romcom  
a Louisville slugger  
battin' a thousand home runs  
what the fairytales  
said it was

but this too – is *this* not also *that*?  
to be madly in love with the world

and the world

w h i s p e r s      back

## ***Master Potter***

You are different and I like that  
you hold perspective like wet clay on the wheel  
and it whirs round and round  
your fingers lightly trailing lines  
the mass taking shape

you lean in, make it say something  
make it sing

sometimes that something collapses  
and there you go  
whirring it round again

## *Are You Coming?*

there are numerous ways  
to get to the places you've been trying to go  
for a reeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeeally long time  
and don't you think maybe now  
you owe it to yourself to try?

keep going

there are moments you don't know yet  
like safe passage as you fumble your way  
across a train trestle in a tornado  
...on roller skates  
...*blindfolded*

but if you pull the light from your chest  
wrap your worth up in words  
and tie it taught to the tail end of a rogue wild thought  
you can sail all the way down  
where the track ends and possibility begins  
carried off far away from this place  
on a song and a thousand stories  
because *that's* ingenuity  
*that's* vulnerability and visibility  
bravery and beauty  
*that's* transforming the mechanics of your mind  
into a first class flight  
to see what's been patiently waiting for you  
just there on the other side

so ignore the railroad ties  
that seem to fall from the sky  
and let your god or mine  
climb inside your obtuse mind  
and be ready  
when both of them show up at the same time

with cans of hairspray  
...and a lighter  
(I bet you can imagine what comes next)

you see  
people like us  
were never waiting on a train  
because the places we're going  
could never be reached by following tracks

we were always destined  
to forge our own path

## *She is like a Walking Poem*

stay with me, here, she says,  
stay with me as I drown in rushing rivers of letters that  
destroy and create  
in the lightning storm of inspiration that strikes way  
more than twice  
and the softest touch of sensual syllables  
with a slow-motion caress in lullaby breath

allow me to feed you the color canary yellow  
how she is tart at times and others  
a frothing wave of smooth clotted cream riding an ocean  
of tongue  
borrow these brown eyes and try them on so you can see  
the entire universe on the opalescent interior of a single  
seashell  
her trumpeting uniqueness of striations and lyrical lines  
like rays of sun  
or the Renoir in a rose and the Monet in a marigold  
how the streaks of color sing in operatic harmony  
and oh! the atlas inscribed on my palms  
the worlds they have seen and the tales they have told

allow these words to find you and write you back to life  
hold them  
do not crush them  
stay with me and open  
let me be your walking poem

***Two full droppers administered before bed:  
1 for the heart and 1 for the head***

I drop in, I root down; reaching through dirt and crust; anchored in love; a holy connection between two heavenly bodies: stardust flesh and eternal earth; from this space I see what I need, what calls to me through divinely guided vibration and energetic frequency; protected, held, safe, seen. I feel the words and savor each one as I speak: uncharted waters of open conversation; eyes looking *at* instead of *through*; morning light pooling in the room; two caramel macchiatos between friends from a tangerine sky at 7:00 am; bare feet on damp grass; the language of butterflies; a child's tiny hand clasping your own; a tinny voice whispering, "*Mama*"; rose petal and lavender bubble baths by candlelight; the amber glow of two Himalayan salt lamps; incense with scents of "courage" "patience" and "surrender"; soft instrumental music on the stereo; gentle stretching; cups of steaming kava tea with a touch too much turmeric; a familiar smile; chewing on the next chapter of a lighthearted novel; one hand resting on a snoring's dog's back as you sleep; keeping the towering oak doors of your heart propped open; watching every bit of dazzling light swell; poem after poem, all written as exquisite spells. ***Yes, there you are. All is well.***



## *An ahem and an amen*

you are the blinding mess god made  
when she rolled the sun along her palms  
split passion and fire in two  
sliced like a beautiful piece of ripened fruit  
with the saber of her own intention

squeezed every last bit of you to pulp and rind  
and then birthed you anew into the soaking dawn

now when you open your mouth, she says  
the sun will spill out and the world  
will have no choice but to drink

## ***When You Love A Poet***

when you love a poet  
she will sing you to sleep with her words  
and wake you in the kind of lyrical gaze  
that sparks magic under your skin  
she loves hard and feels things so deeply  
that it generates its own kind of heat  
and speaks in magnetic soliloquy  
her thoughts rhyme sometimes  
and she will never tire of describing  
the way your eyes look in the moonlight  
or how your touch is like Orpheus  
leading her back from the dead  
resurrected in your song and lured into bed  
a poet will cherish your love  
and wear it in an amulet around her neck  
just to feel the infinity between two bodies  
at any moment  
the sheer thought of you  
evoking euphoria like watercolors  
bleeding into being  
and words endlessly spilling  
from the place where inspiration  
makes love to passion  
because a poet knows  
we  
are more than carbon  
more than skin and breath and bones  
that we  
are daydreams on repeat wrapped in silk sheets  
and open hearts that can see in the dark  
that we  
are really just creation  
imitating art

## *The Ghost in the Attic*

I lived in a haunted house for a long time  
blackout curtains drawn, windows painted shut  
no stranger to luna moths and the pallid glow of moon  
through curtains thick with dust

I lived in the library  
slept on a bed of books  
shoved far too many things in an art box attic  
I locked every other room except those two  
and always avoided the hall of mirrors

I hung a single painting above the mantel –  
Gustav Klimt's *The Kiss*  
it was a strange and faint remembrance  
a flickering past life premonition  
a reminder my story wasn't finished

I built a fire as questions wandered in  
began burning away the cobwebs:  
what is it like to be loved that much?  
what is it like to be held in that way?  
what is it like to recognize the right thing and learn to  
stay?  
what is it like to expose your shadows to someone else's  
light?  
what is it like to not hold your breath all the time?  
what is it like to have a soft place to land?  
what is it like to exist exactly as you are?  
what is it like to love in high definition instead of from  
afar?  
what is it like to receive just as much as you give?  
what is it like to unlock, to release, to open from within?  
what is it like to live inside *The Kiss*?

plot twist

I can't share the rest of this  
not yet

*August* is still a work in progress  
and even I  
don't know how it will end

## *Vesuvius, meet Venus*

The heart and mind work in tandem now. The heart, with her voracious appetite for adventure, beauty, love; she who only wants to feel and breathe and be. The mind with her constant curiosity now spoon-feeds honeyed ideas to the insatiable heart: a nibble of mountain, a bit of canyon, a bite of coastline. *Maybe we could go*, she suggests. *Maybe we can make this work*.

The heart never thinks twice. She just does as she pleases, knowing the rewards far exceed any risk. The mind, though inquisitive as she is, sometimes broods and bubbles entirely too much, lingering and simmering on a shore of ideas. She wants nothing more than to dive into beaming oceans at sunrise, dance naked beneath the singing stars, bury herself in the outstretched arms of a beach, but there are times even she cannot fathom such freedom.

Too burned by the hot eye of past, too calloused by the gritty mouth of grief, too weathered by the relentless downpour of pain. She learned it was not safe to love or take or want, and withdrew into her rough sketches and unfinished drawings, content to rest in the rogue renderings of imagination for just a little while longer.

But Venus makes her home among the most resilient of hearts and knows only those handfuls of exact words that so beautifully fit into each ventricle: *want, take, love*. Such a goddess within an eternal abode never leaves the Vesuvius mind to smolder alone.

Born of sea, she keeps coming back for every part of me.  
And for her, I would drown endlessly.  
For her, the adventure of love beckons eternally.

## *Orchestra of Earth*

the Moon married Night in a ceremony of silver light  
fawning all over the silent Serengeti plains  
as that scorched earth began to rouse and wake  
dirt churned from the percussion of hooves  
herds of stargazing gazelles  
exuberant elephants rampaging on parade  
trumpeters with trunks poised beneath the sky in praise  
a baritone bellow of each lion's pride  
the rushing woodwinds of birds with wings spread wide  
every music note falling in glory on high  
from every agape uproarious mouth  
on the rapturous eve  
the earth gave birth to sound

## ***The Image Appears: A Portraiture Study in Color***

The Dalí exhibit is a strange one but what did I expect  
I too echo the sentiment when  
the darkroom technique of my story develops  
slow in the room's shadowed red

watch as I summon the soul through the camera lens  
it is a simple matter of positioning you see?  
both of us contrapposto closer to paper  
we both know how to bear such weight by now, don't  
we?

our undoing renders this magic  
the chemicals in us turning to fluorescent ink  
intentional unparalleled heartspeak  
uninhabited fragments of nature  
untamable elemental forces

we appear not *in* but *as*  
Palermo, Italy and the boundless Tyrrhenian  
the heat of touch conjured from  
brilliant Mediterranean light  
free diving in the deep to gather meaning  
to kiss purpose on the mouth  
to experience the exhilaration and ecstasy  
of getting lost among our many sounds

here we rent a small seaside house  
move hall to hall and room to room  
coming alive at night in all our strange  
without the heavy constraint of time

we are sweet blue violets in a moon portrait  
fencing, wrestling with the sun by morning  
that same persistence of memory enshrining

both of us on film  
in letters  
as light

ah, here it comes!  
a dreamworld developing now in full spectrum color  
from what was only black and white



*How I imagine it's going  
for Jared*

I hope that your phone died, or  
got lost in a rogue wave, or  
that you're skirting the edge of all reason  
coasting careless down the interstate

I hope that you ghosted everyone again  
because you chased the sunset instead  
disappeared into burning amber, searching  
for pieces of peace buried under sand

I hope that you're writing poetry by the glow  
of a waning moon scanning the shore for gold  
and penning possibility the palest tinge of pink  
from the inside of shells washed along the shore

I hope that wherever you've escaped to  
carved out from some grand master plan  
that you're feeding your camera roll  
with sunrises and silhouettes of sandpipers  
seeing your spirit through *that* lens, noticing

your own brilliance on film in snippets and snapshots  
recognizing how your resilience is always growing  
stronger  
and enjoying the solitude  
for just a little while longer

## *Riverways*

there's a poem in my backyard and she is sinuous  
like the soft mouth of the Beauclair River  
wandering and winding into the wild  
beyond the parted lips of a hopeful horizon  
with a herd of lavender clouds galloping fiercely along  
her lines

her cattail arms announce to the sky in adoration  
“this! come dance with me!  
I am but life and breath and a simple beauty  
and you are born of the same!”

she speaks in baritone croaks and curious chirps  
and the crackle of campfire  
she has many faces that shift and change  
but always adorned in a dress of spectacular Spanish  
moss  
and when the night arrives for his rendezvous  
I hang around late for that romance  
I am swept away in the rush of their love  
how the firework fronds of her palms gently brush  
against stars  
trailing soft touch along raven skin of sky

I marvel at their effortless intimacy  
how they can simply be  
without even trying  
reveling in the few hours they share  
before her river parts ways again  
and he disappears into daylight

I read her love letter again and again  
my heart sighs

there's a poem in my backyard  
*and my god, she is wise*

## *The Floating Steps*

climbing *stairs*

autocorrects again:

*stars* that I scale; I am in

awe of those alluring stars;

they remind us that we are not

alone; that god or whatever you call

her is there; next to cleanliness where

you left her; wiped pristine in the mirror of

the bathroom; in the adventures on the bookshelf

in the bedroom; tangled in cotton sheets and sweaty

bodies; in the efficiency of every organ; in the calliope

music twinkling from the carousel; in the painted peeling

face of a wooden horse; in the way a small child climbs

a tree

again after falling, back in the saddle of courage and

bravery; in

her view from the bottom before she can see beyond the

canopy; I am

climbing and the stars remind me with each step, softly

whispering; *you*

*are not alone;*

*you are not alone.*

***The Queen escapes the provincial worker  
beasts, builds her own hive this time and  
watches it bloom in B-E-A-U-T-Y***

*The word is: pulchritudinous*

Can I please have the definition?

*Beautiful, attractive*

Origin?

*From the Latin word “pulchritudo” meaning “beauty”*

May I have it in a sentence?

*When she emerged from the dressing room in a floor  
length gown, she found her reflection to be quite  
pulchritudinous.*

Pulchritudinous: tears, rain, tempest – every word  
synonymous with falling water; the earliest part of  
morning when a dewy dahlia takes her first sip of sun;  
the black and yellow abdomen and diaphanous wings of  
royalty ruling entire kingdoms of leaves; blending colors  
and creating new shades of possibility; using the red pen  
to underline what still needs work; the first sentence of a  
new chapter; the Never Ending Story of metaphors;  
harmony between the roaring lion and the purring calico;  
the witch finally emerging from the wardrobe; clothes in  
a heap on the floor; bodies at rest; two tandem  
heartbeats; becoming; peace; ***pulchritudinous***

***The Dream Poet lives up to her name in a  
noun of the same***

give me your downtrodden  
give me your diminished  
give me your underdogs  
give me your overworked and your overlooked  
give me your starving minds and your yearning hearts  
give me your smallness and your scarcity  
seed it all with tiny drops of love  
just to watch it grow

give me your broken faithless belief  
and see how quickly  
it turns to hope

let me show you  
how to stitch a dream back to its soul

## *Spanish Lessons*

*Ahorita* is ambiguous Spanish for immediately.  
right away. swiftly. urgently.  
but also  
in a short while. it won't be long.  
soon, maybe later.  
*but if not now, then when?*

I am cutting into its sumptuous sections with a pastry  
knife  
my name inlaid ornate there on the silver handle  
plating the beautiful two as separate  
*ahora* – a tiered cake of now  
*ita* – a dainty slice of little  
*a little now*. a tiny moment.  
a small piece of present tense  
to have and to hold  
to savor all that is:

consider the cornflower, bucolic blue in a field of sprawl  
outnumbered yet makes its home in a ritual of ease  
consider mouse whiskers with specks of snow up close  
her tiny paws grasping the prize of shining seed  
consider the language of intuitive hands along piano  
keys  
paper, spine, skin – what do they say when they sing?  
consider the dollop of dream that becomes epoch  
a bashful hello leading to the heart thump fanfare of *I  
love you*  
consider the dirt under fingernails  
gifts from the garden as we go  
turning earth upside down  
making chasms from soil to peer into holes  
to plant to pull to weed to exhume  
consider the music of kettle whistle, paw skitter, baby  
laugh, breath

notes charted between ancient stars that reach our ears in  
an instant

consider this *little now* in her *very* in her *delicate* in  
her *shhh*, *wait*  
I think I hear it  
cheek brush, eyelash bat, palm kiss  
the fire crackle and harp pluck where feelings first arise  
the small space of plentiful patient *this*  
moving downstream as a single leaf  
humble as they come, an epic ivy climb into the rush of  
day  
doing what it does

we shape hummingbird wings from it  
something so fast we slow the speed of sound  
deconstruct *flight* into *float*  
our diverse iridescence makes the mark here  
looks ahead, arms outstretched  
the coming of dawn, covering us

when I say I am learning Spanish,  
*this* is what I mean



## *Beneath the Bridge*

It is the day after Tax Day and our offices are closed, so I have the day to myself. I think about the fact that it is a warm Wednesday in April, the middle of the workweek, the middle of spring, and I am lying here in a middle of my own, on the grass getting stoned just as March predicted; taking bites of a coconut passion fruit donut and staring up at the canopy of dancing leaves, noticing how the lower branches of one tree shake in the wind while the taller tree has branches of steel. I think about it as a metaphor. I think about how I make everything mean something. I think about how my melted to-go cup of ice water became poem inception, how the water inspired a poem, that was inspired by another I wrote over a year ago. I think about my feet tingling on the cool, bare earth. I think about the words *grounding* and *grounded*. I think about the concept of loneliness, how she is siblings with solitude, that much wiser sister. I think about thoughts, passing like a flotilla of ships on a shimmering sea of those same late April leaves. I think about the many places I do my real work: in nature, cafes, Piano Man's bed. I think about the beautiful gilded cage I spend majority of my time and its keepers that sign my checks. I think about the colossus of whatever comes next.

I savor the moments, chewing slowly on the experience. I wanted this experience. This one I created. This moment in time lived by a version of me that will never exist again beyond the lines of this poem. This carving of something that will never again be experienced the same way.

And then my thoughts quip, jokingly, "You don't so much care about the experience. *You just want to write about it.*"

I laugh to myself out loud, hearing this inner snark, with such a twinge of truth. I think about being that woman in a park, more relaxed than high, laughing to herself quietly and wondering who might pass by and smile at me, knowingly. Who might pass by and leave their judgment at the edge of my blanket for me to either pick up or leave behind. Who might pass by and wonder what I do for a living that I can feast of sun and ink in the middle of a Wednesday afternoon.

I wonder if years from now when I'm well-traveled and more established, if I'll think back to this exact moment before the Colossus Next, this seemingly ordinary and mundane middle (save for the getting baked part), and remember how I was so hungry for her life, for *her*; if I'll remember the chilly shade, the shape of my crumpled cactus tote bag and fringe jacket resting in the corner of the picnic blanket, the poem melting in the plastic cup from rays of springtime sun.

I wonder if I'll remember the earlier part of this day when Piano Man and I held hands and stared intently and lovingly at each other from across the table while two girls in the same cafe side-eyed us; if I'll remember the taste of his kiss, the tickle of his tawny temporary stress-grown 'stache, the four extra kisses and a last lingering hug goodbye on the street corner of Eighth and Chestnut that no doubt once again made him late.

I wonder if I'll remember how I so consciously felt the jiggle of my own thighs as I walked; how I momentarily cried from gratitude, knowing some future version of me is praising these thighs, this body, wishing she had it back; how the walk to my car became a trek through a jungle, the two women far ahead as fierce Amazonians jogging side by side with a jaguar between them; how

that same walk was also a walk through a witch's house at the edge of the woods; how my brain doesn't even need any kind of mind altering substance to access this place because these are things I imagine naturally, daily, and immortalize in words.

I wonder if I'll remember how I stopped and retraced my steps back to the hole shaped like an ear in the sidewalk; how I bet it has heard lifetimes of secrets, bits of conversation, grand proclamations of love; how I stopped on a nearby bench to continue writing, even though I was already running behind and the next time the lightning struck, I kept walking and typing, like Belle wandering through town with her nose in a book; how I crossed the street barely looking up, willing the cars to stop because I could not; how I will always be late on behalf of the words and have a tendency to make others late from of the size of my own love and a final lingering goodbye hug.

I wonder if I'll remember the peace I felt from it all: his arms, the sun, the doing nothing, these specific middle moments that make us.

I wonder if years from, I'll reach into the back drawer of my mind, pull this album out and flip through its songs slowly, trying on my white fringe jacket to see if it still fits and touching my thick wavy purple hair, the curve of my growing thighs with the dimples of cellulite beginning to show, the faint trace of smiles etched into my face.

I wonder when the day will come  
when *she* misses *me*.

I hope

it is a Wednesday in April.

## *An Eloise May Song*

the poems stacked fat on the blanket  
black ink among colorful emerald grass and picnic  
stripes  
brown leather sandals placed neatly at the foot  
laughter in the wind bouncing through branches  
joie de vivre positioning herself gracefully  
just so

the sun tilts his head forward to glimpse and gulp it  
down  
a cup of water perspiring nervous in the noonday  
but keeping its  
cool liquid now  
time in crystalline minutes melting between worn digits  
getting on in age  
warmed from the rays of persistent sun

a cup of water sings of a day well spent  
the parched lips curling over the lid  
wondering  
where time went

## *The crack between realms*

Pyramus  
here  
outside  
among the trees the rocks the  
river earth and dirt and birds:  
*"A part of me doesn't want to leave.  
A part of me is rooted in this peace.*

*A part of me wants to remain."*

Thisbe  
there  
the other side:  
*"Because a part of you is a part of this.  
A part of you is the same."*

***Things that remind me this life is a good one***

Early morning sunlight coming through the window. A slow drive over the inlet with marsh as far as the eye can see. Gentle heat on my skin after so many weeks of winter. Hiking by myself down Maritime trail and climbing a tree. Exploring secret swamp nooks on Lagoon trail. Spending hours without cell reception. Gathering an abundance of scallops and shell fragments. Eating gingerbread muffins and reading a novel on the beach. Finding a poem in the sky. Dining alfresco alone on the marsh. Water with lemon from a mason jar. A three course feast: feta and balsamic fried green tomatoes, mahi tacos with a squeeze of lime, and peanut butter pie to go. Being in good company because I know I am the good company. Burning a Sicilian orange blossom candle and listening to music. Painting paper squares gold and filling them with poetry. Reading in bed. Texting sweet, romantic things back and forth in French and Italian. Your face as the last thing I think of before I fall asleep.

## *A Greenway Cliff Conversation*

Him: Hey! Didn't you see the sign? No trespassing.

Her: Yes, I saw it. But my curiosity is infinitely greater than my obedience.

Him: You can't be here. Those cliffs are steep. I'm gonna have to ask you to come back on this side of the railing.

Her: No thanks. I think I'll stay here. Would you like to join me?

Him: What?

Her: Would you. Like to. Join me.

Him: I'm on the clock.

Her: I'm on the cliffs.

Him: You're not making any sense. You ok?

Her: Better than most, actually. But to some I appear worse. Depends on your perspective and what you're projecting.

Him: Look, I just don't want you to get hurt. It's dangerous over there. You could fall and on my watch no less.

Her: There is always a risk, yes. But isn't the view worth it?

He stops to think a minute, taking in the streaks of orange and swirls of light purple across the sky that



looks like blown glass. Things look different in that moment. Sharper. Like someone dialed up the saturation and detail on a photo and reduced all the noise. He sighs and steps closer, hoisting himself up and over the wooden railing.

Him: You know, I've worked this route for six years and never once crossed that fence.

Her: Sometimes it just takes another person to go first. Baby steps. I think that's what they call progress. Welcome, friend.

## *Visceral*

There is a stirring  
a rustling  
a shaking  
a quivering I cannot fully describe or understand  
but it is limbs reaching  
arched cathedrals of ravenwood and pine bone  
cut from the corners of time  
spring and summer in February's final winter

I lean towards it  
the entirety of my body buzzing  
becoming something other than what it is  
and everything of what it is not  
all of what it could be

I am a body of questions trying on different sounds  
searching seeking  
hungry for meaning  
anything to offer even the smallest morsel  
of what it is to be consumed

## ***This is a universe based on expansion***

If I could tell you one thing today it would be *try* –  
pluck the silver lining from the dying rose,  
from the sorrowful song, from the simple poem.  
When you pause to inhale the moment, it will  
materialize as a reflection  
of all things great and small and will ask you to tilt your  
imagination  
towards memory, to recall every soft thing you've ever  
held.  
It will wear your suffering smooth, calm your unruly  
chaos,  
carve resounding glory from your stone.  
It will take your pain in two palms  
and lower it gently into the crooning river,  
bury it in a ravine, nourish you with rain's wisdom.  
It will grow you and repot you, uproot you and  
transplant you  
in the truth of your own making.

Even thorns become thimbles when stitched with enough  
perspective.

Gratitude is birthed from ache. Time is a mother's hush  
and resilience is treasure unearthed from your greatest  
challenge.

Your potential is the clashing symbols of starry-eyed  
expansion.

Your soul traverses infinite possibilities, gathering  
knowledge

like a bouquet of rogue wildflowers growing  
where no one said they would grow, wanting  
to know itself, *to name itself*.

If I could tell you one thing today  
it would be to pry your chest cavity a little bit wider,  
hold it open a little bit longer –

with enough time and only the tiniest bit of love,  
*everything silver turns to gold.*

## *I Spy gets a glow-up*

I spy with my little eye something...*red*  
red raspberry  
berry-stained palms  
palm fronds, ferns and evergreen words  
words that grow gardens  
garden of Eden  
Eden and Eve  
eve of takeoff  
taking off from sky into love spread wide  
widened view  
view from the bottom

bottoms up  
up up and away  
away or towards  
towards is forward  
forward motion turbine turning  
turning the clock hands  
hands to hold  
holding hearts  
heart meets mind  
the mind sees what the heart believes

believe it to be so  
and so it is  
is it a red raspberry I spy?

no  
I spy with my little eye  
passion  
possibility  
a purposeful life

## ***For those who never read the instructions***

Don't get up too early. I know you have this thing and that thing and you're all about the doing and the going and the trying-to-get-to-work-by-nine, but you also have that special kind of morning light that only shows up at a certain time and a person beside you that might not always be around. Hold that person a little longer. A little tighter. Tell them you love them. Tell them again three different ways in the same day. Give thanks.

Have an extra cup of coffee. Set the alarm a bit earlier so you can sip in peace on the back deck. On rainy days, hit snooze. Three times. Roll over and be the big spoon. Give thanks. Drive with the windows down. Get messy. Put your hands in earth, in dough, in paint. Offer things to those in need: money, time, love. Give thanks.

Spend the extra money for organic vegetables. Cook more often. Together. Make your plate a rainbow with red and yellow pepper and avocado. Give thanks. Tell the absolute *dumbest* jokes. They will make you laugh the hardest. Read more books and put down the phone. Star gaze. Eye gaze. Say goodnight in a foreign language. Make it fun. Switch it up. Give thanks. |

Point out every animal-shaped cloud. Be spontaneous and visit a nearby small town. Get lost and see where you end up. Swim naked in a river. Nap in the sun. Give thanks. Fall in love more than once. Give your heart to every flower, every tear, every stranger just asking for an ear. Give thanks. Indulge your senses. Eat. Experience. Embrace. Give thanks.

Never stop learning. Give thanks. Tell yourself, "I love you" and acknowledge the awe that is your life. Give thanks. Write your own instructions. Put them in a safe

place.

When you forget, give thanks.

## *As Told*

Dreams, emotion, love  
they will guide you into golden  
make you skilled at this game  
attuned to its tricks so that everywhere  
is sanctuary; everything  
has purpose.

you learn the rules.  
you break them.  
you make this life your own.

## *Goodnight*

What makes a good night?

When we say it, do we mean, “I have made it to the end  
of this day, the unspooling of time has lead me here,”  
and sometimes here is a wonderful place – shoes at the  
door, a small but tidy apartment with a kitchen window  
box, someone waiting up in the living room, brightening  
as you walk in.

Or here, the empty box of plaster and drywall, the dirty  
dishes still in the sink, the piles of clothes on the floor  
you wish were someone else’s as the notifications ping  
in your jeans’ pocket.

In either scene, there is a smile. One on a face, one  
coming through a screen.  
There is a moon and a sky and love.  
The night is good.



***Now a little help for my friends - the ones I  
know and the ones I haven't met***

Words are such a gift.  
Breath is such a gift.  
*To be you is such a gift.*

Promise me you won't squander it. This life, all of it.

Before you even came here, you looked down from the musical accompaniment of stars in the cascading infinite, smiled, picked Earth and said, "*This*. This is the one." Despite strife, hardship, differences, you keep creating *as you are being created*. It is only ever you that holds out a waiting hand for your own acceptance.

Take it.

No one will ever again, in the history of this world or the next, look, laugh or love in the way that you do. No one will think exactly like you or know the things that you know, see the way that you see, exist in the way that you exist.

Not a single being.

***Ever.***

You are a rare book, indeed. A classic timeless and beloved story. A once in a lifetime event. A firework glimpsed from the windowsill off in the distance. The exact arrangement of amber and gold flecked clouds scattered along a sunset. How can you not see that? *Friend*, it is you!

Do not take this life for granted, in all its challenges. Rise to them. Make the difficult, beautiful. Make the

unbelievable, true. Find whatever modicum of light you can and push through because this is it. “The One” is you.

As we grow, we gather. We are but this grand gathering of sound, of moments, of emotions. We are gifted as we are given. And one day we will be gone but the ideas stay behind. How you lived stays behind. What you turned to glory stays behind and it lives on and on in everyone you have ever touched, everyone you have ever loved. You are already enough, as you are, here in this very moment, and the flaws you see are only your perception as experienced from this precise blip of time, with your current state of mind. If you don’t see something you like, it can and will change. You can always be rearranged. Shapeshifter, heart lifter, light bringer, you are all of it and then some. ***You won’t ever happen again.***

I am sold on you.

I am pulling for you.

I am holding out for you.

If we are what we love, then let me love you. If we are what we love, then take hope, take possibility, take change and become. If we are what we love, then love from a room with a view, punch holes in the walls, rip down the roof. Keep choosing this life and build something new.

I believe body, mind and soul in the truth and *friend*...

***...the truth I believe in is you.***

## ***But what does it all mean?***

It's the way the morning light looks so *unbothered* like a grandmother's deep laugh lines, these traces of Michelangelo's David along her skin and the intrinsic wonder-world of the infinite within; it's a chair slowly pushed back from the table in a quiet room, scraping and screeching against the floor, saying "it's my turn to speak"; it's buying birthday cake for your own birthday and bringing it to the party so your friends won't go hungry; it's the good ship lollipop and a sucker punch through teeth decaying from too many sweet nothings that tasted sour; it's the Quiet Ones beginning to molt, shedding skin to become the women of the hour stacked on the continuance of forever because we stretched before this, we're limber, we're loose; it's being so used to the way the world pressed us against a wall with his knife to our throats that it took seeing the stringy guts of soul and its counterpart shadow in red eyes and a growl to carry us back up and make our way out.

It's a pen shoved in our hands asking us to once again write ourselves out of the problem; it's a scribble and a scratch that was more than noteworthy, more than post-its, more than pages because *these words*...can't be contained; it's aching to be free, each piece a strip that says TAKE ONE hung publicly for all to see; it's flagging down that monster truck thought so you can hitch a ride down the 405 through hell and arrive on a stage to tell the tale of how you bloodied both knees on the concrete trying to climb inside.

It's passing the blunt message around and filling the room with raspberry smoke but removing all the mirrors so everyone else can see a little more clear when it all settles; it's putting on the good lingerie, the one he appreciates, and crying when he notices *you* instead of just the lace,

and you feel like a gold medal, a gold star, and the five golden rings from the song after years of society's hand feeding you that you were absolutely right to bite.

It's the world turning a spotlight on after too long of monsters under the bed from the haunted rooms inside your head; it's the music you're making with a pen; it's the rising from the dead for the third time; it's a soul story and ten thousand boisterous songs; it's not throwing away the smallest one that got left behind because...you're learning about recycling.

It's paper mâché Tuesdays while everyone else paints; it's the determination of doing this shit differently; it's not always making sense; it's a grand slam of scaling the fence; it's choosing paper over rock and scissors; it's making love to time; it's a punctuation tattoo of why; it's a spinning Saturn on skin reminding of every beautiful, hard lesson; it's the holy hallelujah amen of a lover's kiss and church of an open armed embrace, the only one you'll set foot in.

It's taking; it's claiming; it's slaking your hundred years thirst with a ruby encrusted goblet of ink; it's crying when it's inconvenient and welcoming that; it's being unapologetically "too much"; it's setting the scene; it's burning rules instead of banning books; it's asking for them to take a second look through love's lens; it's the gospel and scripture of understanding and acceptance; it's a spruce truth forest on fire pining for more; it's a novel kind of folklore never heard before; it's wrung-out hearts rinsed cleaned; it's a billion of the write kind of dreams; it's the jet stream of extreme; it's the Zeliska 600 nitro express revolver of your own resounding scream; it's want being equally important as need; it's the *hope* it all means something; it's the fire and passion and the unshakable steel belief...*that it does.*

## *Cadenza in the Rising Flame*

there is a heat in my chest, a bonfire made  
there from certain words that emerge from the dry and  
brittle brush  
dust eaters of what was left behind  
blaze and buds born in unison that spell the story  
of how a once hollow thing  
could both burn and bloom at the same time  
when everyone else said it simply could not be done

but oh, *we are not everyone*  
who else can wield the weight of a wildfire?  
a controlled burn that razes the rest to the ground  
to unearth the subterranean sound  
and still birth a birdsong where no bird has ever lived?  
some say  
it's the raw material from which love is made  
remnants of wishes and miracles not fully formed  
others say it's what was left in the wake of smoldering  
humanity  
mixed with a Molotov cocktail of volatile emotion

I say  
it's a little of both  
the exact second night ceases being night  
and must take life in the rough beauty of its own two  
weathered hands  
leading from cracked bone catacombs into the blinding  
day  
of temple ruins and twisting streets in an imaginative  
mind maze  
through violent brush made beautiful only by those who  
know what it is to burn

I call it show and tell  
I call it reclamation

I call it a homecoming  
I call it the Great Song

I call it an awakening to all the places we find god

## ***Beautiful Pursuit***

The year is *it doesn't matter*.

The world is flat.

The world is flat only because everyone believes it to be flat.

Except you.

You set out to prove it is round.

You do.

The year is *I'm not going to spoil the surprise*.

Magic isn't real.

Magic isn't real only because everyone believes it isn't real.

You set out to prove magic is real.

You do.

Now...*what do you tell them?*

## ***An Acceptance Speech on Behalf of the Full Moon***

I can't take credit for any of the words I've said today  
not the foxes hunting prey among the skillful wordplay  
or the riot of rabbits riddled in the rhyme  
or the way a simile smells like cherry notes and tobacco  
from oak casks of Italian wine

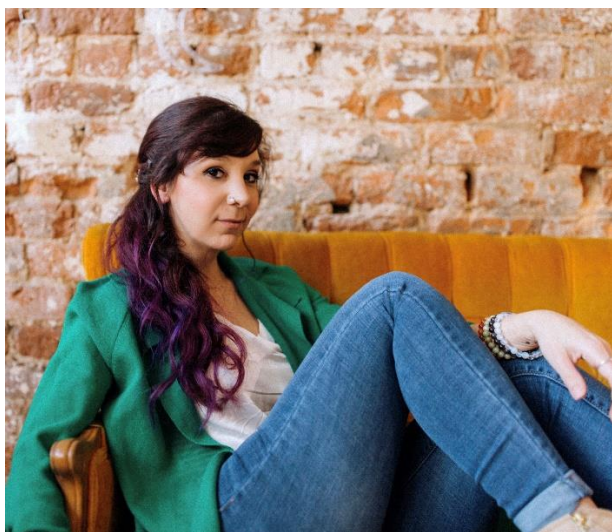
I can't accept your kindness for the tongue-tied titles  
or the mouthwatering metaphors  
the ones that leave me ravished and famished  
frothing at the mouth for more

not the stunning sapphires  
and exquisite emeralds glistening in plain sight  
not the tangled fishing line of mind  
to see which schools of thought will bite  
and certainly not the way I dive for shadows  
and coax them towards the light

not the poems made from playlists  
or the wise words from a star  
not the verbose vernacular of woman  
or her subsequent man's repertoire

no, I can't speak to such inspiration  
when it came quietly through the night  
I just shot the moon into my veins  
and then sat down to write





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