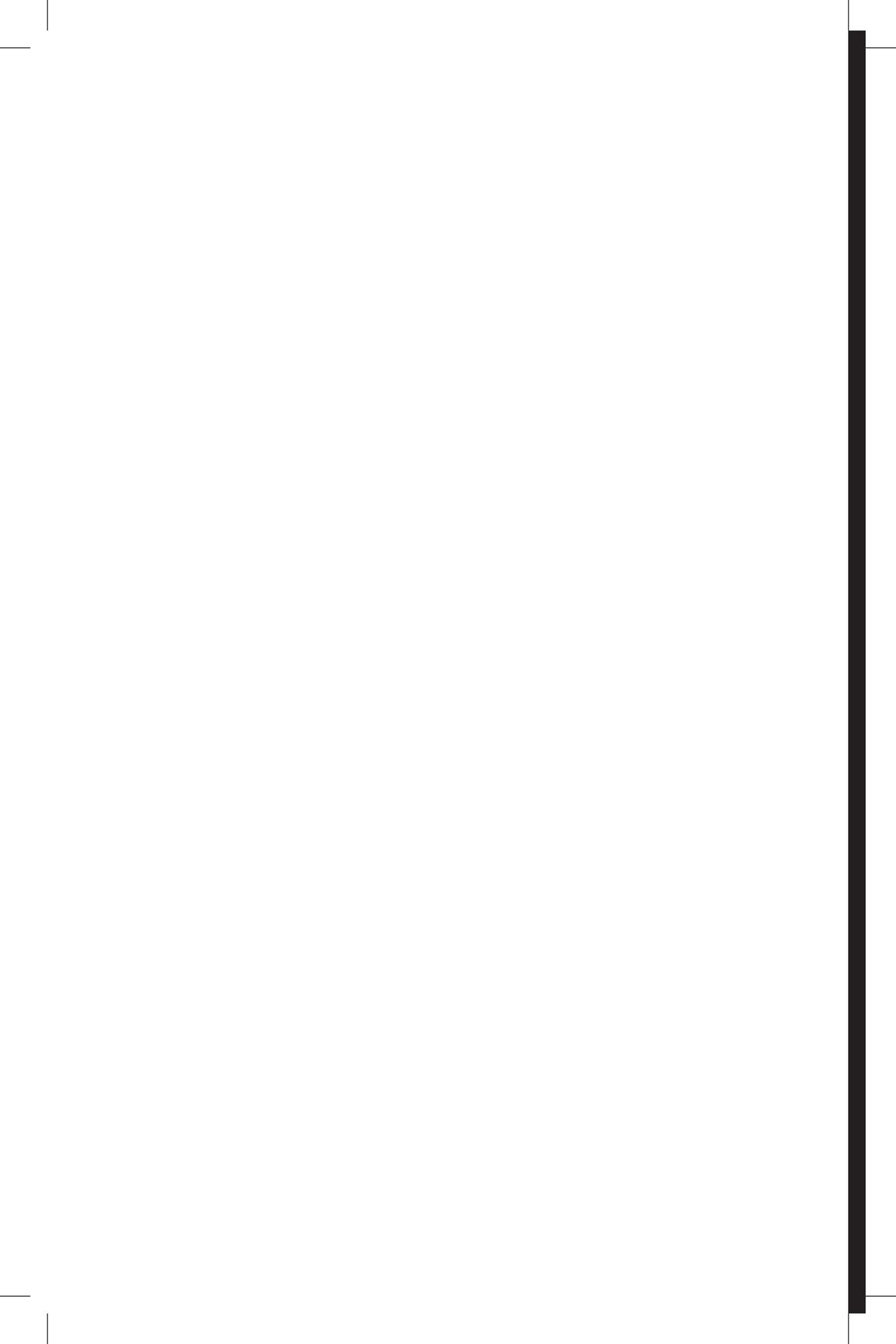


# RED CORNER



# RED CORNER

a poetry anthology

DAWN WEB

VI

VIVID ILLUSION CREATIVE STUDIOS

## **RED CORNER**

### A Poetry Anthology

Volume 1 of the Primary Series  
Part of the Colours Collection

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Dedicated to  
Dr. Becca Babcock

Thank you for believing in me.

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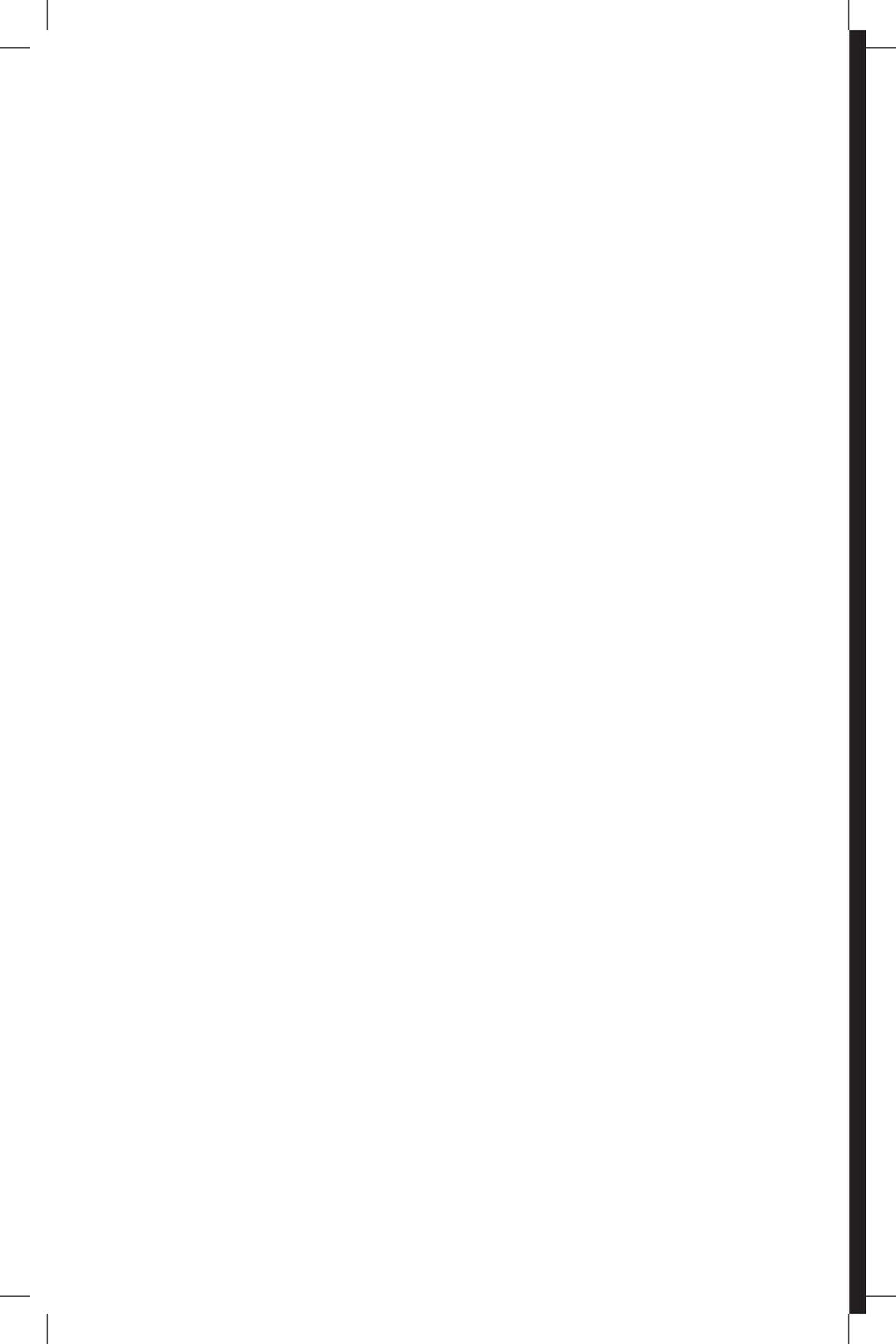
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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



CHAPTER ONE

**SURFACE**



**Flame**

I want our minds  
To melt together like candle-wax.

Reverberations piercing deep  
Bending your mental

Sit still.

Morphing beads unify  
Rewind to drop down.

Kaleidoscopic light—  
Taped out

## Fork in the Road

How do I move

When I am stuck in one place?

When I have been redirected

And I am no longer doing what is comfortable

My head locked in a space I wish I could choose

Let this transition be smooth

Give me the key

Please open the door

My feet are glued to the pavement

I swing my right hand around

Grapple my left knee

With my right hand

Tugging the slime, elude

The molasses, I'm grounded

## **No Respect**

Onward—crisp air freed  
yet Anchored.

In need, you can now feed.  
Toes ripped from beneath you  
Honey glistening resentment  
Melting into the floor

A cavalier  
Runs rampant; courtesy lacking  
Dripping insult  
Til' you crack

Diminish those beasts, for their capabilities and achievements hold no space  
Introspective  
No weight to their thoughts nor feelings

Offended in retrospect  
Damage repair  
Inline; an essential part of continuous sequence  
Upward  
to mend

Just take the next step.

d  
i  
s  
FOR.WARD  
e  
s  
p  
e  
c  
t

**Contestant**

Rain brain  
The leaving leaf  
Swimming along the river  
A blockage not stained  
    What if  
    *What could be*  
    Could really be  
What if  
*What could be*  
Already is  
    What if—  
    **What I want**  
    I already have  
Pondering  
If only,  
My brain rained  
I could move  
I can swim

## **Boundaries**

The  
Foundation  
Of  
Bricks  
Tied behind my neck  
A reformation high-strung

A Cycle,  
We recycle  
To reduce the time consumed  
While we use  
And reuse the same old moldy [pattern]

How we  
Build  
To break

Your home  
Is mine

Enmeshment

Apple crumble, filling with mumble  
Gaping mouth  
We compromise the shape  
Always  
Led astray

Share the love  
    Appreciation and care

Dissociation from  
The black blurred lines  
Built to break  
We **escape**

## Laundry

Nails go deep  
Nails  
Shine through the walls of the paint  
Nails fall out  
When the room begins to shake  
Trying to polish  
Crooked fingers  
Drawing down the page  
While it stares back at me  
I try to love it  
But it fills me

With wrath: that's when the bottle spills

Fold your clothes  
Make it undone  
Wrap it up  
Tuck that corner  
Of your eye  
And can only be found  
As a stash

This is supposed to be fun  
Which can only be seen  
After you unfold

Black nail polish bottle  
spilled  
black ink on the page

**Location**

Up the stairs

Down the stairs

Around the corner

What for?

My chin up and around the corner

Lifting and glancing

Peeking over my shoulder

My mind a maze

Of thoughts

Chasing after the reason

But I just

Can't

Remember

Please tell me

What am I here for?

## Run

Why do I  
Always  
Feel the urge  
A surge  
Energy  
Driving me  
To fly out  
keep that chase

To clear the welts  
In case I might be  
Better off somewhere else

Constantly,  
Changing direction  
Staring at my reflection  
With this destructive complexion  
Is it?

All things fresh and new  
To keep my flesh  
Hidden  
I am a screw.

Hide the drill

Keep me from stripping  
Which would lock me in  
Tie me down  
I'm  
Unzipping

**Pause**

The dishwasher sings.

The whole world goes on—

Man, what are we gonna do when this buzz wears off?

The tremor awoken to remind us

To fear happiness

Forks over knives

They're eating you alive

## Knowing

I have no idea

What I am doing

Where I am going

What I want

Who am I

Where are you?

—*longing*

## **Future**

Hanging on the ceiling.

Bryophyte

Entrenched and tangled

Aluminum

Dangling

Cladosporium

Killing the vines

Liana enraged

By *Parsonia straminea*

Lingered

Once you reach up

You're down

Found—yourself

You must go another round

One opening to the next

The echo funnels out

But you are still trapped

In the tunnel

Dark and gloomy, that's where—where I am,

It's roomy and bold

Icy nose

Purple toes

Aitch-two-O

Kissing my knees

Blue denim

Right foot, left foot

Levitation:

Soaked and Heavy

My ankles dreary  
Digging the mud  
The dirty water, swirling upward  
Spiralling no end

Agenda.  
Empty. White. Blank.  
The denim is drying  
It is quiet

Vanishing echos  
Narrowing tunnel  
There is nothing  
To call my name  
    Wavelengths  
Energy dissipated.

**Rest**

Absence of the long lists

A weight lifted off of my back

Away from my chest

Far enough

I can breathe.

I can do anything

So much opportunity.

Done

They took the bow  
On the way to the last throw  
In fear  
They all scam  
Into enrolment

Following the lead—  
Into the unknown  
We might feed

Clowns to caged lions  
To feed the man  
To make them laugh

Pale face  
Shoulders low

My head is down  
To meet my match

Do this, do that  
Erase this, face it  
Don't react

To the master  
Master of the puppets

Pessimistic  
Or just realistic

I need a refreshment

done trying  
I  
pResent  
E  
C  
momenT  
I  
O  
N  
emotionLess  
E  
S  
E

## **Journey**

The end of my road  
Everywhere imaginable  
Nowhere particular

Why is it  
Leaving something of boredom  
Shows you the beauty you were blind to  
Begin thinking

    I'm heading in the wrong direction  
    Am I making the right decision  
    Stay after all  
    Or run away, running

Funny, isn't it  
Strange, peculiar even  
Am I in the now  
Moment by moment  
Or is it simply washing by

Opening the road  
Paving the way ahead  
Grounding each foot  
Sinking into the pavement  
On a journey  
Not stuck anywhere for too long  
I can't be wrong  
I am strong

## Gleam

Things are never as they seem  
To be  
Things seem greener

So far, so distant, out of reach  
From thy hands  
God damn  
On the other side  
Why is this so bland

Lower your  
Expectations  
So you never disappoint

You  
Them  
Who?

No, raise them up  
So you don't allow your house to be set on fire  
So you don't burn  
You blossom  
You water the other  
You try  
To change the world  
Be happy with where you are today

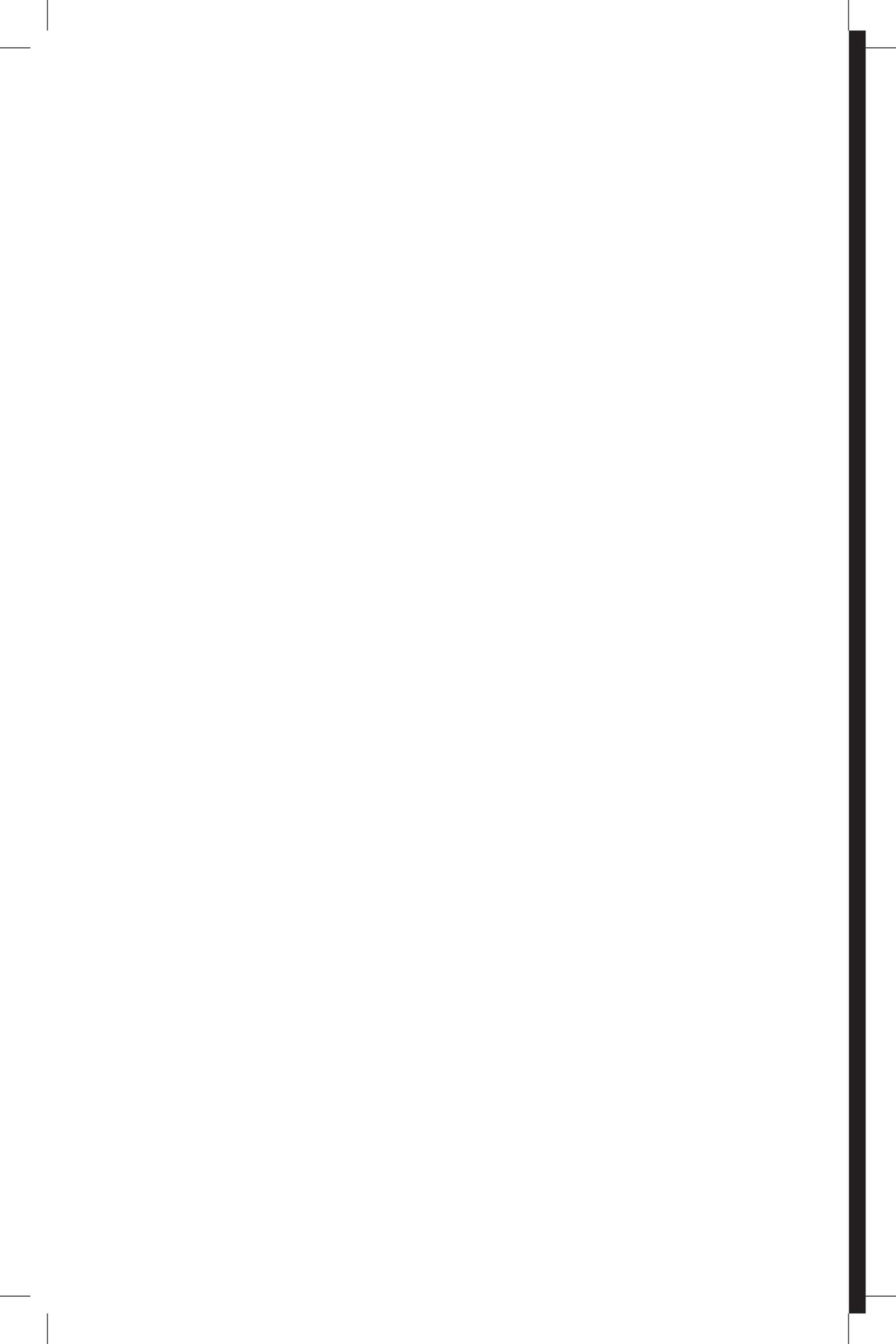
**Hurt**

My tongue is going to fall out of my mouth  
Say the wrong string of words

Falling through my chair  
the floor

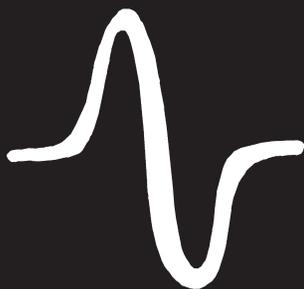
I hurt myself,  
Again.





CHAPTER TWO

**ENTHALPY**



## Chaos | Stability

When I lack stability

I curl up  
Crawl into my bed—as daylight strikes my window  
Breathe silence, inviting darkness  
I pull the covers over my eyes  
Inviting only the  
Two-by-four light  
My phone screen seeps in—to my eyes.

When I lack stability

This desperation to pull up my socks, knee high  
Lace me up and run  
Run far away  
As if rushing will keep me at a distance  
Far enough, away, from the very thing reaching me unstable  
And yet,  
I want to go

Going deep into the forest  
I peel back the branches and find my reflection  
Where the water ripples beneath my feet  
Traces the frames of my shoes  
My socks are wet  
A mirror here  
Staring back at me  
There is a river dividing me  
From jumping to the other side  
I should get out of this water  
Will I make it if I leap?  
Or should I wait 'til found, scavenged—  
But then, when, I realize even *if* I gather ALL  
I cannot deny, there is no guarantee  
That the bridge I create will not break  
My fate  
Trapped in this state  
There's a lot at stake

When I lack stability

I dive deep into the depths of my mind searching  
Capacity to stay on routine,  
It has already been Broken  
Try, I do  
To go—the extra mile

String along those muscles, get up, go out  
Shower, brush your teeth, and smile.  
Make your bed, clean your shed  
Drink a tall glass of water.  
Eat some food  
You know that will increase your mood

Yet, I lay here—  
Starving.

## Undergoing Under

Darty eyes

The gas mask, the cool air

Over my skin

Count backwards from ten.

Your hand in mine,

Becoming

Gentl\*er

A picture, your face fading away

You're so caring, daring and fuzzy

Your look is Airy

You look so Cloudy looking back at me

You call out "I love you"

And I cry, "I love you, I love you, Mom, I love you, Mom, I looovve y—"

I needed her to know.

[What if I don't wake up?]

Nitrous Oxide

Don't leave my side

Isoflurane

Into my brain

What flavour would you like?

A wrestle for answers

I'm here, waiting

Picking & biting

Lost in bloody fingernails

Peeling skin

Crusty webbing

A clicking  
Of the pen  
A chipping,  
The ticking  
The clock  
It's non-stop

Ringing in my head  
While you put me to bed

The tapping  
It was those heels  
Clacking  
To the family room  
An update  
Stank of Purell perfume  
Grappling we stand hand-to-hand  
You're late  
I've been waiting  
Where is my baby?

There was more  
Damage than we thought

## Seven

Seven

Even though it was eleven

Not the time of day

But the feeling of not okay

Foggy and distant

Not near, something, I can hear

Sirens of cries, I open my eyes

Clear the glue and glance over to one side

Gaze at blurry white walls and caged hospital beds

I gloss over to the other

No nurses, no doctors, no father, no mother

The knife is gone

But the ghost radiates

Shooting fire in my bones

Haunting me, I'm cold

I have no control—

Locked, loaded, paralyzed

Urged to scream but I'm seared

And yelling won't numb my pain

Only bring me to tears

Because it's not seven

It's eleven

I'm sedated

The words are in my head

But I can only whisper:

*pain*

*pain*

*pain*

*pain...*

I'm strained, tired and drained  
Focusing on the air  
Hoping help is on the way  
    For my welfare

Because it's not the time of day  
But the feeling of not okay

The nurse appears with a gentle concern  
She asked of me  
"What is your pain level out of ten, my dear?"

Scraping up—trying to find the words  
A battle in my mind  
To bend my tongue  
To vibrate my throat  
To defend my bones  
To spit the words  
    All I could say was . . .

*Seven*

And now I'm in heaven

## **Handwriting**

The flu

Piecing together

The *mind* with the brain

With the pen

With the paper

To convey

A certain meaning

A purpose

A form of communication

Sound and fine

Safe and it's all mine

Soft, yet elegant

Aggressive, yet beautiful

Perfect, yet forgotten

Painful, yet confused

Coming up

The sun sets

Where? Touches the crust

Balancing on one wheel

Piercing through

One cartilage

A hole in the ground

Trust

Thou shalt

Will not steal

But all is done

Your eyes closed

And you

Are now

Disposed

## Forgotten

I'm afraid of forgetting  
Or letting  
Myself forget  
The thing is, I already forgot  
And I have now forgotten what it is,  
I am trying to remember  
If only it were  
That easy

I'm not crazy

## **Sleep**

I just can't seem to sleep these days  
My mind just won't do, but

Race and

Chase

I can't keep the pace

I'm up here so lost in space

Someone please bring me back to my place

Too tired to be awake

Too wired up to fall asleep

Chocolate

Melting away

Eaten up

Cold and in the fridge

## Yesterday

Maybe it hurts for a reason  
Maybe tomorrow  
Maybe tomorrow it won't be this season

Tell me why tomorrow never comes  
Today will be yesterday  
Yesterday was today  
Tomorrow will be today

All we know is today  
And tomorrow never comes

## **Wallow**

I wish I could cry, talk  
Maybe then  
I could fly  
—away—  
Because I have all-ready  
Walked the walk

I want to be held  
    Feel me in your embrace  
But I might die  
So I shy—away—

Hope—is hope enough?  
To hope that I find the calm  
To put the panic at bay  
Fairness is extinct  
I'm stuck, in swill  
I'm tired, could I kick the bucket?

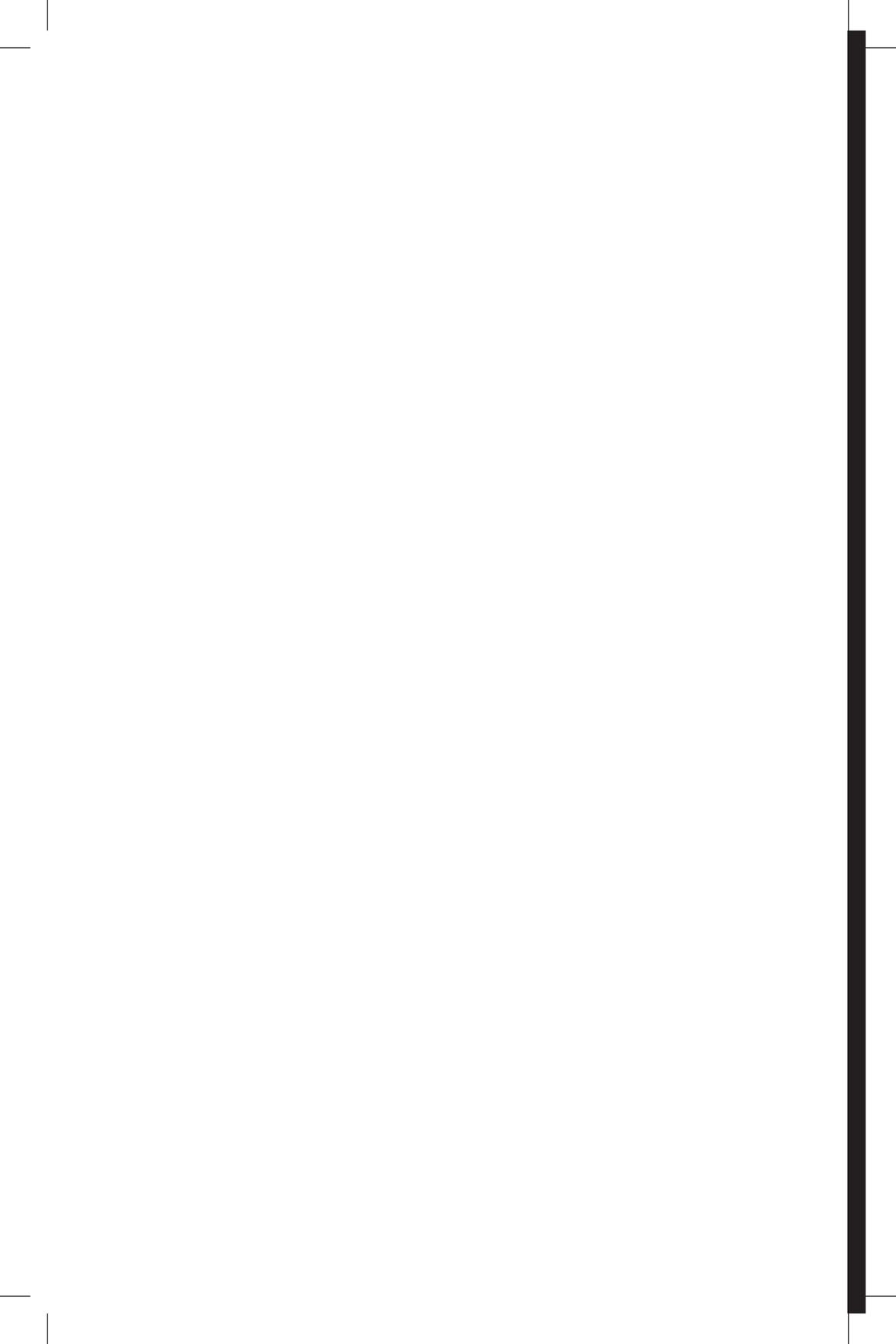
I glare—glare at myself  
I just want these emotions  
To pass over me  
The ocean is crashing along the shore  
Hard. Misty. Cold.  
Waiting for it—  
To wash over me  
Curl up and swallow me whole  
But it won't  
I admire the fire in my eye  
My heart

## Cell

I'm so tired of living my life  
Through a screen  
I sit, I eat, I scroll  
It's obscene

Can't go out  
I don't know where to lean

I have no one left to call  
Even though I have reached them all  
I don't wanna be mean  
So I sit here  
In quarantine



CHAPTER THREE

**DISORDER**



**Buried Alive**

Buried alive  
Six feet under  
Down the hill  
Rolled over my roots  
And sinking  
Below the ice

Crystals beneath the snow  
So light, no air in sight

Six feet below

The surface  
The innocent winter

A wail  
This is the way I die  
Buried alive

## Soliloquy from an Insomniac

Through the looking glass

Is it the failing?

Is it time?

Is it giving up?

Or is it something more —

Is it the recognizing

The awakening

Of the beast inside?

Laying. Analyzing. Questioning...

These decisions

The things you make

The actions you take

Naive to where it will lead

Into the unknown

Be thrown

Searching, crying, whining

Looking for my crown

From these decisions I made

This is what

You ought to do

Where you must run to

Going, on and on, onward

In control, toward that destination

As those legs change circuit

The signal switches

Direction

Stutter, twitch, seize

Here and now

Look around

A-a-always on  
In attempt to drown out the thoughts  
To turn out the lights  
But the tea is hot  
And it must be spilled  
'Til the cup is empty  
Drip 'til dry  
But it's never dry  
And I'm awake with this hot cup  
In my hands  
Here I sit, warm  
Sip, sip

Wet, fire  
Clenching my tongue  
Swirling against my cheeks  
Spiraling down my throat  
Tickling my chest  
Warming me up  
Through the looking glass

But I'm still chilly  
Shivering  
Need to spill

Write  
Write the next chapter  
Read the previous one  
I cannot sleep until  
The cup is empty  
Under heatstroke—nothing left  
Energy runs out  
There is no more writing that can be done  
Only dreaming  
Dreaming of what is to come  
A good morrow  
See what is left to uncover

Trying to sleep  
Thinking  
How not to think  
How to think  
How to sleep

But I'm just not ready, ¿ready?  
I must get moving  
Get a feel  
Get a rhythm  
Reach out to their hearts and steal  
Them, touch them  
Holding them tight  
Embraced  
Filling up the hollow glass  
Proving  
Choosing

Support of the hand  
Your hand in mine  
Only to find  
Your hand is mine  
It's always been my hand  
Only unnoticed and depreciated, ungrateful  
And I'm here  
I stand  
Open arms for you—me  
To run to  
Because I will never hurt you  
Anymore  
My hand in mine, forever more  
Do not ignore  
Me  
Never, please, never turn on me again  
I need you more than ever  
More than anyone  
Before

Through the looking glass

Fear of the unknown  
Lean in  
Focus on your head  
The dark parts  
The s c a r y parts  
Where you fall  
Short  
Grand mal  
Pick up the test  
Slap aside, and leave behind  
Parts you won't touch  
You can't touch  
You *can* touch it  
Touch it  
Poke—Tickle—Scratch  
Itch the hug  
Until you love it  
You will learn to love it

Time is nothing  
For wound healing  
When you don't treat it  
With the right  
Medicine  
So dive—deep  
Into the scary parts  
You might be surprised  
On what you might  
Find

I spilled the tea  
Then let it sit

It is the failing  
It is the time, holding on tight  
It is the letting

Go

As my muscles shut down for the night  
I fight  
To stay awake  
There is too much life to live  
To waste asleep  
Wake up

**Awake**

Goodnight

**Trench**

Giving up, giving out, pushing forward

I want to give in

Let go

Give up—I look for some twinkle in my eye

They say I can't

They say I am strong

All good things must come to an end

That means

All bad things must too

—*trenching forward*

## Noticed

Can't sleep  
Can't get enough  
The voices like to peep  
The sounds in my head  
And the monster under my bed  
I shed

A learning disability  
Who said I can't be anything, I anything I want to be

Welcome to the circus  
Join us

It'll be grand  
You will see the  
The ADHD  
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity  
No memory  
From all the PTSD, OCD  
Or maybe just the Generalized Anxiety

Red corner  
Boldly pungent  
They said I was loud—obnoxious  
But they were just too cautious  
Tiptoeing around what they all said  
So they tread  
*lightly*

I don't know about you  
    But I cannot be a robot  
I don't know about you  
    But I cannot be bought  
I don't know about you  
    But I'm trying to be noticed

Unlike you  
I draw with different colours  
Making me everything  
I am  
I'm gonna flourish  
Because I allow myself to be set apart  
I don't need a go-cart

## **Hit You**

I'm good  
On the couch  
Passed out

I'm not going to hit you

## **The Garage**

Under the covers  
Slipping out of bed  
Toes gripping the cold floor and  
Hovering around  
    Avoid the cracks  
To the hallway

Eyes on eyes, locking  
From across the way  
Unity in our meeting  
An understanding  
Together—of what we cannot yet comprehend  
So we stand  
Together  
Scared  
Confused  
    But we are not alone  
    We are together  
And that's what matters

This is a start

## The Powder Room

POWDER  
POW DER  
POW D ER POWER

He had power  
So much power over us  
Over her, him, them, Mom  
Over me  
Over you

The helplessness began  
Wanting to stop your wrists from snapping  
Trembling squeals, flush oozing  
What do I do?

There I stood  
Bleeding, they were  
My vocal chords  
But the bending  
    Vibrations of  
    Erupting yelps I poured out  
    Spit from my lips viciously  
    Into the powder room—  
Did nothing

*This is not the first time, I thought*

It feels like every time I think back  
To here  
I come up to a wall  
Locking me out  
I try to climb over  
A barbed wire fence  
Or maybe it is just endless concrete  
Where I find no grips  
I'm not high enough  
On the evolutionary train  
So here I remain  
Looking up  
This is not the first time I revisit this image  
Red painted ink on the walls  
Sad now it's tainted pink  
The bathroom sink  
And she falls—

My heart rate increases  
I sink

We ran  
To escape  
To grow

Connecting the dots  
I never stop moving  
No wonder I am so skilled at packing  
A slow start

Cinching inwards

**ED**

My wish  
To feed my soul  
To warm my heart

To fill this gap  
Caused by an endless spit  
In my stomach  
Twirling, a dance

If I could only put food in my mouth  
Chew it up  
And let it be swallowed

—*To eat*

## Patterns

Do we all just continue these disgusting lines  
Of toxic, destructive behaviours?  
Is it just in our nature? Can we break free?  
The never-ending sound,  
Let's break the ground.

Do we live the life we grew up around?  
Is there anything to touch earth's crust?  
Or do we just oscillate?

I hope I'm learning  
I know I must hurt people.

Why do I keep questioning if someone is good for me  
If *something* is good for me  
If I'm doing the right thing—

Doubtful dirty shame  
Filled with guilty blame  
On this rough terrain  
We plunge into

A survival skill  
I have acquired  
To help me learn  
With intrusive force to retreat from  
My mistakes

Is it working?  
Am I learning?  
Or am I repeating the same shit?  
Who do I trust?  
Who *really* knows?  
I don't know

But maybe they don't either  
Maybe they're manipulating me  
Why do I think people are manipulating me?  
Why do I think people aren't looking  
Out for me?  
Deep dark long swarmed  
Dodgy rabbit hole—hidden

The world is fucked-up  
Almost everyone is self-serving—unconscious  
They are not looking out for you  
    You have to look out for you

Not everything is about you  
Not everyone is going to care for you  
    You got to care for you

    And the hairs raise  
    Curling the spine  
    In my neck.

## Electric

House to house  
Stubborn mouse  
Eyelids rolling back  
Tying in knots  
Optic nerve  
Elastic slap

Will I ever rest  
After  
The move?

The bugs are gnawing  
So[u][e] sucking  
Bed crawling  
Skin peeling  
Bumpy lines align  
Along, my arms and feet

Dry ice beside my face  
He put at my bedside [bandaid]  
I breathe it in

Windows closed  
Brute course  
Stagnant, find a choice  
Layered knuckles grinding through the radiator  
Burnt liquid toes

Wet ice  
The hair that is in my armpits  
Chilled

Wet ice  
Running from the boiler

I wish I had heat

## Away

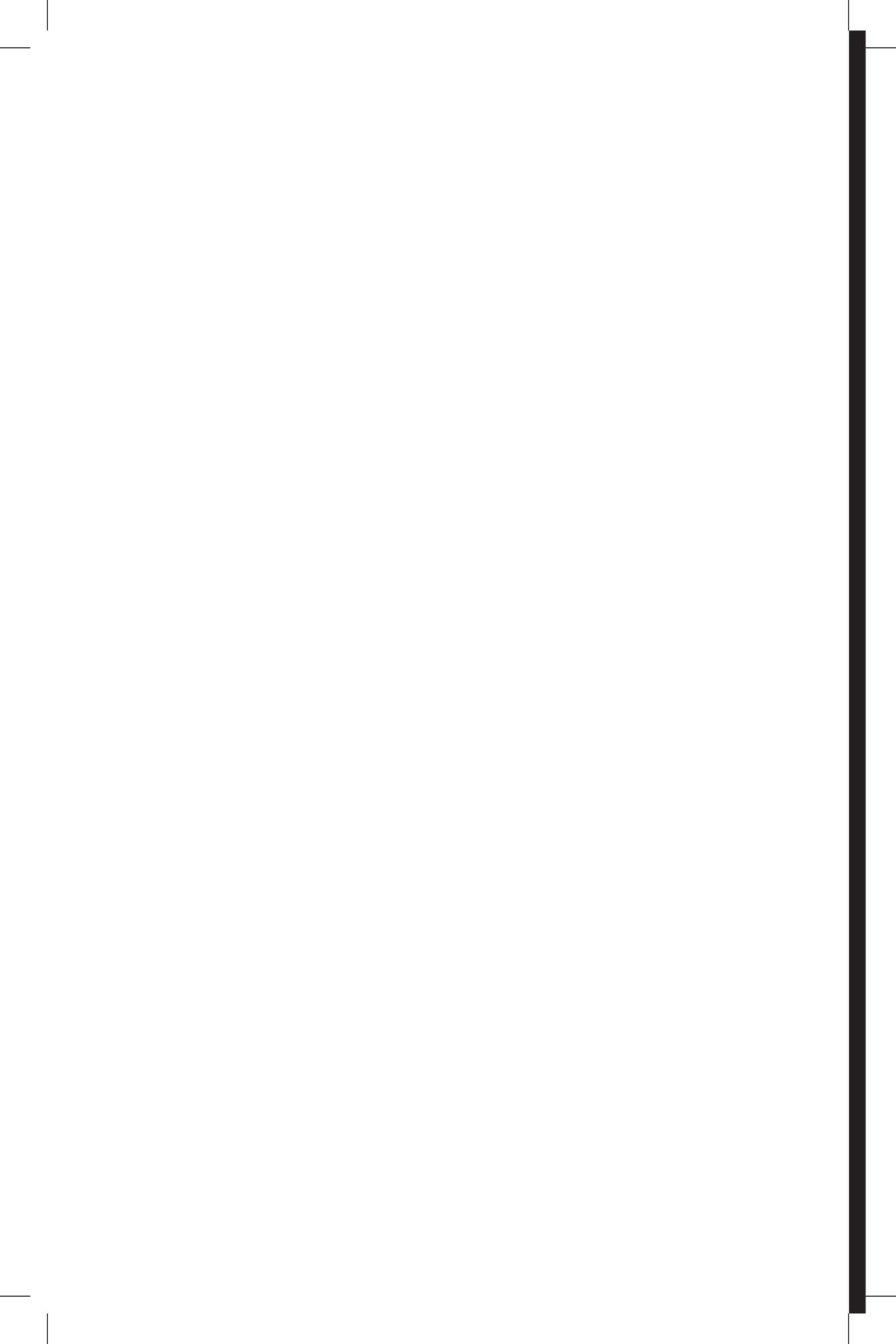
I carry the last piece of furniture, my keyboard, out of my tiny bedroom, down the stairs, through three doors, down another flight of stairs, around the corner, across the fifteen-inch alleyway to the place where I've parked my car. I run back up the stairs to check for any missing parts and drop off my keys. I glance around for anything I may have left behind. There is nothing, but the white walls with hole remnants from the tacks used to hold paintings, tapestries, photos, sticky notes, calendars, and reminders. Nothing in this tiny space, yet it feels so full. How can something feel so full and be so empty? So familiar yet, look so strange? I search for something missing, but all I hear is laughter with the newly befriended, as I am clearing wine from my glass. The heart-breaking conversations over the phone with a long-distance lover. I feel myself sinking into my schoolwork to escape my trauma. The long silence of lonesomeness, the tiring days of suicide contemplation. I see me losing my virginity to my first female lover. My best friend and I side-by-side awake, caffeine-infested, for twenty-four hours to meet our deadlines. The light shining through the cracks of my window piercing my eyes to keep me awake at 7am after the night shift. My alarm goes off and I must leave.

I look around one last time disturbed yet at peace with my departure. I drop the keys and leave the flat.

This is the first flat, tiny and rundown, that I had to call home after moving away from everything I knew. A cheap room with an itty bitty kitchen, in a four bedroom with one bathroom, without a living room. Perfect, I thought, I don't need anything extravagant. It is downtown, but far enough to be inconvenient. The landlord didn't care too much to fix problems in the place. My friend needs a roommate. And space is becoming an issue with my new partner. I am excited for this next journey in my new place to form new memories.

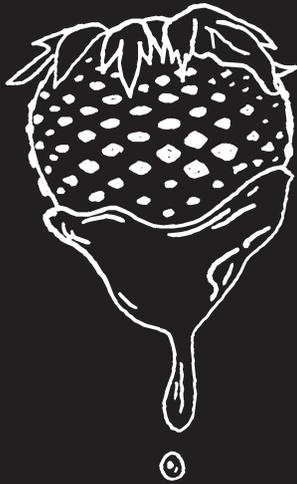
I was not aware that this move was about to change my life.





CHAPTER FOUR

**ENVIRONMENT**



## **Broken Clocks**

I live alone, again.

I did not think I could get this

Luxury

The goblin is coming

And

I stare

At broken clocks

## Prance

Don't allow room  
Room to interrupt  
Your flow  
Your heart

Don't postpone  
Hone in  
Lean in  
Now

You may be so low  
Hit the ground  
Leave town

You may hit a wall  
You've fallen down

Embrace all—  
All of who you are  
And all  
That you are to become

Stand on the side-walk  
With your arms open  
*Wide*  
Ready or not

Here I come

## **Avoidance**

“Where have you been?”

“I’m really busy.”

“That’s a matter of opinion.”

Soon enough you found

All the reasons—

Reasons

Why

I tried

To hide

Away

From him

And you

Were

Disappointed

Again

I’m sorry

I’ve never heard

Or understood

My reasons in being

I really am

I am

Really

Busy

Creating way

Where I can truly view

My reality that got tucked away

Hidden and misconstrued behind

Coercion

What happened

Or what did not

I guess that is also

“a matter of opinion”

## The Dinner Table

They got a ring,  
not of diamonds,  
not of *fire*,  
but their phone  
Ringing.

“I have something I want to tell you.”  
“Are you pregnant?”  
“No, I’m not pregnant. Let’s talk over dinner.”  
“What would you like?”  
“Ribs.”

So we sat  
Together and spoke about  
you  
Exploring how my heart  
sank.  
And wanted to  
crack.  
Out of my chest to  
escape  
the cage  
It was enclosed in.

*Ribs.*

## **Washed**

You made me  
Think it was on me

That I put myself  
                  There  
That I asked for it  
That I initially invited

I was just laying there  
Peacefully asleep

If I didn't do what you said  
What you wanted  
I would be "hurting" you

I was just saying *no*  
That's all I wanted

So I did it  
For you  
And I hurt myself  
For you

You told my friends that my story was wrong  
Who are you to tell them  
To tell me  
My feelings aren't real

My eyelids snap...

## Slumber

I ask  
How do you not know  
That I am vulnerable when I am asleep?

You are a foe  
I know  
I am one whose wish to keep

I was sleeping  
You began creeping

Thinking, I look back, I'm thinking  
Too much

I try to lead—  
Lead my thoughts away, but they just feed in  
    I wish you'd stray

I was in a deep slumber  
Solid like a rock  
But we were in your bed  
So, they believed what you said

You say you detected movement  
How—how did you detect movement?  
How do you not know  
That I am not okay anymore because of you

So I process how I feel  
    Move on from how I think I thought  
    Pretending as if my memory was false  
But it is not

How could  
it not?  
I'm twitched  
Despite what you thought  
There was a fast pulse  
And now you are caught

Because I was in a deep slumber  
Now there is a lot at stake  
How do you not know  
That it'd not be okay to penetrate my cake  
While I was in a deep slumber  
You fucked me up with your damn cucumber  
*—we think we know people*

“Hello?” Harley inquired.

“Hello?” said anon.

“Who is this?”

“Who is this?” an echo of unfamiliar speech, the reverberations of mature voices and lingering confusion on both sides. Same number with a different ring—goodbye to our pre-pubescence. As the tones seep into the ears, climbing through the wavelengths of our cell phones, you know, you recognize, you realize and you say,

*“You ruined my life.”*

“The police, they picked me up from my buddy’s place in a town run by Hell’s Angels and I was taken to the police station. There were five policemen interrogating me, yelling at me, *You’re a rapist! You’re a rapist!* I went to AA. I had to drop out of college and go to rehab. I had to tell my girlfriend there may be a chance the case will re-open. I still live in my parents’ house because I will be paying lawyer fees until I am twenty-seven. I won’t be able to buy a home until I am thirty. My parents think that I am a rapist. I have so many mental illnesses and I think I might have schizophrenia. I had to go to sexual counselling. I had to sit in a room with pedophiles and rapists and they thought I was one of them. I thought you knew me. I don’t trust you. **You did this to me.**”

The sound of his vape indoors in his high school bedroom where it all went down ripples over my shoulders.

“You did this to yourself. I didn’t call you to be friends. I thought I knew you; which made it all that much harder to process. It made me think that I knew no one.” Harley shivered

“I don’t even know what I did. Could you just tell me what I did? Why didn’t you just tell me before?”

“I wish you knew sooner. I tried to tell you.”

“I really wish I knew sooner.” He said, “Why did you do it, why did you report it?”

“I needed you to understand.”

“I got together with this girl and she used to pimp me out to get her fix. I overdosed eight times. We were both doing heroin. I was sexually assaulted multiple times, even before. I knew what it’s like. I don’t sleep. Why do you think I answered? I will never admit to what you are saying I did, because I don’t know if the police will open up the case again. But I’m sorry that happened to you.” A larger exhale into the words, “I loved you.” Only to hold such a heavy pause. Reverberating wavelength at the cell tower awaiting response.

“Yeah, like a best friend,” Harley stuttered.

“You were more than that. Like you said —boundaries weren’t set.” He relayed soft tones of love confessions years later, twisting the scene.

“I forgive you. I don’t want you to hold onto these feelings anymore. I don’t want you to live with the burden any longer.”

“It doesn’t work like that, he declared and pondered “Why’d you call me?” Removing the split moments of time for a response “I get why you called. *I hope you got closure.*”

“I hope you got closure too.”

“**You made it worse.**” He dreaded on to say, “I hope you have a good rest of your life, because you deserve that.”

## Progress is Slow

Maybe you don't remember  
    It was not a significant event in life for you  
But I have carried this with me  
    I've unpacked my bags  
Then picked them back up  
    I will always  
Unpack  
    Just to repack  
But it's getting l i g h t e r  
    *Slowly*  
    —progress is slow

## Other Piece of the Puzzle

“You can’t therapize your rapist.”

And that was the first time

I was okay  
with calling him  
my rapist.

And now  
I really know  
I am not *c r a z y*.

I know he has done this before  
And has other accusations.

She believed me.  
It took her a while  
Before she began  
To see  
His  
True colours.

I didn’t realize how big of a role she played in this story and for my healing.

## Silence

I am not there anymore. I am not escaping

I was nothing but an object to you  
You went off looking for something new. Your destructive nature  
Left you a dangerous creature Lacking basic r e s p e c t  
I'm not in the wrong here  
What did you expect?

I still get flashbacks  
So—tell me again—how that works  
If it never happened  
I won't let you turn my insecurities against me  
I will not be gaslit  
I know I am not the only one  
Who feels this way  
I know I am not the only person  
You have done this to

*—I will not be silenced*

**Flashbacks**

I was only doing the dishes  
'Til my body took over my mind  
I could not find—peace  
Even through my wishes  
Looking for some kisses  
To mend me blind, but I could not find  
Because there was nothing left for me

My stomach rumbled—turning in circles  
It wasn't butterflies, no—I was crumbling  
Feelings of nausea—ready to hurl  
Dizziness—making me curl—I'm on the turnaround, merry-go-round  
I cannot stop, only to swirl

As my insides turn, I feel myself burn  
My throat is tight, I want to fight  
They say it's fight or flight, but I just freeze—torpedied unable to act right

My body curls up, I collapse to the floor  
Not because I bore  
My mind is screaming, thoughts that sore  
Losing control, I lie—lie flat on my back

**Flashbacks**

Because I will never ever be able to be loved from behind  
The same  
All has changed  
Even if you act kind, I feel so much shame  
You've claimed a piece of my self-control  
I fold.

This is not how I wanted to start my day  
But you can always restart the day  
And so I tried, could not cry  
But found  
It was the ice cold water  
That brings me back—home  
To where I belong

I know—they know—  
No slack  
Know you did me wrong, I hope this cycle won't last long  
Because I was trembling, stumbling, talking over my feet  
But they could not hear  
No excuses about the beer  
Nor the pills that gave you chills because  
You're a cheat, you got me beat  
Friends aren't supposed to bend—they are to mend  
So I went to defend, myself, taking me off the shelf  
Stood tall, 'til I could no longer fall

But I—yes—I—am so grateful  
To be alive—I learnt to revive  
I am who I am, shalt become someone who I am not  
Healed—YES I AM.

### **Sob Story**

In a sick way he wants to die  
But also, is so addicted to the feeling.  
He needs these deranged thoughts to stay.  
They are comforting.  
They feel like home.

## My Home

Driving in my car  
Passing your house  
Things are different now  
Same small town  
But feelings have altered  
No longer in your halter  
Like before  
But here  
On the other side of the fence  
I curl my lip

I can protect my heart  
I can protect my mind  
my body  
my soul  
my home

## **Cut**

I'm going back—to what was left

Open wounds,  
Opening  
Pick the scab,  
Picking  
Apart the ugly scars forgotten  
They had already closed.  
Reminded by the phantom  
Now, kissing the air  
Re-emerging  
The dripping despair  
And I'm aware.

A do-over  
Let's try—  
Try this again  
Be my friend  
So I befriend  
The places and spaces  
Where the the cake was served and the slices were made  
And the blood leaks  
I have done this before  
I have been there before—here  
I ran away  
And I will do better than I did before

The blood will clot  
I will pay mind to it with a kind regard  
Even more—  
So there's no need to revisit  
The site, the skin  
Peeling, cracking, sealing  
Ever changed  
Cleaner

I rot  
Rot away the parts of me that do not belong  
That do not fit  
'Cause I took what I was taught  
And I fought  
Steps higher  
Where I can finally sit  
And just be  
At peace

No more pain  
Nothing more to gain  
All the work is done  
So much—

I did

**You vs. Me**

I must accept the past

Now is time

My time

To move forward

To forgive

But never to forget

The battle is done

I have won

—*Us against the problem*

## Deception

*Breathe.*

Get up  
Break down  
Into yourself  
Take a bow

Picking up  
Scooping  
Romantic strawberries  
the dripping lip  
You  
left  
On the  
floor

The corridor breathes deep.

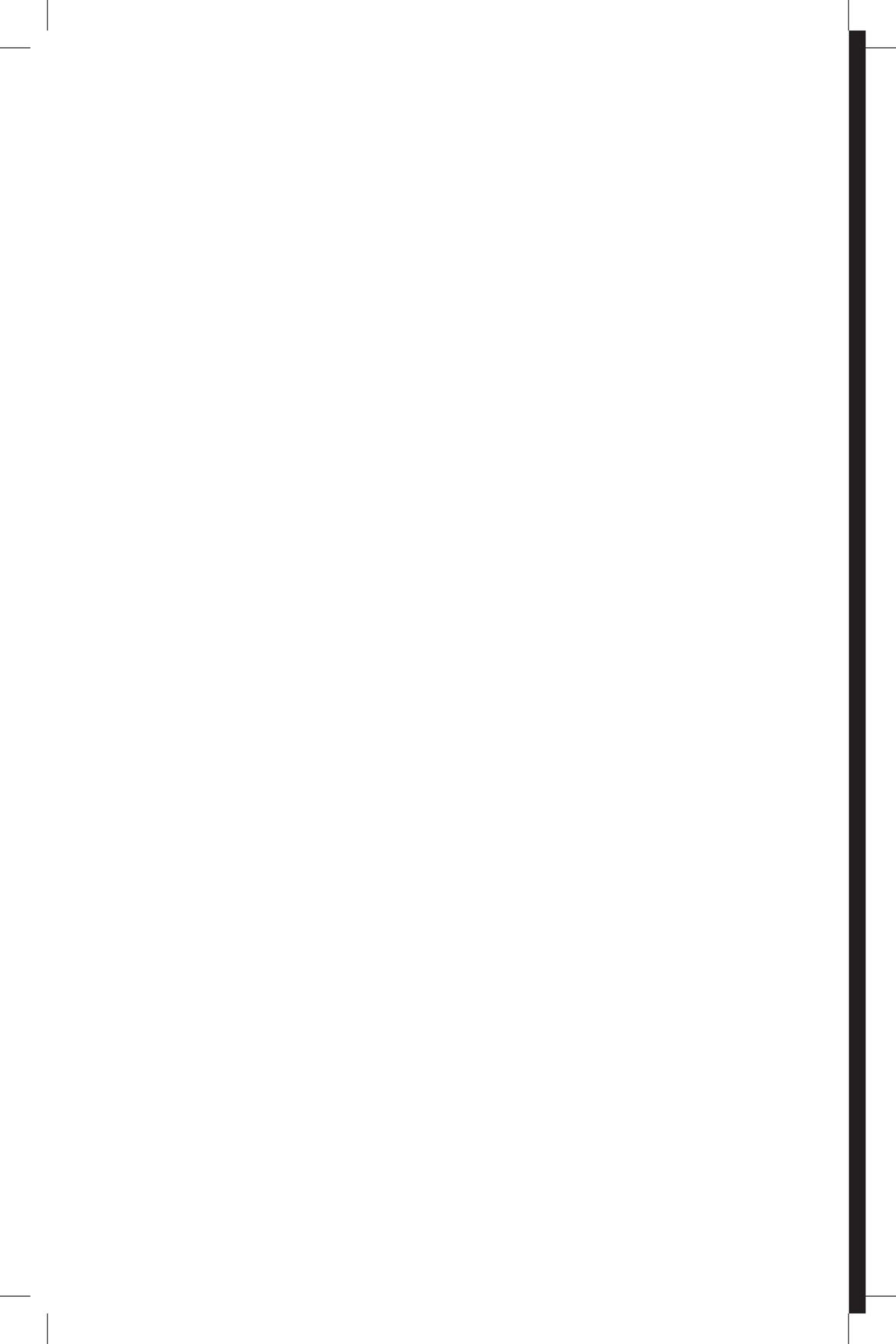
Collapsing diaphragm  
Below  
The sticky chocolate  
Slipping in the white powder  
Off the strawberry

Into your mouth

Hold it safe  
So that it doesn't dig  
Deep

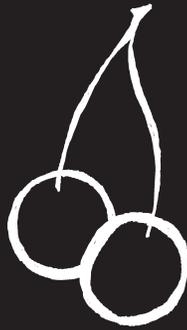
Now  
Just  
the tip

Is it salt or sugar?



CHAPTER FIVE

**S H A M E**



## **Wasteland**

Stupid bars

Displaced

Too many people

What a waste

Of human existence

Polluting the earth with their disturbance

Get me out

## Emptying

She was sitting

Drinking

A table of four

A crowded room

In the bar, wanting—longing for more

An open space

The chase

To move on, lead on

Forward looking

The speakers pressed to her ears

His voice piercing that drum

That pit cluttering my chest sinks

Expanding

A sound to the rest: “Are you okay, baby?”

“Do you ever feel like there is a hole in your chest?”

“All the time.”

And the song goes on and on

It does not end

Here I bend, unable to stand

Slouching my back, melting

Into the chair

Unnoticed

The bottom of the bottle

Emptying

Pouring out onto the streets

I flood the scene

## **Slut Shaming**

Applying *Covergirl*

It is cheap

She was told it would not make them curl

At the sight of her

To change appearance—she took a leap

She wanted to hide those scars

To find where she fit

So she dove into bars

And there she sits

Looking for the next best thing

Where have you been?

She isn't cheesy

Just busy trying to *get busy*

Making society queasy

Men don't get this sort of behaviour

They're calling her sleazy

Making her uneasy

Because with her mask

She thought

She was just *Easy Breezy*

Board on water  
Water to surf  
Surf is tired  
Tired is me

Tackled  
Pulled under  
Flailing  
Surface touch  
Bubbles gone  
Air near  
Cruising in

Here  
There  
Come over there

Grains of sand  
Between my toes  
The souls we hold below  
Treading forward  
The guide beneath our knees  
Away  
Toward the tree

Right foot  
Left foot  
Tight hands trapped by the old folds  
Built a stem  
A body to climb  
Up up

Return  
Land to hand  
A grass green bowl  
Taking the form of a coconut  
A rugged stick  
Brown, dirty, dying

Splashed in my eyes  
Spread through my hair  
Dripping from my eyelids  
Off my lashes  
Sliding down my face  
To kiss my lips

**S l u t**

## Body Ink

Heat, hugging my shoulders,  
Spiking my nipple  
Salt licking my skin  
Not constricted by the walls of the blade  
Drying faster  
Freedom is warmer

Raised on  
Constrained  
Views of our bodies

Unloading—  
Caring for yourself  
Is liberating  
Running across the beach, wind rushing through hair  
Skinny dipping  
At dawn, marching

Airy  
My cloud  
With dry sickle lips

You stare at my chest  
I know  
You have one too  
I am shirtless, bare-chested  
You don't need to obsess

Being  
Solo  
It is so fun but

You stare at my best  
I know this is not  
Your first sightseeing  
Please forgive me, for just being

Brought up  
Bodies  
Our conditioned taboos

You tell me what to do  
I know  
Poor you  
Please ignore the social stain  
You have been ingrained

Don't call me pretty  
For you see my breasts  
Let me walk  
As you do  
See hearts

Before  
You see my face, my body

Inky lines  
So divine  
Call me beautiful  
For that  
It beats

we don't need bloody sinks when we have body ink.

## Affirmations

I'm done,  
I can't do this anymore.  
Can't bat my lashes for others  
Hoping you will pay attention  
I finally say  
So long, it's been too long

So—I close my eyes

I am important  
I am of value  
I am everything you wish you could have  
But you can't open your eyes

Your  
    Real  
        Eyes

**Real • Lies**

I tried  
To be smarter  
To match you

To be cuter for you  
Becoming more ditsy  
I want your attention

I'd be in the kitchen whippin' it up  
Hoping for you to realize  
Maybe one day you will realize  
That I am a prize

Maybe one day I will realize  
Maybe one day I will accept  
That my prize must be won  
It must be won

## **Retro**

In  
Retro  
Spect  
Respect

It comes from within  
Dive in

**Eyes**

I glimpse  
Into the crisp eyes of lonely guys  
Elderly cries

Shy Children

It's empathy—That I feel  
Through the waves of the sea  
Let me be

**Malleable**

To be  
Hammered without break

**Vagina**

You wish you were

You wish you had

Soft and delicate

Oh, beautiful to touch

Bend and transform

Create room

Allowing space to grow

It shrinks

**M a l l e a b l e**

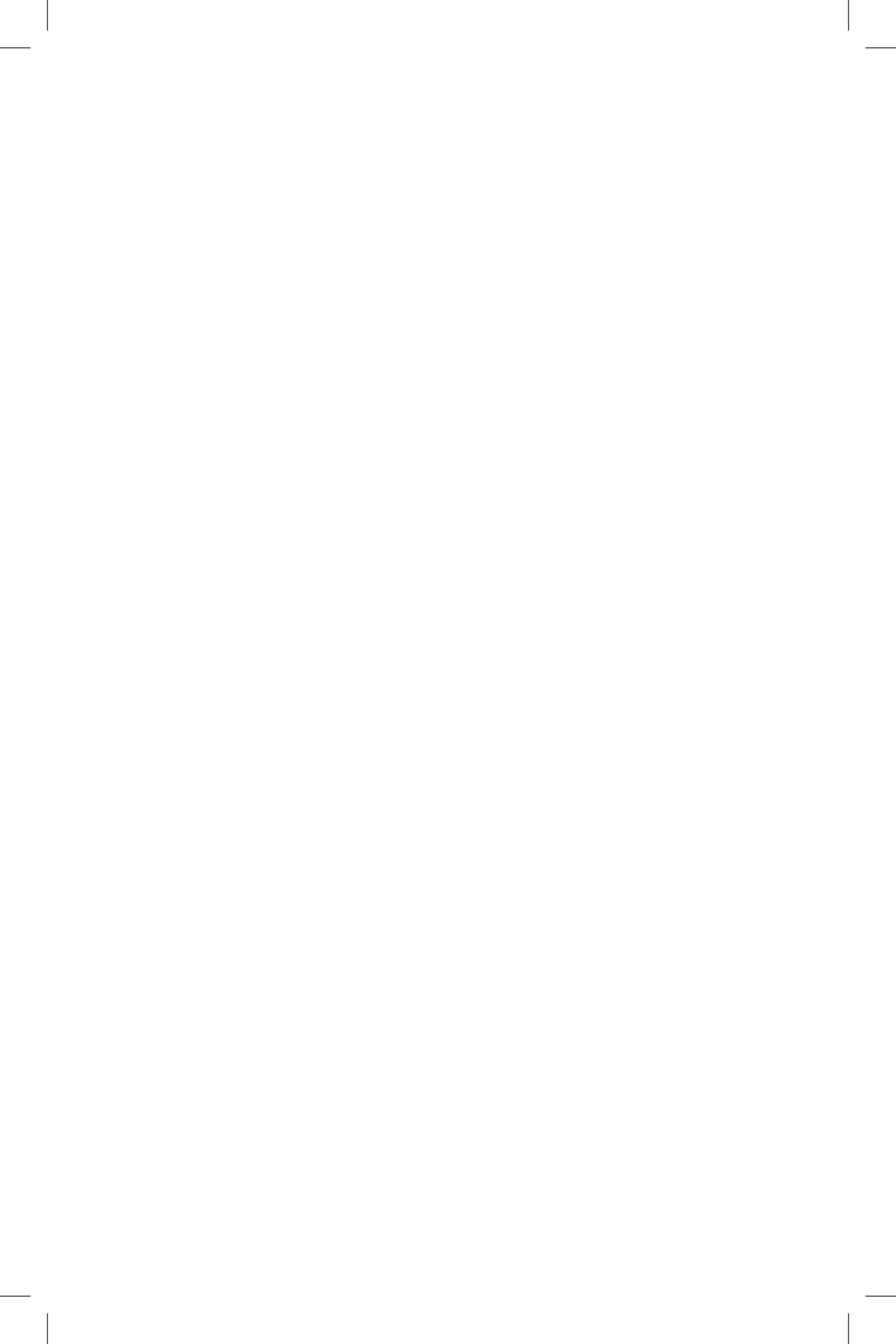
So palatable

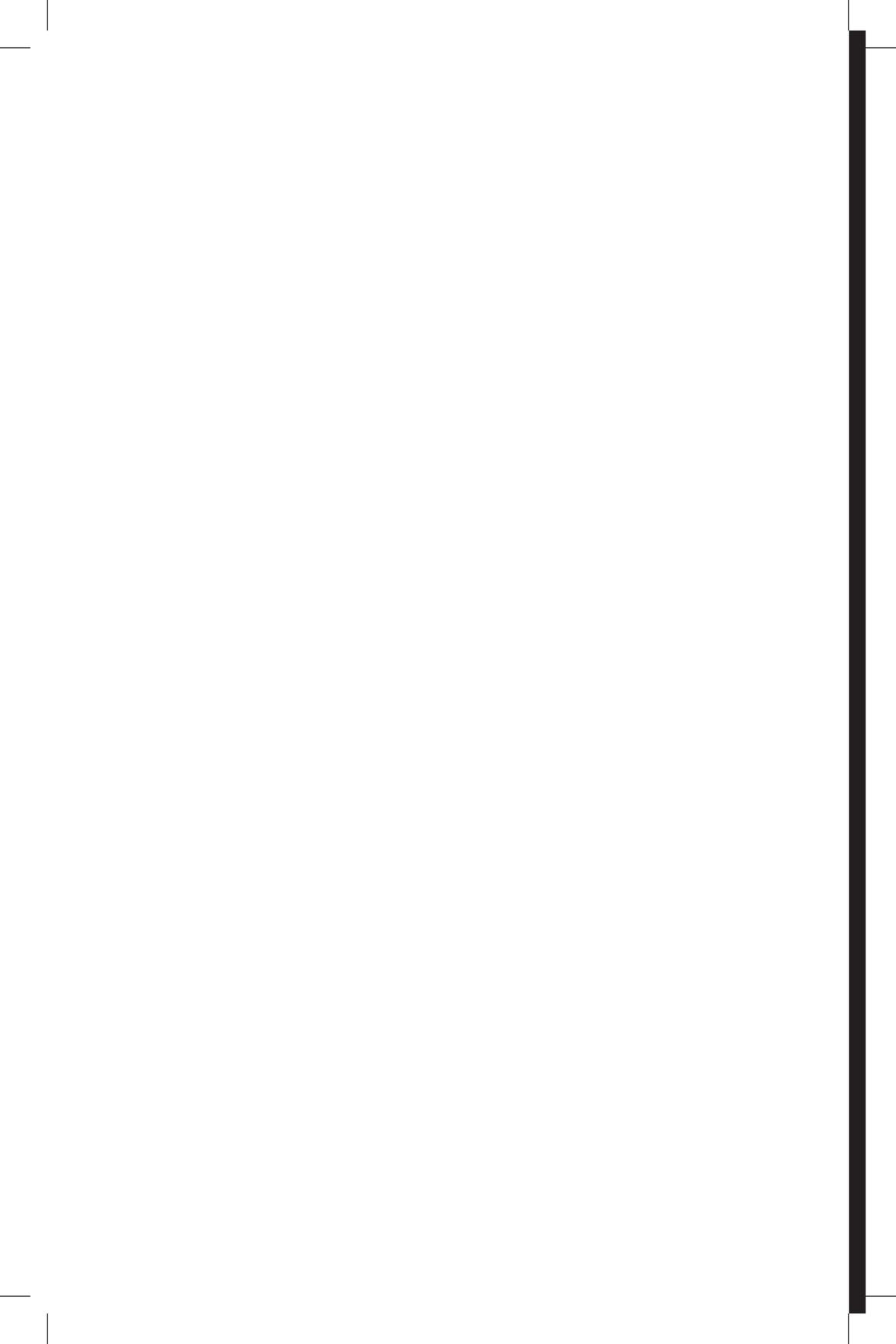
So yes, I am strong enough, you wish you were able, to be

And have the privilege

To be called

A pussy

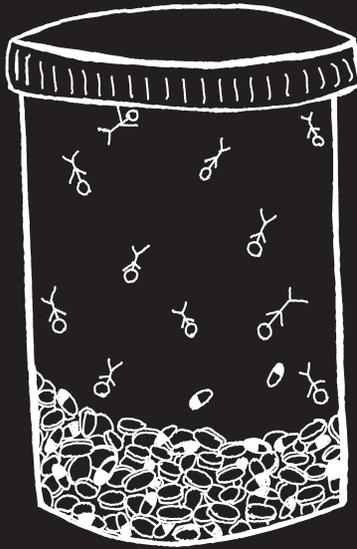




CHAPTER SIX

**VORTEX**

Buy Your Soup HERE



## A Vortex

The snow sticks. And I sit, sit in my room, all alone. My pants are around my ankles, I am sitting in my swivel chair. At my desk, the bed is above me. The walls are plastered with white paint and tacked with artwork. All alone, I sit. I unscrew the blade from the razor and I begin to slice my thighs. Red, wet, thin. Vertical, the lines cross over me. I'm in deep, carving to no end. It feels good to have the fresh air breathe life into my body; the pain reminds me that I am real. It's January of 2020. I never thought I would do this again. I'm not 15 anymore.

It wasn't always this bad. Let's rewind, flashback to the beginning. It crept in ever so gently, subtle. How could you even begin to notice? Notice the change before it corrupts, erupting into pure chaos. Bending the limits of your reality. Where feelings become unpredictable, completely disoriented and your thoughts are overtaken by the beast inside. Ever so sensitive to change; it is unfathomable.

Where did it begin? I'm not entirely sure where or when it began. I don't think it really "begins," but rather changes slowly over time. This is the only reality I have ever known. A small voice, *not* from the outside, but from within.

"I am not good enough."

"I will never be enough."

"I can't do this."

"I don't want to be here anymore."

I ate that shit up. This voice grew; a robust tornado swirling and destroying everything it touches.

I didn't think it could get any worse but then, in the fall of 2018 I began my first year of university at Carleton in Ottawa, Ontario. It was a vortex sucking me in, drawing me closer and spinning me out of control. This was my driving motivation to keep going, to prove myself wrong. It was more than just moments of doubt; it felt as if these thoughts were following me around. I was constantly checking over my shoulder—a prisoner of my own mind—unable to be at rest. Sometimes it would feel as if the world was moving so fast around me, but I could not move an inch. Other times, it was as if I were watching the world in slow motion. It was as though I wasn't even real—I was just watching a TV screen. How do you make sense of that, not feeling real? How do you even try to explain it? And who would understand that?

I was locked up, chained to the idea that no one would understand me, and no one would like me. My free time was spent hiding into the depths of academic books—tracing over the ink on each page. Memorising the words. Copying and copying away each social interaction, each neural connection. Because if I could at least know everything about neuroanatomy and neuropsychology, I could ignore the mirror and I wouldn't have to look myself in the eye. At a standstill, it was almost as if I were in solitary confinement. I felt unsafe around everyone, especially the people I thought I could trust. Because things, people, aren't as they appear. In constant paranoia, leaving me exhausted, I fear failure and letting everyone down, especially my family. I hid away. In a state of avoidance, I did not speak. When I did speak to my family, it was explosive. I was thunderous. Screaming. Shards of glass slicing, piercing the world to reflect my insides. Pulling out the glass stuck in my skin, so I could feel relief. Unhealthy, I sought out this relief to no avail.

January 2019: tears rolled off the lid of my eye and rushed down my face. My head was heated, throbbing. My mother interrupted my screaming and said, "You need meds."

She thought it would be a good idea to book an appointment with my family doctor. This was something very out of character for my mother. Growing up, my mother ingrained in me that medication was not the solution. She grew up surrounded by parents who used drugs to cope with and get through life. She did not like the idea of relying on any type of substance. My mom has endured a lot of pain in her lifetime, including unstable living situations, absent parents, a divorce with four kids and no money in the bank. She experienced anxiety and panic attacks to a debilitating degree at times, but she has forced herself to learn how to live through these moments. Many times things were out of her hands, but she always did the best with the cards that she was given. She put herself through university (first one in her family) while working and raising young children, while her husband was too *busy* to be around—building his business. A financial burden he embodied to pull his entire family of immigrants out of poverty. The toxic masculine societal pressure to provide, a legally binding responsibility to provide post-divorce that begins in 2008.

When I was a child and a teen, I was always in the principal's office, I didn't like to "*listen*". I was easily distracted and had difficulty making new friends. I often felt excluded. Kids would say mean words to me, how it twisted my hair. In the fourth grade, I was not allowed to attend school unless I was getting a psychological assessment completed for autism spectrum disorder. The school wanted me to be medicated, but my mother did not believe in medicating young children and messing with their development. She believed in treating the root, not masking the symptoms. She believed I needed extra attention, and nurturing, more time to process my emotions, and that was okay. She accepted me for who I was. Sometimes her parenting techniques were not always the best, often she would be quite controlling, at times even manipulative which stems from her own anxieties, experiences with domestic violence and intergenerational trauma. I may not always like or agree with her, but I will love her even from a distance. I will love her past death. She is a strong independent woman, and she has loved me unconditionally, no matter how "crazy" I was.

So, here I sit. Where the snow sticks. I was dragging myself into the doctor's office, a small room with yellow walls. I sat in a brown chair and fell into tears struggling to express my deranged thoughts. I was diagnosed with severe generalized anxiety disorder (GAD) and was put on medication immediately. I was prescribed a very out-of-date medication practice from my GP, which I later learned in my neuroscience class at Carleton University that term. My GP, he prescribed me a MAOI (monoamine oxidase inhibitor) and Buspirone (an anti-anxiety). These are messy drugs that target many, many different neurotransmitters in the brain, and were discovered before the famous SSRIs (selective serotonin reuptake inhibitors). SSRIs were available, but my doctor did not make them available to me. My "outbursts" were lessened and I didn't cry everyday. But I still could not regulate how I felt inside, I felt dead, drained and overwhelmed all at the same time. And the pills, they came with consequences—side effects. I was glued to my mattress, 10 hours of sleep at night was not enough—I was experiencing "bed gravity." Forcing myself to peel back my eyelids and lifting the bricks of my body away from the mattress, stretching the glue to lean over to the other side. I'm up. But I would fall asleep everywhere; in lectures, at meals, on the bus and even behind the wheel. Sometimes, I would convince myself that I was not

actually mentally ill, and that I did not need medication because I felt “better.” Overall, this led to poor patient compliance, in other words, I would stop taking my medication. Soon enough I could expect someone to ask “Have you been taking your meds?” I felt crazy. I wanted to feel *normal*. I didn’t want to rely on medication.

In the fall of 2019, I moved 1435km away from home, I transferred to Dalhousie University in Halifax, NS, changed my degree multiple times, began working part-time as a care-taker and personal support worker and I broke up with my high school boyfriend. He was really angry with me, understandably, that I didn’t have an open discussion with him about it. I did not ask for his permission, I simply stated my future plans. But I didn’t want anyone to change my mind. An endeavour that he could choose to be a part of, but he did not follow. He wanted to move in together in Ottawa, and start a life together. He made me feel safe, he validated my trauma around my sexual assault and always told me to get help for the demons I was battling. But he also told me that I didn’t need medication. I helped him get a job and find a place to live. Our relationship was on-and-off near the end. And it ended really poorly.

Serving a fresh plate, I began to treat my body like a home because it is the only one I have. I got a personal trainer and began going to the gym. It helped to build a stronger body and mind. Feeling my muscles stretch and contract as I lift the weight off of my shoulders. Standing taller, holding myself up for longer. It helped me feel more comfortable in my body, powerful. I started attending dance classes again, something I hadn’t done in 6-7 years because I had to have surgery. And I loved dancing. It is a creative outlet, a mode of expression. And it is something I am good at. I used to do it competitively for 10 years. It forced me to be in social situations, where my body felt vulnerable, revitalizing my veins, building my home. I began to go to massages more frequently to decompress. Allowing the air to run through my hair and the water to wash over my face.

It wasn’t enough, I could not sleep beside another without twitching, shivering. A flashback, replaying the moment I woke up being violated, the poking and prodding which I did not ask for. Triggered. I would wake up to my heart flying off the rails—nothing there to latch onto to ground

me—in a panic. I was wedged too deep into my mind, too far to accept sexual intimacy. It's like giving your house keys to a stranger, and hoping they won't steal from you. Or jumping off a bridge and not knowing how to swim. And I was trying to swim but the waves pulling me and lacing anchors around my ankles. A certain touch, or an invasive thought... it knew exactly how to stir the pot. Desperate for constant reassurance—I would ask before, during, and after sex “*Is everything ok?*” Soon enough, lying in bed alone was a fight. Insomnia. My insides turned, my throat would be tight and I could not just say goodnight. I have trauma. This acceptance led me to seek help.

I sought out cognitive behavioural therapy. I had weekly, then biweekly, then monthly therapy appointments. I later found out I also had ADHD and a learning disability. My therapist was kind; she was young, fresh out-of-school. She had long dark brown hair, pin-straight, brushed back into a half-up/half-down pony-tail. She always had a notebook, one that flips up and backwards, not sideways. I would sit on a love seat, and she in the chair in front of me, with the desk behind her and to her left. I chose her because she specialized in sexual assault, depression and anxiety, and school-related stressors. So, I tried to unpack my belongings and leave them in her office. But I clutched onto my body, with no grip and my home was ripped out beneath my feet. I was underwater. Months passed, I plunged deeper and deeper. I was too far down, I could not reach the surface level to gasp for air. I was so alone, I had no friends. Why did I move so far away from home? We talked about my trauma, feelings, coping strategies—how to regulate my emotions—and what to do when I felt suicidal. *Am I really alone?*

At Christmas 2019, my family and I flew out to the Dominican Republic. *I should be happy*, I thought. But I was sweating, my skin crawling, my chest felt like a bottomless pit and I just wished my head would fall off. The *anxiety* was too loud. I wished that *they* weren't *chasing* after me, that I would know when the *beatings* were coming. Hoping the party streamers and exclamations “Happy New Year” could pull me out from the undertow. It was the daily pellets locked in the prescribed bottle, I was playing truant by doctor's orders. Pulling me back from somewhere I could not escape. I was withdrawing.

Before flying back to Halifax for school, I flew back to Ottawa. In an attempt to gasp for air, I went down to the Ottawa police station to fill a report—It was a history report. A recount of sexual assault. No hard evidence, since the event occurred in 2017. There was no physical aggression involved. Only emotional conflict, physical penetration. I was asleep for god sake, and it was my best friend, who claimed to be in-love with me. He claimed it didn't happen and, even if it did, he didn't remember. At the time, he was addicted to various drugs, and constantly in withdrawal. His words made me think I was crazy. I pitied him. I pitied him so much that I did not validate my own feelings. Driving to the station my heart was racing: it thought I was running a marathon. I couldn't keep up. My palms were wet, sweat bleeding through my gloves. Do I smell like B.O.? Afraid of the police, afraid to say the truth, afraid of what events might follow. Not only was I processing the assault, but the grievance of a childhood friendship. And I knew he had done this before, to another girl. I thought to myself, *What if there are others?* What if they are also too afraid to come forward? Afraid that no one would believe them? I must come forward.

During my visit in Ottawa, I also saw my ex-boyfriend. I had rebound sex in Halifax after we, my ex-boyfriend and I, had broken up. And then, when I came home for a visit, I slept with my ex-boyfriend—that really rubbed him the wrong way to say the least. He called me a lot of names. I then met with my caseworker about my sexual assault to provide witnesses, so I asked my ex to explain what he knew about the case. And I will never forget the last words he said to me, “You can't regret having sex with someone and call it rape”. I flew out to Halifax.

So, here I sit, sit in my room, all alone. I'm here in the bitter winter with the icy blade between my fingers. It's red, I'm bleeding from the inside out. I never thought I would do this again. I began a new medication. It's January 2020.

I was spending time with one of my close friends who had been through sexual assault, and physical and emotional abuse; and I asked, “I am doing everything I can. Why can't I get any relief?”

She said gently, “It gets worse before it gets better.”

It was one of the best pieces of advice I ever received. And on Bell Let's Talk Day, I received an email from a family friend. He shared his life-long struggles with mental illness with me.

"Is there anything that you found particularly helpful in your journey, other than traveling the world?" I asked

He said "Patience, kindness and vulnerability," and he let me know that he was there for me. And so I tried. Perseverance--I had put the work in. Pulled the weeds from their roots. I was adjusting to my new medication. And I was moving forward with my therapist. Instead of exhausting myself, I was exhausting my resources. The air is hugging my lungs. I'm not alone.

Spring of 2020, I began only monthly sessions with my therapist online. I know myself. I was doing okay, aside from the fact that we were now stuck in a global pandemic. And anytime I had to go home for family emergencies I had to quarantine. And I quarantined about six times: bye bye three months of my life. The second quarantine, I had met my soon-to-be girlfriend on the infamous Tinder. I began working in a nursing home as a PSW/CCA with the job title "Covid Relief". I worked like a dog. I had no concrete schedule. Working crazy hours, twelve hours overnight, with just enough to get time to get some rest, to come in for an eight-hour shift only to find out it was now a sixteen-hour shift. Constantly switching between days and nights, sometimes I would work up to seventy hours a week.

Through this chaos, after talking to this girl on Tinder, I asked her to get a Covid test before I met her in person. I drove three hours to meet her, four if you include me getting lost. *Crazy*. Who drives that long to meet someone they've only spoken to over the internet? Me, I guess. What if I'm getting catfished? What if I get murdered? What if I don't *really* have feelings for her? Questions swarmed my brain, and excitement filled my chest. I picked her up from her house and we went for a picnic at a place of her choosing. I brought her flowers, baked goods; she made artwork for me and wore a mauve maxi dress. How cheesy? Makes me wanna throw-up just thinking about it. But she was such a "romantic", and I thought it would be fun to play the game. I also really liked her...wanted to make a good first impression. I had never dated a girl before, and I was quite confused about my sexuality.

When I was in middle school, I “came out” to the world wide web. I posted a video on Facebook at 2 am with me saying “I’m not straight”, end scene. How cringe-worthy. When I woke up for school that morning, everyone had something to say about it. And I sat down, I was gaslit— *it’s just a phase, how was I to know I was queer?* I was only 13. I began to explore my sexuality and always felt like I needed to prove my gayness for some reason, somehow, to others but really show myself that I was right. Breaking the bounds, I was the high school experiment; girls would flirt with me and sext me to never make it public we wouldn’t even engage in true friendship outside the dimension of a phone screen. Why? Because, why would anyone want to be outcasted with me and blasted into the spotlight? But little did I know, that I would be able to find love to celebrate being *out* and PROUD.

It was so beautiful from the start. A fairytale. She—my girlfriend and I. We shared a lot of love and laughs. She pushed me to be a better version of myself, supported me and my dreams. She loved the weird parts of myself. I loved her creative energy, the conversations we had, her company. But it became toxic. We were always fighting. She always thought I was flirting with everyone I talked to. I gave her all of my time and energy when I was not at school or work, but it was never enough. I could never please her. She fell short on every promise she made from the beginning of our relationship. She constantly flip-flopped between the idea of an open relationship, then accused me of cheating on her. She was no longer willing to move closer to me/ The whole relationship lasted a year. And honestly, I wanted her to be something that she just wasn’t ready to be, or gave up on being. She would always just complain about her situation and not do anything about it. That is just not my style. If you don’t like something, change it; if you can’t change it, embrace it or find a way. Our relationship had an expiration date. It was time to make a change.

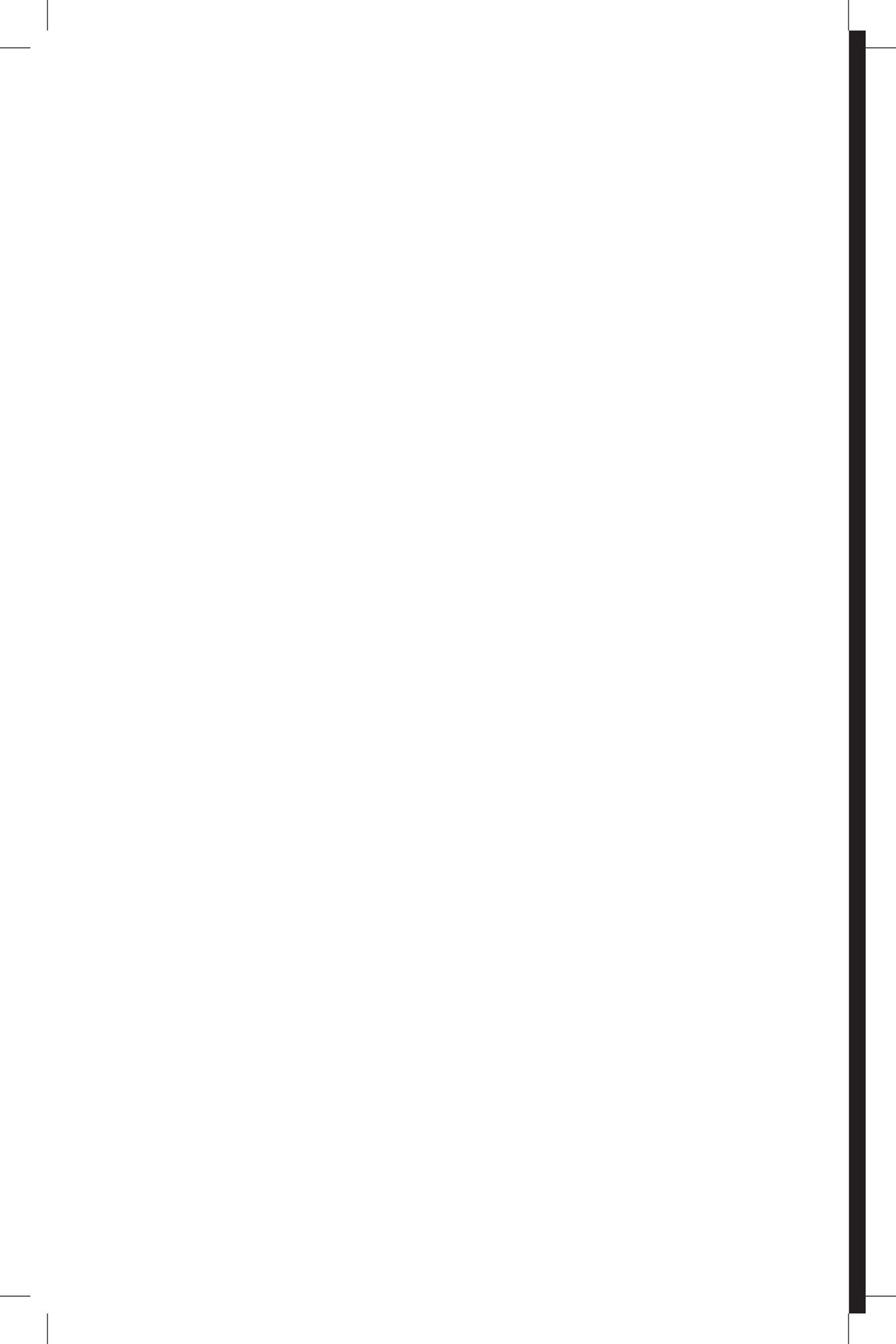
Spring of 2021, after numerous medication changes, removing toxic relationships and setting boundaries to create healthier ones, extended therapy, seven residential relocations and a handful of degree swaps. I made the decision with my doctor to discontinue use of my medication. I’m not sure if I would be here writing to you, if I didn’t receive medication. But medication is only part of the solution. It begins with you. I never thought I could survive unmedicated. Every day I make a

conscious effort to put myself first. Though I fail, I am still recovering. I am not where I was, but the illness lives on with a strict curfew. Conquering mental illnesses and accommodating my learning disabilities, I didn't know that I would make it to twenty-one I didn't believe that I would graduate from university because I was so consumed in my struggles, just to stay alive. I climbed Everest to be here. Stretching my way through the treacherous mounts of snow, climbing and reaching the summit. Where the wind hits harder, and the sun shines brighter. I raised up and healed a wounded child.

Awake, alive, alert, breathing. And slowly, things are changing. But it remains looming and it can ignite at any time. It's name is a chaotically navigated, and chronically dis-regulated nervous system. It was not better overnight. Some people say, "One day I woke up and I was just better." That is not really the case. Just as it creeps in, it also rolls out.

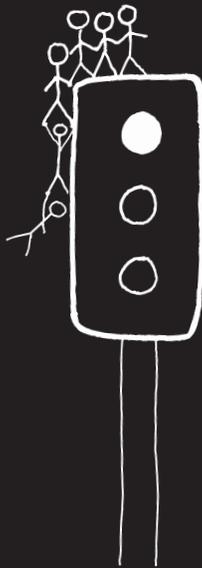
So, here I walk, walk through life with open arms. It's Winter 2021. I never thought I would come this far.





CHAPTER SEVEN

**B A C K W A R D S**



## **Productive**

I'm busy

“Are you working yet?”

I said I'm busy—busy doesn't mean I'm getting paid

To slave my life away.

Why am I only respected

For being busy if you are employed?

I am working, testing the limits of my mind

It's okay to be uncertain about what I might find

So long as I am trying, and I pull back the curtain

To practice

Busy with my personal growth and development

Busy creating healthy routines and behaviours

Busy planning my life and educating myself

Busy existing, living, being, breathing

A self-learner—entrepreneur

Hard is working

## **The Exchange**

Commercial goods

Naive

To take your cash

For pleasure

An incomparable measure

A game to play

Shedding the layers

Disgusted.

**Stolen Land**

We are all

On stolen land

Nothing is our own

**Sun. Sunny. Son.**

You can't stare  
Look at it  
Look into their eyes  
Stare into the distance  
It won't—  
You can't—  
Exist

It's too bright  
They tell you to shine less  
Than he does  
If you are brighter  
He will not be attracted to you  
I guess he doesn't like the beach

—*Sun*

**Light**  
Set the  
deck  
on fire

Me  
Here  
Taking action  
Standing tall  
With my heart  
I am sleeveless

I'm  
Here  
Showing beliefs  
For what is—  
Justice, righteous

You  
There  
Standing tall  
With mockery  
You should be  
Ashamed to be

So yes

I'm  
Here  
With my armed voice  
Standing tall  
An ally  
Please join my hand

Stand with us  
I'm not dividing the people

You are

Please jump the line  
The invisible divide you speak of  
Help us break it

Because all black lives matter  
All minorities matter  
And yes, all lives matter  
But we must shed light on our counterparts  
To bring justice  
We may have been created equal  
But society alters creation  
And equality is not the same as **justice**

## **Industry**

Don't cut me down  
Hold me tight  
Don't poison my body  
You know  
This ain't right

He's on fire  
And we are dying  
Oil is too easy  
Big money is driving it

He's crying for help  
To no one's remorse  
He's on the floor  
Please just open that door

The trees are burning  
The oceans are rising  
The government is too busy

Do anything about it

He's on his knees  
Pleading  
Listen up, open your eyes  
Bleeding

This is a fool's dance  
And it's your last chance

But you cut me down  
Held me light  
You poison my body  
You know  
This ain't right

## **Partner?**

Shaking hands with the slaves  
The pandemic waves  
Making stands shift  
A dark age of distaste

How can you do this?  
Discuss disgust  
Acting fast  
Burning money  
Where is humanity ?  
                    To lift up

The human  
In me  
The human  
In you

Act with creativity  
Crush human poverty  
Remove GHG activity  
Disdain

Show, don't tell

You can't piss on money  
It won't make anybody

                    Wealthy

## Hard Rain

The hard rain hits my face  
The waves crashing  
Bright blue  
Dark blue crashing  
Foaming water  
Splashing the rocks  
The boulders — white, brown speckles  
Oxidizing turning orange

White mist  
Shaking my eyes  
Freezing my face  
And I am in awe

The hot chai tea  
Steamed soy milk  
The dying trees  
Colourful bushes

Empty  
Leafless trees  
Destroyed by the fire  
Lasting **three** days  
Years later, it still cries

Don't you want to give a little love?

## **Conflicted**

Where do I turn

The extremes

Ultimately alternate paths

Trying to mix oil with water

Why bother?

The inner turmoil

Soft unspoken

Time to roar loud loud louder

## De-arrest

“How’re you?”  
I’m okay  
    I made it out  
Out of the march  
A success  
    without a grand parade  
“I can’t go in there.”

So, we walked—around  
Away  
Nearby  
So we—could still be—a part

Peeking in, from the outside  
Looking over the fence.  
Going up the hill  
Glancing back  
Mumbling over your shoulder

    “They are following us.”

The clowns have arrived  
My head a carnival to celebrate  
They waited  
Waited till all the kids had gone

To close in  
To team up  
With their blue suits  
To serve and protect  
But what from?  
You’ve got it all wrong  
*You’ve got it all wrong*

There were so many of them  
We were outnumbered  
We meant no harm  
They were armed  
    The metal wrangling  
    Them surrounding, grabbing  
    A tab of speed, but in my head  
    Sinking into quicksand  
    No time to think

Less than half a puff of smoke  
Quicker than they spoke  
But you remain calm, did as you were told  
As they tightened up around and cut your wrists  
One of us—in chains  
I am your witness

A thunder-crack, grappling my breast  
Scarlet rushing beneath my skin  
Running down, chest to palm  
Salt beading between my fingers  
My hand reaching out for yours  
My vocal chords bleeding out  
To those near  
Waiting—for just-action, out here

In fear

To be scooped up  
A blockage in the way  
Am I gonna be restrained?  
A leech latched on  
The salt there, now detached  
As I watched  
You get tossed into the back  
Clicking clack  
Everything went black

They are just so deranged and in so much pain  
They feel so much shame  
How do I unwrap this gift?

How do you de-arrest  
When you are so small?  
Be loud  
Make noise

“How are *you*?”

## **Closed System**

A concept taught in chemistry class  
I can remember from grade twelve

Where I am trapped  
Locked in a zone  
I can't break out of the box  
Break the law  
Wipe the dust

Uncap

I'm strapped into place  
The seatbelt buckle  
So tight  
I am chafing

They chuckle  
They say I must  
Play it safe  
Life isn't always like flying a kite  
But to me  
It's unfathomable  
To remain somewhere I—

Do not belong

## **Friends with the Monster**

Not good with criticism  
Never have been  
But I'm getting better now

Don't put your hand up  
Look away  
Look at me  
Lift your head up

It's just a voice in my head  
Saying you're judging me  
It's anxiety

**Lived Yet**

Ticking time bomb

It cannot explode on me

Not yet

I have yet to live

A dream I was dying

I fear thee—

**I'm so tired**

Of all these conversations  
These political battles  
Money and greed  
Poverty and famine  
It's too shameful

My skin  
My blood is pouring out  
It's on the floor

Your family is gone  
Say goodbye to your daughter  
Her hands they shake  
The ground quakes  
I just want her to be safe

**I'm so sick**

Of hearing the news  
Of singing the blues  
How am I supposed to do my homework  
When my home country is under attack

Take me home  
To a place I belong  
Save me  
    Keep me alive  
    *Keep me alive*

How does it make you feel  
When you drop the bomb?

Hear the cries near and far

You don't see the tears  
Only guns and swords

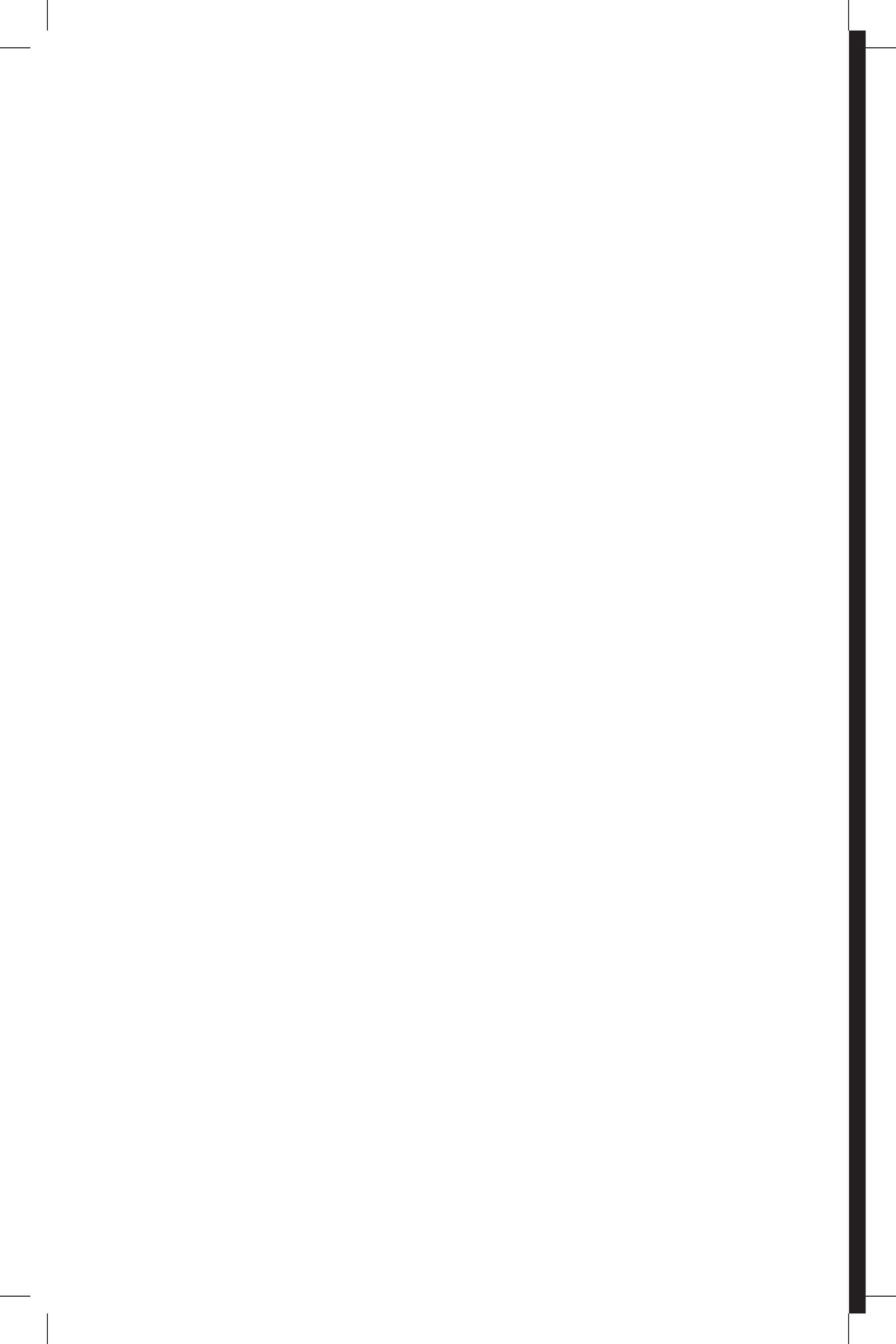
Park your ships  
Dock your boats  
Rebuild where the damage that was done

Because I was hospitalized  
And my family  
Could not see me.

## Salt Springs

She asked if I write it  
As if she believed  
I could really do it  
As if she believed in me

I just want it so bad  
I know I can do it  
I will get there



CHAPTER EIGHT  
**C O N T A I N E D**



## **You Are Confused**

“I’m not straight.”

“You are confused.”

I wish you would have taped flags on my wall  
And celebrated with me

My bravery  
My discovery  
My confusion

But you shamed me

And warned, swarmed, swore

My feelings away

Were weary  
It was embarrassing

Pouring gasoline on the fire  
And I carry this with me

Doubt sits  
And crawls up the back of my neck  
There is no way one could be confused for this long  
Could they?

## Mirror

I shouldn't have to spell it out  
For you to understand

Why can't we just be  
Who we are  
Like what we like, do as we please

Be at ease?  
Flying away, can't catch up  
Acceptance  
Just a tease

Keep us clinging to  
To the approval of others

Neglecting thyself

They might break you  
Who are you?  
You can't know  
Just remnants  
There is no permanence

Shape you  
Show you  
They try  
Give you a chance  
But it's all a fad  
They know  
You aren't capable

Down  
Searching, lurking, looking  
I'm gleaming  
The waves press over my eyes  
All I'm left with  
To stare at my own  
*REFLECTION*

**Backflips**

And the taste of her was stuck on my lips

In bliss

My cheeks were pushed up to the sky

I could not draw my lips in another direction

My face hurts

Facial muscles don't get this much exercise

'm doing back flips

## Taste

And the taste of her was stuck on my skin

My cheeks were pushed up to the sky

I could not peel my lips in another direction

My face hurts

My heart is warm

And I am happy

Everything happens for a reason

And I am in love

— or am I?

**Lusty**

Dry mouth

Salty skin

Chapped lips

Sweet kiss

Sticky chin

Loud laugh

Slapping ass

I do have class

Meet my match

Craving connection

This is my

— *sex addiction*

## Lonely

I know they can smell it from a mile away

They prey on me  
Because I'm freshly picked  
My flesh is ripened for manipulation  
I wish they couldn't tell  
Or see that I act out of desperation  
Please don't see through me,  
I know you won't stay

Don't leave me  
I already know I'm unworthy of your attention  
That I crave

I dig for the root  
But it's deep  
All I see is the stem  
It can't bring me to the right location  
All I know is that

I don't want to act  
For the wrong reasons  
Making the wrong decisions  
I'm leaning in the wrong direction

I want to plant a new seed  
But I fear heavily,  
That I will lose control

Leave me  
— *lonely*

**Her**

You're setting me on fire  
I'm just so tired  
Chasing the flame

Rain on me, please

You're all I desire  
Driving me insane

## Occupied

I wish it were easy  
To date  
And trauma would vacancy

**Ray**

Why am I so scared  
For my sexuality to  
Come through  
To shine down  
And dawn on me?

## Poly Pocket

I need you  
Not in the way you think

In my mind  
I need you to understand me  
I understand your boundaries  
But you backed me in a corner  
I'm stuck, please let me free my mind  
Because I feel so locked into a place  
A space I do not recognize  
I am going into  
Crashing into you  
Forehead to forehead  
I love you and I want you to see me  
So I keep my boundaries  
Then we can be free  
Because I don't want to feel guilty  
For my needs  
It doesn't make you any less  
This is who I am  
It doesn't make you any less

## **Inside**

Why can't I hold you?  
Am I just desperate for love ?  
Do I just crave attention  
Or is it you I want?  
I can't tell

Is it you I'm attracted to?  
Am I looking for something inside?  
I fall in love with some special piece That  
I find in you, him, her, them  
Genderless  
I'm committed to you but I find beauty in others too

Your beauty is incomparable  
Why do I feel so attracted to you?

Why do I want to pursue you, but others too?  
But not  
I'm fighting with you  
I'm fighting with me

Every connection  
Is different Splinter

LADIES  
I cannot deny  
I like to look at their thighs

Thinking in the sun

I fry

It's just your touch  
No  
So  
Let me  
Tell me  
Is it you that I am attached to  
—Or did I find something inside?

## Outside

Is it that I'm attracted to you  
Or am I looking for something inside

I fall in love with some piece special  
Just don't let me blow my mental  
This I find in you, her, him, them  
I'm committed to you, but find luscious beauty in others too

Your beauty is incomparable, why am I so attracted to you?

Why do I want to pursue others too?

Genderless  
The connections  
I glimpse into the crisp eyes  
Of lonely guys  
Elderly cries  
Ladies I cannot deny  
I like to look at their thighs  
Don't be shy

Thinking  
Pondering in the sun  
I fry  
Diving into the waves of the sea  
Let me be  
Empathy  
You are haunting me  
The muscle grows stronger

Is it your touch?  
No So,  
Tell me

Is it you that I am attracted to  
Or did I find something inside?

**My Best**

Missing home

Feeling alone

Tired of being on my own

Won't someone come take care of me?

## **Detaching**

I can't make words into sentences

I miss you

I need to wrap my arms around myself

I need to be alone

— *detaching*

**Save**  
*the* attention  
I crave

may I

**lock** my knuckles between yours  
clean your *dirty* laundry throw out the *trash*

may I

do it all, please **you** and more  
show you—all that I *am*, all that I can  
be meet your match—

maybe then,  
when,

*you* see me  
I will be satisfied  
I will be gone  
far

away

## Next Summer

Just need to make it  
To the next summer  
Where it will be warmer  
Here or there  
It doesn't really matter

I just need to make it  
To next summer  
Maybe then  
I might have space  
To call my own  
I won't need mace To  
keep the pace Putting  
out fires  
A drone in disguise

I know it's sunny here  
But I can't feel the beams on my chest  
The sweat beads off of my chin  
But somehow I hope it is warmer  
Next summer  
Maybe then  
I might have parallel thoughts  
Cutting off the direct line  
That shakes my mind  
Into circles  
I must remind myself  
I have control

Just need to make it to  
The the next summer  
Hopefully I will cool off  
There—all the toxins flush out  
I scoff

Your reflection  
Is on the bus windows  
Because it no longer snows  
It's keeping my attention

—*Your damn reflection*

## Queen Size Mattress

The space is so empty  
Without your body  
Making pictures on my bedroom floor

On the cracked butterscotch  
Your corpse swimming  
The splashes of paint on the wood  
A work of art  
That's what you were  
You are

Now the paint is  
Divergent  
The colors  
Take another form  
Scattered  
Scarlet jaded  
A big question mark  
Replacing your body  
Meaningless  
Creating,  
working  
Thinking, missing  
Looking over at you  
While I'm  
Creating, working  
What strings do I have to play without you?

**Monica**

And I lay here  
Thinking of you  
Well  
Where we were

Kombucha and lunch for two

The sound of seashells  
When pressed to your skin, swirl

As the wind scratches my membrane  
The pebbles of sand  
Getting in the way of my tan  
    Sitting, waiting for her to paint my body colors  
    for thee freckles to tattoo my body, my corpse

What are these smells?  
Maybe the beer  
Soiled and spoiled  
From the heat  
Mixing orangutang piss

A bite  
To eat  
A crunch in my beans  
The sand acting like a weed  
A “vitamin crunch”  
That is what you would say  
Your voice ringing in my ears  
But here I am, lunch  
For one, but I stay  
Undone

The star dangling in the sky  
The rays beaming down on me  
The sun moves  
Running —the tide

It is so pretty here  
Maybe one day  
I could stay  
Where my body is warm

The place where we spent our summer  
Now down by one number

My stomach molding to the sand  
Thinking of the moments  
Spent with you  
How nice it is,  
To be  
With me

The membrane I peel  
And I am now  
Sane holding—Gratitude for my solitude

## **Gasoline**

The tank is empty

To be alone

Learning to be ok again

Here I am —

All on my own

Enjoying my own company, again

Beautiful to love who I am

Myself to be alone

There is gas in the tank

— *The battle of solitude*

## **Bikes**

We used to ride our bikes through the parks  
Driving round the town  
Screaming so loud  
To the music  
We were stars

Now I don't know

Who you are  
But I try to  
But you keep raising the bar  
Take a bow

Where are we now?  
My memory's a little foggy now

### **Some Time**

Not everything is about you

You are mad at yourself

Not me

I do not deserve to be

Treated

So poorly

Jump up and down

Throw your tantrum

I take some time To myself

Some space to think

Some time to think

I'm tired of building relationships

For them to all fall away

I deserve better

It's not all about you

**“Thank You”**

Sitting on my bed  
My bed I sit  
In solitude—

Eyes on the light screen, beaming  
A phone, mine  
Posting, posting, posting, liking  
Like me  
Grappling onto sanity  
Pulling at the string  
Waiting for the rope to pull me up  
Vying for—

An arm branches over my chest  
The hand placed by my side  
On the surface  
My bed I sit  
Eyes on the light beaming screen  
I’m not alone  
There’s a black sweater  
A body above me  
And I look up  
My eyebrows raise  
I’m wrapped up  
Embarrassed  
Surprised  
An angle, we’re entangled  
An awkward position, juxtaposition  
All too warm  
My clenched jaw drops  
My shoulder unlatch  
Why am I in your arms?  
Chest to chest  
Gaping  
The air between our bodies  
But connecting  
The hug I finally did not have to ask for

“Thank you” he says  
    “Thank you for what?”  
“Thank you for many things.”

I feel the dew from their cheek, prickly, brushing up onto mine  
I pull back  
We gaze — only inches apart  
I lean back, I look down, I stare  
Out the window  
I tear up  
They are still looking  
Wiped away the rain  
Putting the blame on you  
Taking my pain

## Sea Urchin

In the deep midnight sea  
Blue is black  
And you won't protect my back

No tears to flood underwater  
Empty in the depths of the open ocean

I'm sad  
Lonely  
Not alone

Hold me  
Why won't you hold me?  
Why don't you love me  
Care the way I do? *Show me*  
I don't wanna hear it

Could be mad  
But I'll just be  
Disappointed

Second place  
Left in a space  
Where you dropped your bags  
And ran away, back to the days  
The one who made you gag  
You're so lost in her gaze

Don't mean to be a damper Please  
Forgive me  
Forgive me  
For bringing down your mood  
Grab the laundry hamper  
Make the food

Where am I going?  
    You say “What’s the matter?”  
    I say “Why does it matter?”  
Start where you are

The tide rushing back in  
Your spiny skin  
Latching back to mine  
The sea urchin  
Has come back in line  
It is no longer fine

I’m glad  
You couldn’t ruin me  
I’m on my own

## To Be Free

Free me

I need you  
You're on my mind

But in my mind  
I need you  
To understand me  
I understand  
Your bound-ar-ies

But in my mind  
I need to free mine  
Because I'm locked into (a) place  
Where I'm just a fallacy  
But I don't wanna be

*So please*

*Just see*

I love you and I want you  
And for us to be free

But I too need to keep my boundaries  
I don't wanna feel guilty  
For needing what I need  
It doesn't make you any less

It's just who I am  
I can't feel as if I am wrong  
For who I am, for who I love  
Where I wanna go  
The experiences I want to have

Diversity  
A need

Our needs being met  
You are all the more  
No less  
My heart is whole

But that could never be

## Cokehead

She broke you and I'm sorry  
She loved you  
But she loved herself more

It was over before  
But she can't start something new  
She doesn't feel like a lover  
Even if she's over you

You're a drug dealer  
A cokehead  
An alcoholic  
Was it all a lie?

She thought  
She was a spy  
Peeking through the looking glass  
Driving into your heart  
She lost her spark  
Watching her slowly die inside  
Did you even notice?  
Was it all a game?

Smashed in half  
Broken  
But happy because she could finally fly

**Laugh-t-her**

I laugh so much more when I am away from you  
I smile so much wider when I don't feel drawn in by  
You dragged me down  
Hurt my crown  
Now I'm here  
Strong and proud

**Breathe to Grow**

I am a caterpillar  
Wrapped up by your love  
It's suffocating

The  
Need  
To  
Grow

## **I'm Not Her**

I'm not her  
And I will never be her  
And you don't deserve me  
All that I am

Holding me back  
Weighing me down

I hope you are happy  
I hope you're happy  
Without me  
Without  
Me——

I know you too well  
I deserve better  
Better than you

Someone who will choose me  
Wrap me up  
And hold onto me  
A treasure they will never leave  
Never let go of  
As if the can't live without

I said "I don't want anything to mess this up or come in between us."  
And you said "Then don't."  
But it's too late  
Things are out of my control  
And you can't feel something you don't

I deserve to be wanted

I was lying to myself before now

## Email

You  
So I reread the email from you  
So I never forget  
The image you have of me  
The way you treated me  
How crazy you are

The leaves are falling  
I met you when the leaves were growing  
But we don't talk anymore



When I met you  
I wrote my first song

Here I am  
I'm standing  
I'm tall  
For her

We've been stagnant for too long  
I been stagnant for too long  
When we got heated

I stopped writing  
When we parted  
I had forgotten how to

I take everything I learnt from us  
From when we were an us  
I'd be lying if I said you never crossed my mind

I miss you

I miss a lover

A lover to come home to  
    To hold my hand  
    To share my weight  
    To cheer me on  
    To hold my hair  
    To carry my pain

The fire was sudden  
Strong and mistaken  
For a beautifully cultivated art display  
For me to see, call mine

And I'm **here**  
Slowly,  
Coming back I'm here  
I'm alive  
I'm going  
I am moving  
Moving forward  
Moving on forward  
Moving on  
Move I do

Slowly  
Move others to the sound of my words

Here I go  
I'm going I'm crying  
In the shower  
Watch me cry

Here I stop  
I'm stopping I'm stopping  
I'm not moving  
Watch me move

I'm hurting

Here I go  
I'm going  
I'm running  
Watch me run

## The Situation-ship

I thought you were gay

When I saw you  
You were playing my keys  
Entranced, I was drawn to you  
Your energy kept me compelled  
But it was just the sounds made

Time was spent  
Together we were  
Day and night

My sleeve was spread too thin, my heart too big  
What a sin

Roommates  
From place to place  
The places you helped me move  
Where you then,  
Lives  
Stayed  
With me  
I let you in, to keep me company  
You did not go hungry

When you went cold turkey  
It was scary  
But I still kept you warm

Planning, we did  
To run away  
To look  
Looking, searching for what  
I did not know

But instead of running together  
You ran from me  
To someone else  
I should have known  
Better  
Than to get my feelings wrapped up  
To let it extend, reeling me in —entangled  
Mangled  
I tried so hard to keep them in storage  
But then I built up the courage  
To say, to speak my truth  
There are chains around my heart

You reinforced my doubts  
Because you're still entangled with another

Wonderful  
Am I am so grateful  
To unravel  
This message

Finally brought to the forefront  
Breaking the chains  
I can move upward and shine  
I'm mustard  
Cracked and bruised  
Salt in my burns  
Lemon in my eyes  
Bright  
To no demise

Time was spent  
Day and night  
Together we were  
Not together

I begged for pleasure  
Touch me, please me, punish me  
Give me any attention  
But you were sure  
Attention was to be given  
Not received

So I gave, and gave, and gave  
And you took, took, took

Silly me  
Begging  
Humiliating no one  
But myself

I was deceived  
Misconstrued by what I perceived  
I deserved  
After a breakup, stuck

Hard  
The tip,  
Soft skin, salty  
Prodding around the depths of my throat  
Your large hands wrapped around my neck  
Gentle, warming me up  
For you  
Sticky on my face

Empty and divided  
Desperate: this was one-sided

You slept on me  
Rejected my kiss  
My lip, an inch from yours  
Your hot hands on my soft cheek  
Your hand on my face,  
Redirection, pushing  
Me away  
Brushed aside

My eyes now open

Sometimes, yes, sometimes

I hear thumping

Shaking the ground

A shadow

Crossing over behind me

A chill quivers down my spine

A shrill

Is someone there

To hurt me, to grapple with me?

No one is there

Maybe it's you, looking over, protecting me

Reminding me that you are here

And you will always be here

Your spirit never rests

Even if your body dies

## **Friends**

That you are close to

That are far away from you

That you know all too well

That break your fall—fake

That watch you break

That are your best friends

That you don't know at all

To            get            you            through            it            all

**Soon**

A hello  
A goodbye  
Where sometime has passed  
And I paid you a good farewell  
An overdue visit  
And here I am  
I have arrived I am back — back in town  
But I don't know how long  
An unknown timeline

I'm on my way back and  
I can't wait to see  
Your face  
To feel their flesh  
Your physical existence

To be reminded  
That you are real

To wrap up your voice  
Storing it away  
My chest of memories  
All of those I love  
All those who love on for me

I'm on my way out  
On the road  
In the air  
Sailing down the concrete walls of the earth  
Eye to eye  
We cry  
But this is not the first goodbye  
It is not the last

I will see you soon

## **Friendship**

It's hard to be sad—

It's hard to be sad around you

—*anna*

## **Simultaneously**

I wonder if you wonder

when I do

We must be connect, until I am corrected

I will be infected with this idea of our mental dialect

When I'm thinking of you

Do you think of me too?

Or are our experiences

So divided?

### **Grew-up**

As I grow older  
The more I see  
The more I see  
The more I doubt  
Punching holes through everything  
To see what's inside  
To *find* the leak  
So bleak

As I grow older  
The more I see  
The faces I have always known  
I learn who they are  
Their behaviors  
Things that were never shown  
Because I was little  
But now I see what your  
Real intentions are  
Not so pure  
Manifesting, changing, becoming  
One with thyself  
I see you  
You play the game all too well  
But you're fake, sad, alone. I'm sure

I'm getting colder  
I just cannot be

I just cannot be  
Me, searching but I'm sauerkraut  
Looking for the mole, it's going  
My patience — wears thinner I find  
I'm shorter. I used to stand tall, but now I just seek  
Something that isn't there  
I'm weak

As I grow older  
The less I see

They give me the shoulder  
Me they always leave  
Me, I'm just looking  
For someone  
To do  
Nothing with

Maybe to hold my hand  
Maybe even to spend the night  
y my side  
Toes in the sand  
We'll collide  
Hold them tight  
Stars align



## Pocket Dimension

Bringing me into  
Your pocket dimension

I had no clue  
When you had mentioned  
About all the tension  
You feel  
Of course,  
You're locked up  
Boarded off  
Because deep down  
It's so very scary

But not over  
There in your Pocket dimension

## **A Letter from Her to Her**

Here I go  
I'm going  
I'm flying  
Watch me fly

I'm not there yet  
But I will be one day  
One day  
Someday  
Soon

You were my number one  
Built me up  
Gassed me out  
But now I must go

Move forth  
Onward  
Forward  
Forward

a l o n e.

## Best Company

I miss you  
I wanna know who you are  
Where we are

But your love  
our love is toxic

When the lights go off  
And I am in the quiet  
There you are kissing my brain

I be alone  
And not think of you  
Not feel lonely  
Fully alone, on my own, with myself, no one else  
And be my best company



CHAPTER NINE

**UNLOCK**



## **Hard Eyes**

A lot on the run  
Through the mind  
With less than time  
It cannot be undone

They are  
Kind with  
A tired mind  
A heavy soul  
Low shoulders  
They couldn't be bothered  
It's all been just too much  
And they grow old

Smile  
They do  
Chuckle and  
Joke and light up smoke  
That head is full  
The heart is hurt  
They are done

Hard from the pain  
Soft  
A shard of lard  
Lumped internal  
Loft

In the rain  
staining this lane.  
Crunching into my collar bone  
To fold  
Grainy gold fingertips  
Fingernails of black dust beneath  
Digging in

A cackle  
Bright as the sun  
Rolling through  
To pierce your

— *wise eyes*

**All or Nothing**

“You don’t know what love is  
I guarantee.”

Chest in  
mind, intertwined  
When you feel the heat you  
reap

Lustful puppy lips  
Dangling smile, jerking together that devilish smile  
Twinkle in your eye  
Making you shy

Sending shivers  
down  
my spine  
I’m out of line

Your version differs from mine  
*I guarantee.*

## The Block

I wish I could string new lines  
New words

That didn't all sound the same  
It just feels so estranged  
I'm in my head, not that  
Not this  
That sounds pathetic and lame  
You've said that before  
You've been there before  
I wish I could find new rhythms

Find my cards  
Where they unfold and flow perfectly  
With modern hymns  
And the queen of spades flies into my hands  
Am crowned and it's all mine  
And it's all worth it

Dive in. Own it.  
You want kin.

## Unlearning

Finding the deep glare  
chasing something  
that doesn't exist

you turn the corner  
To be reminded  
Of the circle,  
Again.

Beware of the  
back there where  
you started

the light,  
on the tip,  
the cusp  
A choice to turn around

Ledge—  
hanging, of to the drop off  
The never-ending rabbit hole  
You put yourself in.

Therefore  
Only you,  
Can pull you out.

You finally arrive, but there  
is nothing there, left in white  
space, devaluing yourself,  
offended, so disrespected

Thick air  
Thin stare  
Lean deeper

Put out your hand  
Try.  
There is no other option.  
Do or die.

## Complex Realities

Individual cars  
Collectively  
Side by side  
Individually  
And only sometimes  
We get the privilege  
To share a car  
To unite  
One experience collectively  
Going strong  
But the truth is that doesn't last long  
And we will never truly know someone else's  
Vehicle

**Percept**

Sometimes what is right in front of you

Is not easy to see

Sometimes what it seems

Is not what you think

## Unclench Your Fists

You don't have to be miserable  
Unclench those fists  
Let down your guard  
Open your chest  
Lift up your arms

You don't want to be miserable  
Go scavenge  
For that key  
Pick the lock  
Open that gate  
Walk through the doors

You don't need to be miserable  
So take a deep breathe  
Roll back your shoulders  
Let yourself live  
Melt those bars  
Transform that energy  
Break through the cage  
Set yourself free

Synergy

Unfold the box  
Tab by tab  
Cardboard  
Box cutter

Open your mind  
Follow the path  
Push the bushes back peel the branches back

Escape your mind

You might find

You

Are

Greatness

Yosemite

—layers of boxes—need to get out of each—level up to break free

## **Sharks**

Dipping toe in the water  
Why don't you just dive in?  
You're swimming with sharks

**Doors**

Go back to school

Go travel across the world

Don't stop moving

Keep on going

I'm just so scared of what lies beyond those doors

## I Had a Dream—EP

I was shot.

My lips were sealed shut, and I was the only one who knew first aid. I wanted to scream out — tell them what to do. Everyone was in shock — just staring at me, and I lay there bleeding out, trying to breathe, trying to speak, to tell them to call 911.

Bullet wound sticking out out my chest. Survivor. Chest pain. I was in the hospital, my family and friends around me, but when I got back home I did not know it. The walls, the chair, the smell: they were gone. This is where I live now, with my husband. His family instructed me to tend to the house, in pain, in recovery, disobeying doctors orders of bed rest. I am up, bending down, crouching over, heating up a fresh pot of stew. I had no strength, peeling my body from the mattress. A party floods through the gates, circus animals climbed into my place, trashing my home. These are our so-called “friends”? The music is loud. The lights are dim. A huge jam sesh at my house—I need to gasp for air. I am in dire need of quiet, of rest. I push my way through the crowd, it’s as if these people didn’t even know or care that this is my house, that I am in recovery. I unlatch the front door, bolt downward, toward the street. Bolting, spinning around the people—a group walking. “Who are you?” I scream. Late night dark.

Raining. On the incline, grass along side the sidewalk. Anyone can pull a gun. Paranoid.

Did I hit my head? Why can’t I seem to have any recollection of this life I am in. I seem to have lost my memories in the trash, searching for that photo album to set a spark but the filing cabinet is too messy, my mind cannot sort through. Has life has gone on without me or are they fooling me?

Controlled. I was. In my body with a life I did not know, I did not recognize, not something I could call my own. Married.

I was trying to run away, but where would I run and ride? Escape this apartment the house, the place, in this space.

Terrified of doors, I crawled around my apartment. Anyone, anytime could walk through those doors and bang.

## Cold Feet

One foot in  
One foot out  
Ankle seeps in a puddle  
Ankle deep in a landfill

But you dove in  
Head first  
You were all in  
And I was scared Ran

**Losing**

You didn't make me

I made me

Do it

For you

So you

Would like me

Continue to be around me

Never leave my side

Because I knew

I could never be what you wanted

What you were looking for

But I wanted to be

—*losing*

## **Fall Away (Money)**

I don't need money  
To invest in fancy items that will all fall away  
I need to invest it into my body my mind so it won't decay  
Pay mind to my food  
Give attention to my thoughts  
Give them space to come and go  
So I can grow

## **The Orange Peel**

Prying that orange  
Twisting that peel  
And dip  
She is dropped down into that drink  
Prying, trying,  
Climbing out  
To lock horns with  
Something to keep the bottle on the shelf  
A cook book  
A schedule  
A job  
Someone cuff her wrists  
But you are avoidant  
Attachment  
Rowing away  
And I am anxious  
Stuck at the bottom of the glass  
Wanting isn't enough  
Another one

**Drip Rip**

There's blood on my shoes

I'm not amused

A blade to the skin  
Cut me open

—*drip. r.i.p.*

**Free**

We stand

Begging for plans

Please let us

Celebrate

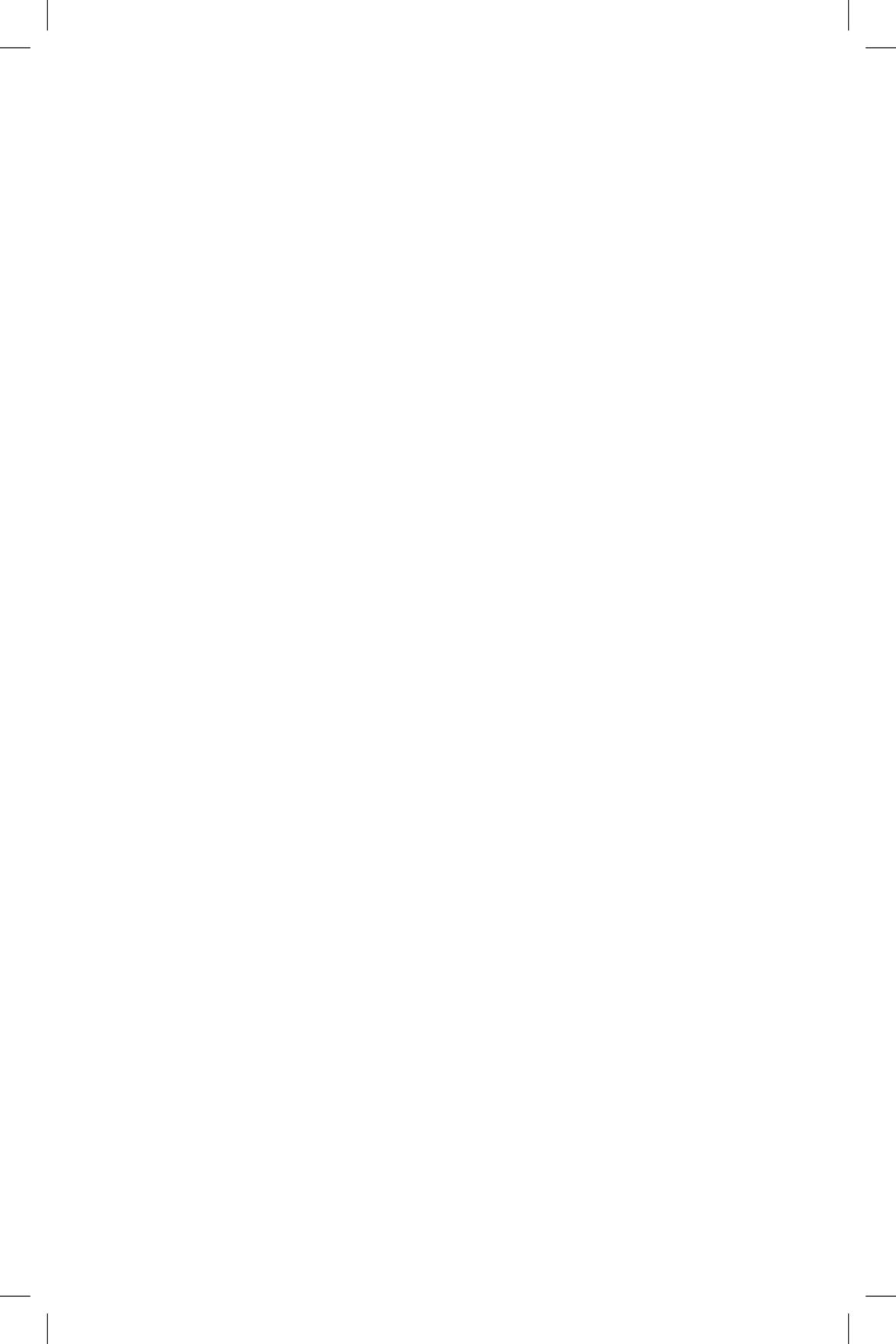
All that we have

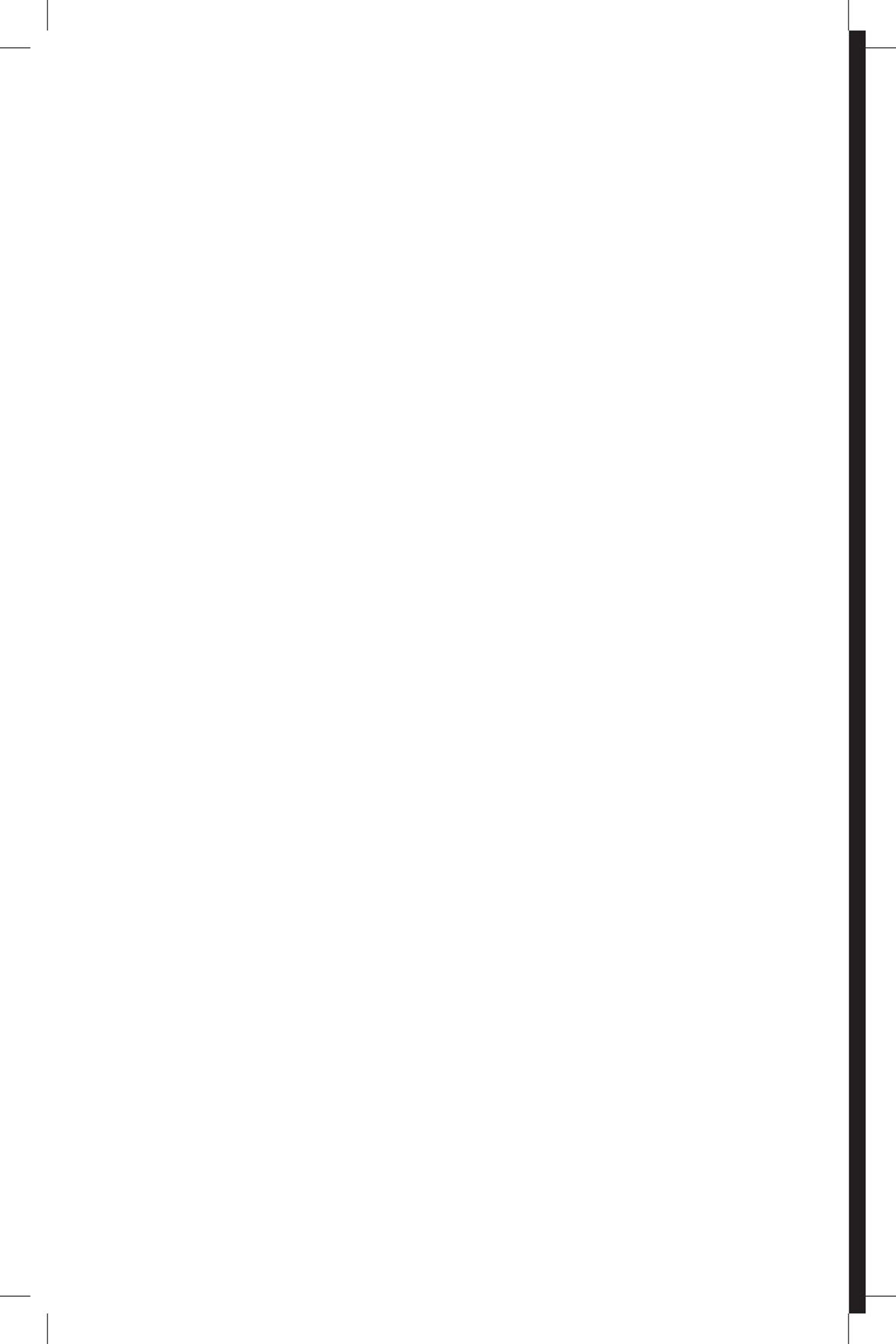
Stuck in cement

Leaving us bent

Out of shape

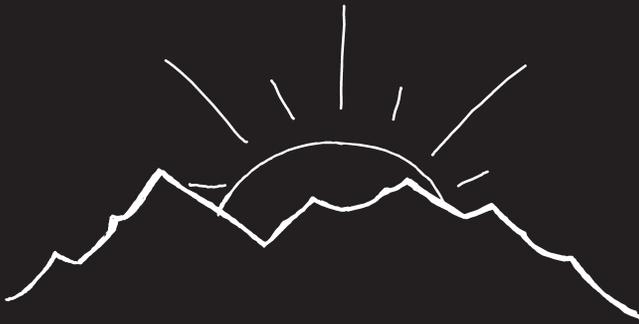
To the slave owner





CHAPTER TEN

**R I S E**



## **Snakes**

Sitting, legs branched over one knee

Not a whisper

Nor a sound

Unable to lift the corners of your lips

To show teeth

For others have trouble keeping beat

Unable to jump up

Out of those arms

Across the floor

From those snakes

They're chasing you as you chase the sun

Slithering across they wrap around your feet

Becoming colder

Left foot, right foot

Pedalling

Chasing faster, and faster —

Warmer

Smiling under the bridge

Reaching up and over

To climb, to grasp the sunlight

But the snakes stream upward  
Over your knee  
Around your thigh  
Surging onto your chest  
Swirling around your neck  
Flipping your lips  
Closing on your teeth  
Clenching your jaw  
Your tongue feels raw  
They're molding to your airway  
Just as concrete dries  
Vying for air  
You are unable to check  
Where you are going next  
The hissing is too loud

But my ear is pierced  
By — that hammer — pounding  
The jury declares — guilty  
The sun has set, the snakes at rest

You quiver  
Not a whisper  
Not a sound  
Jump up  
To fall down

Your mouth is a moon, I see teeth  
Happiness doesn't need snakes

## **Beauty**

Strange to find

I was actually adored

I hope to see the beauty that I ignore.

## Trust

Who do you trust?

I think you should trust yourself.

You don't trust yourself?

Why don't you trust yourself?

"I trust you."

The intention behind what you're doing

That's what is important

Believe in yourself, okay?

Don't doubt yourself

Believe in yourself

I love you, baby.

**You Matter**

You are bigger  
than your story.

Your words—interactions.  
Hold weight (They matter / it matters)

You matter.

## Valentine

Oct 16/2021 & Jan 15/2022

Will you be mine  
My valentine?

So I don't have to  
Protect me  
From the heart wrested?  
So I don't have to roll up my sleeves  
To keep you from infecting  
My clothes?

But I know that when I find  
*One that will act kindly*  
It is just an act

So I will hold my heart  
Tightly, closely  
Watch it, nightly  
My eyes peeled back  
Prepping for the day you steal  
From me, when I am no longer watching  
You're stuck with that half-way love that only stabs me in the back

I'm trying  
Trying to hold it up  
Let me try to put my borders up  
What I've never been good at  
I will layer up  
To be protective, to be selective  
Cuz you are worth all that  
Learn to be okay  
On my own  
You're mine, valentine

## **Fuck You**

You are amazing  
You are more than  
More than amazing  
Beautiful features  
Give yourself more credit  
The credit you so deserve

She doesn't know how to love herself  
She doesn't accept all that she is  
She put herself on a shelf  
I wish you could see what I see  
Don't trouble oneself

Put yourself above  
Ride this crazy wave called life  
Despite  
What they all say or do

The world will try to break you  
Beat you, till you are black and blue  
Covered in bruises,  
until it amuses enough of them  
You must learn how to stand tall  
And say  
Fuck you  
I am worth more

## **Hiding Behind Confidence**

The educational guiding hub  
Blind leading the blind  
No guidance  
But your own guiding light

*Shine bright*

## **Unblocked**

A breath of fresh air  
Into my pen  
Running down the page  
Relief

Exhaled

Finally climbing out  
Of where I felt retired

Writing again  
On a rampage  
Dissociated (•) association  
Cleaning the earwax

The way, the blockage  
From my brain  
Where all is sound.  
I bind and buckle down  
And my mind

connects

To the pen  
To the page  
And fall away from where I'd lack

It's there, completely  
The parasite is back  
Thankfully

## Proud

It's been one year  
Our anniversary  
Since you altered my body  
Where I swallowed you whole  
To rid the mole  
To alter my state of mind  
To keep me from dying

I made it this far without you  
Where my lungs fill with air  
My heart beats to a regular drum  
I'm thriving

I never thought I would live  
    without  
    So much fear following me  
    but now I see  
        how to treat my mind  
        how to stop it from lying

What does proud feel like?  
    Happy graduation  
        Congratulations

It feels like a breath of fresh air  
When the smog rolls out from the streets  
Or when you reach the top of the mountain and the air is crisp, piercing,  
cold

It feels like  
Standing on the highest rooftop with your arms out and up to the sky  
Looking down and seeing all the small homes you had to build to reach  
this empire

It feels like  
The first snow fall  
Bright

## **Tardiness**

A tornado of thoughts—Swirling

A straight jacket for clothes—Curling

A shattered clock—I'm not going

But here I am

Late

But at least I saved the date

## A Letter to Myself—

I'm so proud of you  
All you have endured  
All that you continue to  
All that you profess (even through you are a mess)  
All that you are  
All that you do  
And what you do not

Everything you are chasing  
Keep on chasing those dreams

You are a tiger  
You'll rest in the lion's den

I love you  
Thank you for supporting me  
Always being there for me  
And I forgive you for when  
All you knew was to hurt me  
I know you were breaking  
I know you were doing the best that you knew how to  
You have grown so much  
From the start  
Leave room to grow  
There's so much more  
To go

**To Calm**

Thump thump

My heart

I pound

Zing

My ears ring

The visual

Is unusual

I breathe

I stand still

I sit

I breathe

I stand

I sit

Still

To calm

**Dry as Gin**

Pull the drawer  
    choose wisely  
A slip on thy touch  
What a sin

Fork to the shin  
Leave my skin  
Dry as gin

Beautiful

I have always been

**Motive**

Today

I will

wash my face, I will change my clothes

I will

pull myself together, put myself first

Chasing that thirst





## About the Author

**Dawn Web** is a queer and neurodivergent individual, born and raised in a small town in Ottawa, Ontario, and comes from a conservative mixed-race family of six. Dawn has been creating and exploring multiple mediums as coping strategies for as long as they can remember. Dawn is a multi-media artist, first place award-winning dancer, feature author for *Fathom: Creative Writing Journal*, feature multi-instrumentalist in the band *Wool Sweater*, and is the Creative Director for *Vivid Illusion Creative Studios Inc.* They moved to Halifax, NS, where they completed a Bachelor of Science with a Specialization in Neuroscience and Psychology at Dalhousie University and took a class in creative writing. This led them to pursue a career as a First Responder, Child and Youth Counsellor, Research Assistant, a Personal Support Caretaker, and finally an Author and Multidisciplinary Artist.

