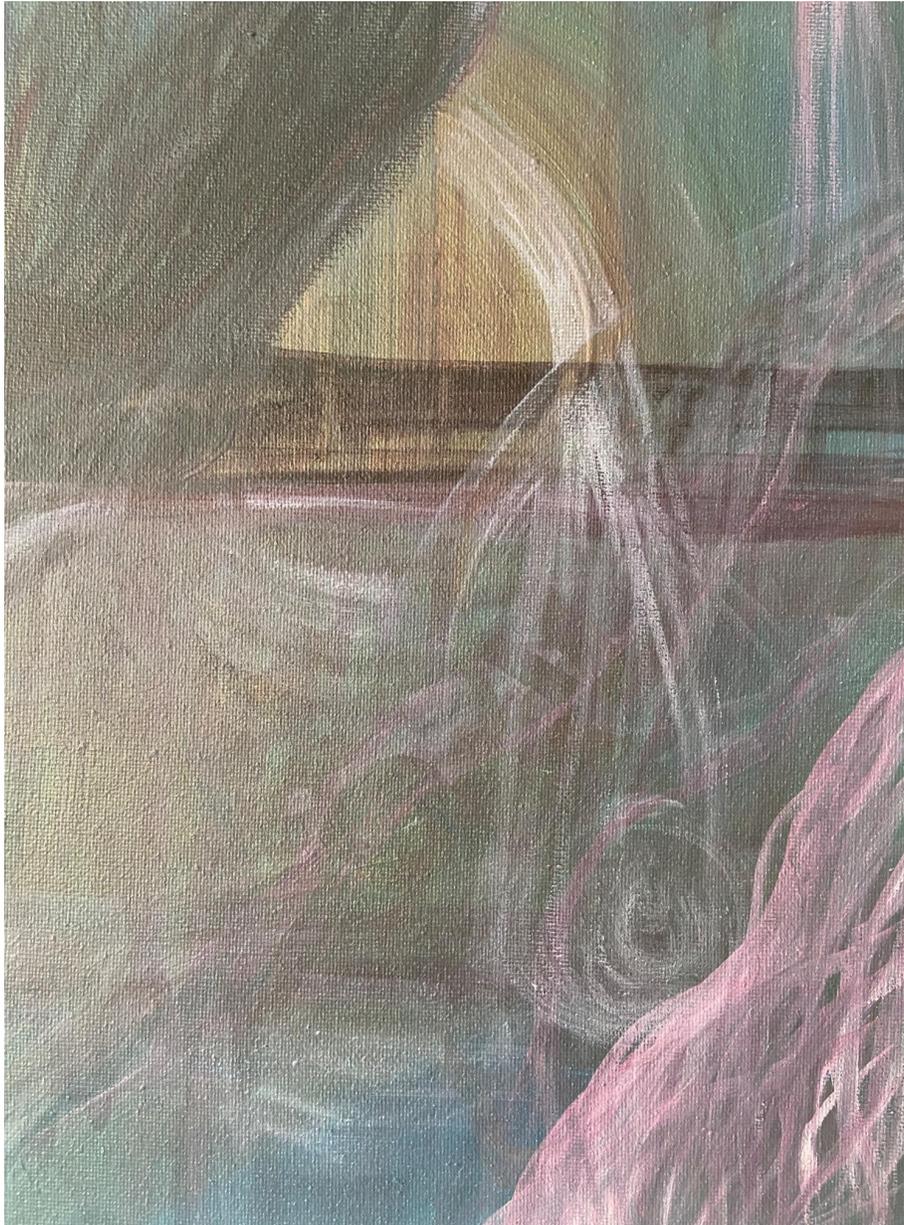


Into the Light  
traveling between peace and pain

by Nicole Sylvia Javorsky



Dear lovely Reader,

I've been traveling between the lightness of peace and the heaviness of gut-wrenching pain. I've been taking long walks full of joy and wonder. I've been falling to my knees, pleading for relief.

I've been wondering which is more real: the darkness or the light? The pain or the peacefulness?

But here's the thing: I wouldn't feel the clarity I do in this moment if I didn't allow myself to feel my confusion and doubt, to co-exist with my questions. In one sense, I didn't choose my trauma or my pain. In another sense, I chose to heal. I took leaps of faith because I understood this was the only way for me to get the chance to live fully and authentically as myself. It's very hard to choose the unknown and I did, and I do.

Almost 6 years ago, I had my most serious attempt at ending my life. Shortly after, the person who had been sexually assaulting and abusing me at the time stopped. Just after that, I had a moment of clarity: I needed change. One of my coping mechanisms from repeated abuse was anorexia. I said to myself: I want to live, just not like this, and so I must find a way. Still I had no clue even how to imagine what another way would be like. The roots of anorexia went back even earlier to abuse during my childhood.

I am very aware of my joy, love, and awe of living. And every time I dip into doubt and darkness, I come back into the light with something stronger, deeper, meaningful, or beautiful. The abuse was horrific. And still, it is all the more hopeful to know that I have found a way to trust, to believe, and to love despite the way I've been treated in the past.

And I will keep traveling into the darkness, knowing that I will return to the light. There is so much for me to learn. The sun cannot rise if it never goes down. And without sundown, there would be no glorious sunset, no nights. I don't fully understand this, but I do sense that the existence of what I love is tied to the existence of what I fear.

Honoring the darkness, I travel into the light . . .

I go off on a lot of tangents, but in a way, the tangents are the point, rather than besides it.

I've heard the phrase, about how life isn't supposed to be about the destination. Catch phrases like that, the ones that people say to make you feel better, are their own kind of destination. For example, one of the few I actually liked and found meaningful at one time went like this: "Life isn't about

waiting for the storm to pass. It's about learning to dance in the rain." I still like the message of it. But by now, I've seen it typed out under one too many sunny social media photos and so the words don't sound so profound anymore. They sound empty.

A lot of people say, "It gets better." The truth I felt when I heard those words was, "I don't really get what you're saying, but it can't be that bad." Or, "One day, you'll realize that you think way too much." In other words, what I heard was, "Your pain isn't the problem. It's YOU."

When I was struggling to keep myself alive as a teenager and then while I was entering adulthood, hearing these catch phrases would leave me with a greater sense of unease. I thought these conversations were supposed to make me feel better. And I thought that there was something wrong with me because they didn't make me feel better at all.

What is the real difference between going off on a tangent and stating my actual case? What's the difference between a destination and a pit-stop? I don't know.

Okay, so I can try to make your head hurt. I can use logic. I can try to persuade. I can try to prove that what I have to say is true, important, etc. Sure, I can do that. I also could try to be more understandable. I could try to make myself feel more important, more worthy.

But, I don't want to convince you of anything. I don't want to feel more important because I'm important enough. I'm good enough. I'm enough. When I've gotten lost in the circus of trying to prove my worth, an emptiness inside troubled me and I felt more worthless to myself.

What is a singer? Somebody singing.

This isn't about lowering standards, and this is not complacency.

It's accurate. It's effective, and true.

In all these quests for self-improvement and becoming our "best" selves, what truths do we become out of touch with? How does your "best" self treat all your other selves? Is that really my best self, then?

Disconnection and avoidance is distinct from healing and acceptance.

I've casted off my anger, my sadness, my pain, my confusion, my grief, my desire.

I told myself I was looking at the bright side. I told myself I just needed to be stronger. Really, I was scared. I had learned to shame myself instead of accept myself.

To create and share from my soul helps me unlearn shame and learn acceptance. I trust you to feel, to look, to read, to listen, to make space for what I share, if you choose. I appreciate anyone's choice to give me their time and attention. At the same time, it's okay if I'm not for everyone, or not right now. I don't need more. Only this.

In this spirit, I give you my artifacts: the snippets I've written on and off, the bits and pieces of me reflecting in real time and coming to know my own story. Please do what you wish with them.

Love,

Nicole

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## A Strange Trip

Dear Nicole,

My name is Nicole Sylvia Javorsky. Yes, we are the same person but in another sense, we are not. I read somewhere recently about how our experience of time doesn't go from past to present to future, as we might assume. Instead, we usually experience time as present to past or present to future to present.

Anyway, one day, this language will be yours and it will make sense to you.

Now, I am writing you this letter because I am coming to visit soon. I just wanted to ensure we're both expecting the visit.

See you before you know it!

Xo,

Nicole

The electric currents inside me rushed toward my fingers, bombarding my fingertips with the flower's lightning juice—right in the instant I saw the cover of that letter.

Oh wait, I'm not making any sense, am I? I'll backtrack. So I peeled open the envelope to reveal a notecard with a flower on the front, except "flower" isn't a sufficient description? No! To understand, you'd probably have to picture first an orange lily with insides that fade to yellow-gold, and scarlet edges too. And if you were to zoom in on a particular rectangle within the frame of this image I just described, do you see how it's at once abstract and a "flower"?

Yeah, then my fingers fumbled to get this notecard open, so I could read the letter. As soon as I saw those words inside though, I wished I had just stuck with looking at the cover, because the letter had me thinking I was going crazy. The nausea started. Before I even knew it, flash, flash Flash. Flash. Flash. flash. Flash. FLASH. FLASH. FLASH! FLASH. Scenes, these vivid vignettes which I knew (but also didn't know) came from my life, switched from one instant in time to the next to the next and the next (and frankly, too many more nexts) in no particular order. On top of that, these scenes changed so quickly—and many of them I couldn't even tell you when they happened—so I wouldn't be able to arrange them in chronological order even if I could recall all the scenes.

I know, but how can I believe myself if I don't even know for sure this is real?

At first, it seemed like I could stop the movie from playing. Yet, this was no typical Hollywood film meant to entertain the crowd. No. This was just like Tarkovsky's *Mirror*! Except the fact that I am not a Russian director of art films and my brain is not made from the material of film stock. But if this movie playing just for me had been created with plastic and gelatin emulsion, I would run straight to the projector and smash it with my fists. Once the projector appears safely broken, I'd find all the available film that captured each scene and I would cut each strip into such minuscule pieces. Tinier and tinier until I could safely assume I'd never have to see the movie again.

Are you sure that'll help, to let myself go there?

Do you promise I can always come back?

...

No matter what, Nicole thought, this was no time for time travel. In fact, she felt this way because she didn't want to hear the words a faraway part of her whispered, which is why she didn't exactly make out what was being said. If Nicole had listened, she would have heard, "You can get stuck in another time. It has happened before. If you let yourself go there, are you certain you'll be able to return to the life you have today, the person you are now?" Instead she felt, "*stop stop Stop. stop Stop. STop stoP. STOp stop stop stop stop stop STOP. STOP. STOPSTOPSTOPSTOP. STOP!!! . . . s t o . p . . . pp p p p pppp p stop.*"

If she had actually been able to make out the words, Nicole would have recognized her precise fear—of losing her present identity and becoming stuck, living a life governed by disorientation, ruled by the flashes she couldn't quite anticipate and that seemed to come to her out of nowhere. (She didn't see them coming, but she could feel them coming. Nicole was still learning how to view her feelings also as valuable information.) Her precise fear was akin to your fear of death because at the moment, the Nicole of the present had felt so distinct from the Nicoles of her past. How horrifying is the thought of becoming stuck in a prior you that feels like a different person? How terrifying to consider the idea that you can lose access to a new self that feels like your true self, which you have grown to understand and accept, even love? I don't need to tell you. You already know, even if, right now, you believe that you don't. Some things are felt before they are seen, huh?

...

I was kneeling on the shower mat. My body curled into itself—I mean, I curled into myself. The shower head was pelting me with a steady stream of its . . .

I felt like nothing. And yet, if someone didn't feel creepy or intrusive doing such a thing, if you opened the bathroom door and pulled back the curtain, you'd see my body in a ball at the bottom of the tub. Alive, not nothing, but something somewhere else, I think.

But how can we be physically here now and still feel as if we aren't? I don't get how it works, how time can be like that.

...

Nicole hoped time-traveling would indeed help a future version of herself. She also nearly prayed, trying to grapple with the prospect she felt was too real—destroying future Nicoles through her travels. She wondered, “How will I know what times are right for this kind of trip? Which times am I supposed to recognize as the time to fight to stay when and where I am?” She did not know the answers to these questions, but that didn't stop her from asking them over and over (and over) again, and pleading with herself to please find out.

## I Don't Know Anything

I don't even know where to begin. I've been writing the story of my life, or trying to, every couple of years. But, then, I realize something new. Maybe I felt like a fraud for claiming I knew something and then the new fact about my life shakes me and it's hard then to return to my project of telling my story.

When I was in the first grade, my teacher yelled, “Put your coat on!” Or rather, “PUT YOUR COAT ON!!!” (She was known as the loudest, most terrifying woman at P.S. ■■■ in Bayside, Queens.) The story goes (my mom found out from the mom of my classmate and friend — I don't really remember what it was like to be 5 years old) that I simply stood there and replied, “But it's warm outside. I don't need my coat today.”

When my rabbi started to try to help me when I was reading from the torah at my bat mitzvah, I shushed him on stage in front of the whole congregation and I said firmly, “I know it.” I did know it. I just needed a few extra seconds and I read the Hebrew. But most of all, I didn't want him to do the reading for me. Just a few extra seconds. I got this.

After my parents unexpectedly took me to an eating disorder clinic and the doctors hospitalized me on the spot when I was 14, a creative arts therapist offered some sort of activity (I think it was coloring) and I yelled, "I don't need your help!" Or rather, I sobbed, "I DON'T NEED TO COLOR! I NEED TO LEAVE!!! I NEED TO LEAVE!!!" I apologized to her the next day. For years afterward, I told myself I was so grateful to my parents and the doctors for saving my life: the truth, but not the whole truth.

Being in the hospital taught me obedience, something I often wish I didn't learn, especially not there. Obedience meant giving up on trying to do things some special way or in other words, trusting that my way worked for me, that my way was enough.

I tried to kill myself when I was 18, a couple months into going upstate for college. The doctor asked the unanswerable, and probably one of the worst rhetorical questions I've ever heard, "You're smart enough not to do this again, right?" I think that was the same year I noticed a strange look in Myra's greenish eyes when she told me I was turning into a zombie, don't I want to live up to my potential? Don't I want to do something with my life?

All I've ever truly wanted to do with my life is just be. Be what? I guess, I wanted to be myself: the girl who dances outside in the park and throws herself so fully into the present that when she goes home to paint, she realizes the experience has been so intensely imprinted in her brain that she can make a painting that looks like dancing in Bliss Park. It's a 20" x16" canvas with greenish brown hues imbued with gold and white. The magenta-ish maroon strokes, the same color as the coat she was wearing, trace the path of her body gliding across the snow-covered grass.

Yes, I just wrote about myself in the third person. Sometimes, I imagine myself as more than one person so I can have a discussion with myself and consider multiple points of view. I'm weird, but in a good way. But I'm not always confident about the "in a good way" part.

I've been an artist since my parents sent me to preschool and I got my hands on some crayons. My first grade teacher had trouble getting me to learn how to read. I was more interested in drawing. Until I went to high school, I used to get up from my seat and walk around during class. I learned better that way, but you can imagine my teachers didn't see it that way. I didn't even know then that I learned better that way. It just felt right to me, and I didn't really think enough about how other people saw my walking around the classroom during class to stop doing it.

By the end of first grade, my teacher said I was reading above my grade level because it turned out that I found books interesting too.

In middle school, I showed up to school often forgetting I had a test, but did fine anyway. I was a happy-go-lucky kind of kid. If I couldn't remember the answer to a question on the test, I'd think back to myself in the classroom and place myself in the memory. It worked most of the time. And either way, I felt miserable sitting down in front of a textbook. I'd rather create a world of my own than study.

In high school, I was pretty miserable. Mr. S, my English teacher during junior year of high school, helped me beat writer's block. Before him and to some extent afterward, I sat at the desk spending more time using the eraser side than the pointy side of the pencil that you can use to actually write.

I still smiled a lot in high school, in part because I was used to smiling and in part because I felt ashamed. I hated myself and I loved everybody, but in my mind, "everybody" stopped including me. I lost touch with my identity during the crucial phase of development when there's usually a lot of identity-forming and exploration going on. The scariest part was most people couldn't tell the difference between the me who smiled because I felt joy and the me who smiled because if I stopped smiling, I would probably fall to the floor in one dramatic swoop and curl into a ball. Sometimes, when I have flashbacks, I fall to the floor in one dramatic swoop and curl into a ball.

I don't always know what I'm trying to say until I begin trying to say it.

## Artifact dated 12/16/2021

I'm still searching for something in this pair of paintings.

They hang on my wall in my apartment: the left one hangs above my table, and the right one hangs above my bed, where I keep my pillow and rest my head at night.

There's heaviness, but the heaviness is purple. There's light, but it's not separate from the darkness. The light seems somehow embedded in the darkness.

I'm asking: What is day without night? What is night without day? What does it mean to exist? What does it mean to live fully? How is it that deep, heavy pain makes for even more lightness, awe, gratitude, and joy during my moments of peace and contentment? What is the role of my past experiences of trauma, abuse, loss, and feeling completely lost in this world in shaping who I am and

where I stand now? In other words, who am I without having experienced darkness and who am I without having experienced the light? And are these questions just another way of saying that night and day are at once hopelessly and beautifully intertwined? How do we describe or comprehend anything without contrast and comparison? Can we?

It's painfully obvious to me that I'm still searching - and that it's not a bad thing, just uncomfortable. So today, I have questions, lots of them. Another day, I'll have clarity. I'm okay with this.

## House of Cards. Chapter One: Guilt Trips

I spent Christmas Eve in 2019 at the dumpster. (I'm Jewish anyway so it's not really my holiday.) It might have been one of the best moments I shared with my dad. On my phone there's a photo of my dad and I, holding up some crap that I was trying to get rid of, laughing and pointing at the giant green bin. I added text decked out in a squiggly, festive font, "Christmas Eve at the dumpster!"

After living in Arlington, Virginia, and working in D.C. for a year and a half, I decided to move back to New York City, where I grew up. And all this stuff I was trying to move back was just not going to fit in my parents' car. We threw out some things. I made many different piles multiple times in an attempt to decide which of my many books to bring back and which ones to drop off at the tiny Arlington library nearby (which was really just one room in a government building).

I know moving is far from a kumbaya moment for many families, but throw my family's dynamics into the mix and well . . .

Step 1: My dad would bring down too many things in one trip, then guilt my mom and I for not carrying more.

Step 2: Then, he'd leave a trail of breadcrumbs behind him on his way toward the car, items falling out of the cart left and right.

Step 3: Later, he'd complain that his back hurt, maybe even throw in a few more comments casting blame on my mom or me, or both of us.

Step 3 was when I'd typically feel guilty and ashamed for letting him help me. Maybe I even felt secretly angry about his insistence on helping me move, only to remind me one reason why I have trouble asking for help. His help hurt.

But for one brief moment, my dad was laughing and I got to share the laughter with him.

When you get accustomed to fear and conflict, mundane reprieves from the volatile madness can feel so sweet and precious.

I love my parents. I still do. And yet, a house of cards isn't a home. A home is where I get to feel free.

## Look away

Lone duck glides across  
pale water, a  
reflection of the  
opaque  
mask the sky  
draped around her  
face, today.

When I plopped myself  
beside the rocks, who  
wore the shawls of  
moss the cool, humid air had  
woven from the  
spores of  
time passing by,  
I ...  
wondered if the

sky had become  
overcome with  
self-doubt today, too.

Because like those  
shawls, covering the  
shoulders and the  
backs of those rocks, much has  
grown under the  
chilly cover — or,  
shield? — of  
obscurity.

I  
ask, pose this  
question to the  
sky: Is it hard for you to  
share such  
bold color with  
us, knowing most

hardly take notice?

I  
ask, knowing the  
question was more  
concerned with  
myself than the  
sky: Do you feel it is sometimes  
easier to dim your  
brilliance than to present your  
full self to  
us, knowing we often  
tilt our heads toward the  
ground, because we  
cannot take in  
all your glory  
at once?

I  
confess, whispering to the  
sky: Sometimes, when you  
share your  
immense, bright, blue glory with  
us, with me, I  
divert my

gaze.  
Human eyes can only  
hold so much  
light before the  
eyelids close or the  
head bows toward the  
ground — my  
excuse, yes, and the

gray skies,  
today, let me look all  
around and  
around and  
around, and I feel the sky's  
magnitude, how you  
extend yourself in all those  
directions.

Today, you  
give me no  
reasons, and no  
need, to  
look away.

## House of Cards. Chapter Two: Secrets

### Journal Entry - November 16, 2019 - Arlington, Virginia

*This has been a tough week. I've finally broken down my belief that I am bad and I no longer hate myself. But that has triggered a profound sense of loss. It has also led me to synthesize "the girl I was" and who I am today.*

*The memories and experiences I have suppressed are finally coming back to me, but all at once. Since the process of remembering has sped up dramatically this week, I have been feeling an avalanche of emotions. While I know this is all progress, progress is painful.*

*Those painful and hurtful experiences, which used to feel distant like they happened to someone else, have flooded my system because now I can feel the reality. Now I can accept for real that this didn't happen to "her." It happened to me.*

*I am the one who almost killed myself several times. I am the one who hated myself. I am the one who felt so alone. These were my experiences — not some fictional character named Nicole Javorsky who happens to share my name.*

"I don't have any secrets!" That's something I actually used to tell people. And honest to G-d, I believed this.

I guess "I don't have any secrets" is what you tell people when you feel so ashamed that you don't even believe you're ashamed – so silent, so tight-lipped about what has already happened in your life that you're not conscious of the fact that you do have secrets.

The secret is so secret that you never told anybody, maybe not even yourself. And when I said "I don't have any secrets," what I meant was, I can't even begin to answer the question, because then I'd notice that these blank pages are filled with stories I'm not ready to read, memories I'm not ready to remember.

I became more dogged in questioning the gaps in my memory recall about one year into living in the Washington, D.C., area, where I started my first job as a journalist in 2018. I thought I could resolve the questions I had about my past the same way I wrote articles about climate change or later, the COVID-19 pandemic.

I searched my inbox for emails from my high school therapist. I rummaged through old journals filled with vague self-loathing (and, often, zero context), birthday cards I didn't even know I still had, stashes of artwork shoved behind the desk in my childhood bedroom, and poetry I had written in elementary school. I scanned through text and Facebook message conversations with the person who abused me in college.

It turns out, though, that the body will protect us from what we know until we are ready to know it.

## Mixed Emotions

Having complex PTSD, I know it can be really difficult to uncover and sort through memories that have been repressed. Imagine your brain is a big house. Well, you went for years thinking there was nothing in the attic, nothing in the basement, nothing in the guest room. But over time, you start to realize that the lights were just turned off. So slowly you bring in lamps, shine more light on the rooms and start to see more and more of what had been stored in those rooms you had thought were just empty.

When I paint, I feel so engaged in the process of art-making that I'm able to access parts of myself that haven't come to the surface consciously. And reflecting on my art is very connected to how I reflect on my life and who I am as a human being. I frequently work with vibrant, bright colors. Yet I tend to make more muted colors when I'm sorting through something that feels murky or confusing.

Some of my paintings have vibrant colors. Others are more subtle, with a lot of different colors mixed in, and at first glance, some might appear gray. This is similar to how we experience our emotions when there are multiple firing at once. When sadness, anger, and joy is mixed with guilt, shame, and fear, it can be difficult to discern any of these emotions. It may feel like stumbling through a musky cloud of smoke.

## Even Eve

She was born into Eden

Pinnacle of purity

But even Eve witnessed the wonder

Of something more than what you see

Even Eve, first of our kind, knew the body can't compare to the mind

You've been given a chance to know your naked soul,

And yet, still you claim, naked bodies in Eden

would be preferable?

You know I've heard a lot of people call me innocent

Fail and fail again, to recognize, my faith in humanity is far from blind

No blank page for a past, and neither do we

I've lived past the pain, the betrayal, and somehow I maintain my foundation, so can we

Yeah, I know I'm mostly ignorant but that's because I'm not

Wise enough to know there's unanswerables, strong enough to still ask,

to seek what I wish I could understand

She was born into Eden

The place of all she could need

But even Eve took a risk

And out of it, look what we got? Real humanity

Yet what's the lesson you derive?

Is ignorance really the bliss you desire?

She was born into Eden

Yes, the realm of toil not required

But even Eve knew this:

There's beauty in struggle

## THIS IS HOW I KNOW I WANTED TO LIVE: CHAPTER ONE

Whenever my dad parks his car, I get restless as he takes his sweet time to back in. This brisk morning was no different so I had plenty of time to notice, from the backseat of his car, the rusted sign above the door of the building.

Already knowing, I asked, "Where are we?"

"You have an appointment at the clinic," my mom responded.

I studied my dad's face in the front view mirror. My gaze shifted then to the back of my mom's head, her poofy hair sticking out in all directions.

"But the sign says eating disorder clinic. I thought you said we were just going to a nutritionist," I protested. "Why would we be going to an eating disorder clinic?"

It would be a quick appointment, my parents assured me before I agreed to go into the clinic. They promised we'd be in and out, and then we would go for a special lunch in the area.

Once my parents and I entered, we walked past more signs that made me quiver with two words ("eating" and "disorder"). Why was I here? The nurse weighed me, got my height, and measured my blood pressure. The clinic staff administered an EKG test to check my heart. With

each measurement, each assessment of my health, and every question I was asked, the clock hands spun faster and faster until the pace became dizzying. To stay in that room with the doctor's stethoscope and the scale and the signs—I felt I couldn't do it for another minute.

I don't recall what the doctors asked me, but hearing their questions bounce off of my eardrums caused my body to feel hot and cold at the same time. When one doctor told me I could have a heart attack and I needed to be hospitalized, I was too overcome with the strange simultaneity of extreme temperatures, somehow able to scald my skin while freezing the flesh underneath as if I was a scoop of fried ice cream. I was Alice in Wonderland floating between feeling the effects of the "Drink Me" potion and the "Eat Me" cake. In this state of extremes, hot and cold, small and big, I couldn't fully process what the doctors were telling me.

My immediate response was to refuse to be admitted. As far as I could tell, I was fine, I insisted. I was healthy, I repeated to the doctors once again. Amid my protests (I'm okay, I'm fine, and I don't want to go to the hospital. I have schoolwork to do!), the doctor told me that my parents could go to prison for neglect if they signed the forms going against the doctor's recommendation—admission to the hospital.

"Don't do that to them."

I could taste the saltwater on my lips. My face overflowed and my head exploded. The tension cracked my brain, and the fissures prevented my thoughts from flowing naturally.

At the same time, a flood and an earthquake.

...

Someone hauled me over in a stretcher to the other end of the facility where an in-patient eating disorder unit was located at the children's hospital. I cringe just thinking about how my arms flailed and how I kicked my legs against the straps of the stretcher.

(Yes, I continue to harbor some shame for how many tears I shed over my own suffering in a world where pain is far from a rarity.

Pain is a common denominator, I know.

To experience pain, to feel joy—you can't get one without the other, I know.

I wouldn't be living a full life as a human on this planet without both, I know.

The shame I felt for focusing on my own suffering and continuing to suffer from pain has lessened over the years. But after this moment, in the days and months and years after my hospitalization, I wondered how I could feel any different from anyone else facing pain. And, how lucky was I, being transported to the hospital against my will but to save my life?

I was also convinced any anger I could express would mean I was ungrateful, and signify that on the whole, I was bad. For at least six years, spanning my adolescence and the beginnings of early adulthood, I tried to avoid recognizing my anger towards my parents and the doctors who treated me. In college, I even told a psychologist that anger was an emotion I did not feel, plain and simple. I thought I could leave that “horrid” emotion out of my life completely. Maybe then, I wouldn't feel wronged, or disappointed in the people I love.)

I could have died before exploring the distortions reflected in my mind's funhouse mirrors. I could have died before falling in love. I could have died before I saw the Rocky Mountains and realized how vast the blue sky could be in a place like Colorado. Yes! I'm lucky and I feel lucky for many moments during every day of my life! But that doesn't mean I can't be angry too.

I still felt anger because I am human. I was so determined to be grateful toward my doctors and be a model daughter, friend, and student, and as a result, the anger turned inward. It

had to go somewhere. It always has to go somewhere. Rays of light bounce off of a mirror. It wasn't a mirror, was it?

During my first night at the hospital, I used every fiber of courage in my body to swallow the chicken and rice that the facility provided. When I couldn't finish, the nurse told me I had to drink the supplement, a bottle of Ensure. I think if you handed me a bottle of the milky stuff now, I would feel nauseous just looking at it.

That night, one of the other patients told me that it's common for newbies to come into the hospital kicking and screaming. One said she had come in wailing, too. If that was a consolation she was offering to me, I did not accept it. I did not want to be a part of that club. I did not feel like I should be a part of that club. Yes, I felt strange or different for the trouble I had with eating, but I hadn't yet developed kinship with the other patients because I did not believe my condition was nearly as bad as theirs.

When I looked in the mirror, I did not see my protruding bones as evidence that I was extremely thin. After all, I had not learned yet that people with anorexia often experience body dysmorphia. Back then, I didn't know there could be a disconnect between how I saw my body and how others saw it. A short time before the hospitalization, one of my friends' moms had asked my parents if something was wrong. Was I sick? Did I have cancer or something like that? Yet, when I looked at my body, I didn't see myself as frail. I don't know what I saw instead. Maybe something more like nothing?

It seemed crazy that I could lose an unhealthy amount of weight and then think I looked about the same as before, all the while staring at my skeleton reflected in the mirror. There was a time when I snuck into my parents' room when they weren't around to weigh myself at the scale

located in their bathroom and I would see the number fall. Simultaneously, it seemed I had no awareness of what was happening to me, with me.

I didn't understand how my perception of both my brain and body could get so warped. I didn't get how I could be so wrong about myself and yet here was this doctor, a stranger, telling me I was wrong about myself. The doctor told me I had anorexia, a kind of eating disorder associated with having rigid restrictions on food intake, but that wasn't enough information to persuade my shocked system that he was right. Instead of convincing me, his explanation of what was "wrong" with me transformed my brain into a wrestling ring.

"I'm fine" and "I'm anorexic," battled it out in my head, but neither appeared to win. If one side did win, a rematch would be called right away. I couldn't go back to believing everything was fine with me, either. I wondered, what if the doctors were right?

...

As a kid, some of my teachers engaged with my numerous questions, sparking a desire to learn about everything from plate tectonics to Van Gogh. Others, teachers who gave short, simplistic answers to my questions, frustrated me. I think I sensed that the world was more complex than they were letting on and I wanted to know what was *really* happening. I felt aggravated because I was aware of my teacher's simplifications, obscuring the nuances I so badly wanted to grasp.

...

The doctors, nurses, and therapists who I dealt with at the hospital often fell into the category of simplifiers. As they taught me about the illness with which I was diagnosed, I sensed things were more complicated. But I couldn't find anyone to explain to me the nuances of

anorexia. The staff often wrote off questions that grasped at the little-understood mechanisms of the illness as resistance to recovery.

I wasn't asking for assurances or sugar-coated lines of encouragement, like "Keep eating and it will get easier." How does that work? Explain *how* it gets easier with time, I pleaded silently to myself, after realizing these doctors were either unwilling or unable to explain. My questions were integral parts of the path to trusting treatment providers. With their sometimes flippant and other times simplistic answers, they failed to develop my trust in them. I felt like I had been trapped and brought to a place I couldn't leave and didn't understand. I was Alice when she fell down the rabbit hole.

Out of nowhere, I was living in the hospital instead of at home, eating prescribed meals, going to therapy sessions, and having to discuss my private thoughts with strangers who were supposed to be helping me recover from a disorder that I wasn't convinced I had. I couldn't see my closest friends because the only people allowed to visit me were my parents. Even for my parents, there were specified visiting hours, which we would spend in the community room playing Chutes and Ladders or Checkers. I noticed not everyone was lucky enough to have visitors so I felt grateful for my parents' visits, even if all I could provide in return was blank stares.

Meanwhile, I was working toward this goal of recovery that I didn't understand. I ate the hospital's meals and drank the supplements obediently even though the Ensure's thick, milky texture made me gag. I learned to act like I was feeling better so they would sign the discharge papers and let me out of there. I engaged in therapy sessions, but only said just enough to make them think I was opening up. I stopped pestering them with my curiosities about the illness and

my concerns about treatment. I learned I wasn't going to get out of the hospital nearly as soon with that approach.

I restored my weight to a healthy one, and no one would have to worry anymore about me dropping dead from a starvation-caused heart attack. I buried the pain further underground. I left the hospital, but I still felt trapped - within my own body.

My doctors in the hospital told me that anorexia was something I'd have to live with for the rest of my life, but I no longer view anorexia as a chronic illness. In an effort to avoid giving me false hope of a life completely free of anorexia, my doctors failed to give me hope of a life worth living.

Dr. Wayne Jones calls this “the paradox of healing” in his book, *How Healing Works*. Jones writes, “Doctors don't like to give patients what they call ‘false hope’ ... Science helps us determine what works and what does not—and so, we believe, distinguishes true hope from false hope.” But from his experience with treating patients as a doctor, Jones learned, “Distinguishing true hope from false hope was not just a matter of science—it had to be done by physician and patient together. Neither had a lock on how to handle hope.”

...

Five years after I entered treatment for anorexia at the hospital, I wrote in a journal entry: “STOP EATING NOW, Nicole. And, if you have to eat for social reasons, please do yourself a favor and get it out after. Yeah, you know what I'm saying.” If it wasn't already obvious, the doctors who were assigned to my case, when I was hospitalized shortly after my 14th birthday, did not succeed in partnering with me to find the sense of hope I needed to heal.

I read over many journal entries I wrote over the years just like this one with the refrain of “lose weight, I hate myself, I'm fat, and I'm a failure.” I do remember that I wanted to lose

weight and repeating over and over again that I hated myself. I remember that I thought I was a failure. But the sheer extent to which I berated myself for doing what people do each day to survive—for eating—is shocking.

In my journal, I often cursed myself out. In the same journal entry, I called myself a “stupid, fat, ugly b[REDACTED].” Then, with some convoluted logic, I wrote, “I hate myself. Why do I have to eat so much? Well, I don’t have to anymore. I’m putting my foot down. No one is going to pressure me to eat anyway. I’m just imagining that. Actually people want YOU to lose weight. They just don’t want to say it to your ugly, chubby face!”

When reading my old journal entries, I can often feel the weight as it builds in my chest and a wave of nausea washes over me. Frankly, it’s painful to read the words I’ve written about myself over the years, and to remember. And yet I was so extreme in my contempt for myself that the journal entries manage to also read almost comically. I include “almost” because it sets in pretty quickly that these thoughts I wrote down used to roam the halls of my brain, scrawling hate in permanent marker all over my walls and floors.

One of my journal entries, the one where I describe running to the bridge near my home in Queens, New York, felt distant. When I read this entry in particular, I felt as if I was reading someone else’s diary. To identify the unfamiliarity of my memories is to sense the ground disintegrating underneath my feet. I am afraid of what came before what I can remember. The blank spaces make me want to tug strands of my wavy hair, clench my teeth, and ball up my fists. I scavenged my old notebooks for the soft insides I can touch and feel, but sometimes I wonder if I only kept the empty eggshells.

I want to remember the warm caress of the wind as I ran toward the bridge, its lights glistening against the darkness of night, but I only know about that breeze from the journal entry

I wrote in high school. And why did I bring my phone if I was planning to jump? What I know about much of my childhood and adolescence I know the way I know World War II happened or that Harry Truman was once president of the United States. I can recognize that certain things occurred in my life based on journal entries or the stories of family and friends, but there are many experiences from earlier years I can't picture beyond what I've been told or previously written down.

There's one image in my mind of a dining room where a long table held plates dotted with small, round cookies. This experience I can actually remember using my own brain, but I don't recall much. I don't know how long I sat in front of the cookies without taking a bite, but it was long enough that a staff member of the eating disorder clinic reminded me to get started. Some of the patients chimed in with encouragement. What did they say? A blur, but I know my cheeks burned as they spoke. I couldn't recognize myself. Who was this girl so afraid of eating some [REDACTED] cookies to the point where swallowing a bite felt so impossible? This girl is some version of me. She must be inside here somewhere.

Like many of us humans, I felt, and still feel the need to explain things. I wanted to know how I got to a place in which a plate of cookies could feel like the weight of the world. I wanted to know how I got so lost. I want to know why that prior self is lost on me now. I want to remember.

Yet, remembering is to realize I am the girl who starved herself, made herself puke, and tried to kill herself. I was that girl. I am that girl? It's easier to write of her, and not me, despite the glaring fact that we are one and the same. I wanted to say that I refuse to hate her, or to blame her for her suffering, caused by lacking the skills to handle her pain. But I judged her, an impulse

crystallized over years of judging myself. But that girl, whose failing was a failure to cope with pain, she tried. She tried and failed to recover over and over again.

She wrote lists of things she loved. She described sitting in a moving car, watching the world pass by her from the window. She wrote of surrendering to the trance she entered when drawing outside, all the while noticing the passage of time solely from the changing shades of the horizon.

She—I tried and failed, but the fact that I kept failing also means I kept surviving to try once again. There were doctors who said, “You’re a smart girl. You won’t do that again, right?” As if intelligence could make it easier to cope with one’s pain. As if no one smart has ever killed themselves.

No. Failure is the wrong word.

I struggled to live and I kept living.

I persevered with the place-one-foot-in-front-of-the-other-until-you-get-there approach, like how Max, the tabby cat I adopted at eight years old, followed my mom around the house, rubbing his furry body against her leg every so often, until at last my mom opened the kitchen cabinet to pull out another treat to feed him. There were times I had hope. Mostly I think I wanted to see what could happen in my life.

Some part of me had bigger ideas for myself than starving and puking into oblivion. I know I had more ambitious goals than feeling nothing, ultimately becoming nothing more than bones. No matter how the doctors explained it, no matter how they tried to explain me, I know the truth. I know because even when I wanted to die, there was a part of me that decided to bring my phone with me—when I thought I was going to jump off of a bridge—just in case I decided to live.

## A Civil War of Myself

To fight in war is to risk everything.

Your body.

Your sanity.

Your conscience.

Your time on planet Earth.

All of these things can be lost in war.

Exit signs of neon do not live in battlefields.

All directions lead to struggle, to loss.

I am not a soldier.

I have little to cry about.

I can't stop the tears.

When you walk through the field of war, every step is a decision of great consequence. To yourself. To others.

When you hold a gun, there is anxiety. For yourself. For others.

When you use the gun, there is pain. For yourself. For others.

My weapon, my words, how I use them, how I hold them.

When I hold words and when I use them, there is anxiety and pain.

Words matter, yes. But, this is not a matter of life or death. The greatest threats posed to my life consist of the words I speak to myself. All other causes of death would most likely be ordinary, risks posed to multitudes.

I am not attuned to the rhythm of war. All directions lead to struggle and I can't keep my cool.

I am not a soldier.

I have little to cry about.

I can't stop the tears.

Waged for so long I'm unaware of the cause, the civil war of myself must end. It's hard to negotiate peace when you don't know why you're fighting.

I could lay down the weapons, let the words rust while sunshine pounds the earth. I could drop the past to the ground and forge a new future for myself. The anxiety and pain keeps the weapons alive. No amount of sunshine can burn the words away.

If you take away the weapons, will there be world peace?

The question is how. Fear prevents us from letting go of the weapons. We are afraid that once we lay down our guns, our enemy will pick theirs back up, point, and shoot.

To be killed when most vulnerable. To be dead, engulfed in trust's embrace.

That is what fear tells us will happen. But, my enemy is not unique to myself. I should allow the words to disintegrate in the dirt. Because I know what the enemy is thinking.

After all, I am the enemy and the ally all in one.

As I ponder the details of the civil war of myself, I remember the questions I fail to ask – the nature of war on the earthly scale.

As I try to figure out internal peace, the rain of self-criticism pounds my battlefield. How dare I wonder about the inner war when war of greater consequence exists outside of myself?

The grenades of the mind go off. Words are harder to read in a mind filled with smoke. Misunderstanding breeds more war. Peace starts coughing from all of the dust and stands further away from the battlefield.

The civil war of myself continues.

## The Game

Every move, every kind to become  
They said they're all here in the standard deck, but  
I'm not a king hoarding diamonds,  
Not a queen stealing hearts  
Can't be the joker striking words like a club  
I looked around and yet  
The cards I've been dealt are nowhere to be found  
In the standard deck

Someplace to go or somewhere to hide  
That's what I kept on trying to find, but  
My ghosts were far better than I  
At hide and seek  
My past knows just how to haunt me  
So silent, confused and alone  
Oh I wondered why continue to play?  
Just walk, just run away

Is there some card I can find to leave the game? But,  
The cards I've been dealt led me out of that way  
And instead of giving up my place on the board  
I learned something special and new  
No more striving for poker face  
No more competing in the first place, I'm through  
I will change the rules of the game

## THIS IS HOW I KNOW I WANTED TO LIVE: CHAPTER TWO

Dr. M leaned backward in his brown leather desk chair, the color and texture of that dry, whole wheat toast which is extremely difficult to swallow without some jelly. My previous psychiatrist, Dr. H, had spent our ten-minute appointments in the far corner of a large room sitting in a wooden chair in front of his laptop. Dr. H had made almost no attempt at eye contact with me. While Dr. M was the opposite of Dr. H, he wasn't any better, though for different reasons.

Whereas Dr. H was more careful with prescribing medications, he also failed to take the time to learn what I needed (and to help me - and my family - understand that it's common to show symptoms of anxiety and depression after experiencing trauma). Dr. M asked lots of questions and probed me for answers, but he had an "experimental" approach to medication. Over the course of the latter three years of high school, he prescribed countless different

medications, used to treat ADHD, bipolar disorder, anxiety disorder, etc. Neither Dr. H nor Dr. M diagnosed me with PTSD.

I was, after all, early in my teenage years when I was hospitalized. Children and adolescents often blame painful experiences on themselves. The reason? As a young person whose livelihood was dependent on my parents and the hospital's care, it would have been terrifying to recognize their failures. To accept that my caregivers caused me harm, even though it was unintentional, is to realize that my support system hadn't figured out how to support me. And that? That would be to feel even more alone. And to feel more alone? That would mean I was in danger.

And I was in danger. I ran to the bridge during the nighttime. I tried to kill myself by attempting to overdose on medication more than once. I blasted "Habits" by Tove Lo in the bathroom as an attempt to mask the sound of my puking. I cried often, but there were times when I needed to cry and couldn't even get out the tears. When I couldn't cry, I felt like a zombie, which was the calm before the storm I always knew was coming. Beneath the silence ran electric currents of anxiety.

Is it that when you feel something bad is on the horizon, you can't cry because it hasn't happened yet? No. The somethings had already happened. I just wasn't ready to acknowledge what already happened. Even when the water remained at sea level, the storm was swirling in my belly, evading recognition. When will the waters rise once again and overwhelm the dams I built? Build another dam, another internal wall, another, another ... when is the storm coming? Prepare, prepare.

...

One day, I was searching through old emails and found one from my therapist in high school, Ms. Z. In the email, the therapist wrote:

i got a new patient this week, right from LIJ out patient eating disorder clinic. she is a freshman in college, needs to have a 4.0 index, which she does, is very organized, needs to be perfect, obsessed with what and when she is going to eat, when she is going to exercise, thinks she's fat, (she's a twig), and even does stretches in the middle of the night cuz her thighs rub against each other. There is no use telling her she's not fat, i am attempting to work on the obsessing 24/7 by assigning her worry times which seem to help her. From you personal experience, any sage advice for her that you think might have resonated with you back in the day? she is so nice and so suffering. appreciate being able to run this by someone who can relate who is also psychological minded.

The email shattered the perception I had of this therapist. Reading the way she described her patient helped me recognize that the therapist couldn't have helped me get better because she just didn't get it. She had taken the thoughts driven by my eating disorder at face value instead of probing what's underneath them. Sure, I had already realized that she had not taught me breathing exercises when I was having daily panic attacks with hyperventilation and had instead told me to write index cards with positive thoughts to refer to. And I already knew that it wasn't until I learned breathing exercises from a new therapist during college that the panic attacks stopped. And I knew she had failed to help me change my system of thinking, but what I hadn't grasped until rediscovering this email was the extent to which she reinforced my system of fear and shame.

When I told Ms. Z in another email exchange I was scared about gaining weight, she suggested working with a nutritionist so I would not gain additional weight and that maybe I could set a number on the scale I wasn't willing to go beyond. Her suggestions reveal that she wasn't breaking down the foundation upon which my eating disorder was based, but rather was working with the surface-level thoughts and behaviors. One of the tenets of dialectical behavioral therapy, which I discovered later on, is do not validate the invalid. My therapist in high school did not recognize that my fear of weight gain was based upon other deeper, darker, more terrifying fears. By inadvertently reinforcing that it was okay to fear weight gain with the level of compulsion and extremity that I did, she validated the invalid.

Rediscovering Ms. Z's emails felt like pulling out a wooden Jenga piece from the tower, the stack of wooden Jenga blocks tumbling to the ground, my system of self-loathing and avoidance falling apart. I felt as if I was exiting some cult finally able to see myself for what I am and the cult for what it was. But I imagine leaving a cult is both freeing and extremely painful. Why is it so hard to let go of a delusion?

To let go of a delusion is to realize the fact that at one time, you had been deceived. It means I finally know that they were never going to "save me." The messed up frameworks for understanding why I starved myself led me to fall even further out of touch with my truth. I was pathologized. I felt like a pathogen. You will live with anorexia for the rest of your life, they told me, except I didn't.

I learned how to observe and describe what I feel instead of merely distracting away my urges to starve or throw up what I had been forced to eat. I learned it was okay to ask for what I want from others directly and without degrading myself.

I wrote in my journal once that my mind was a playground with negative thoughts hogging the swings. “Back and forth. Back and forth they swing, never giving other thoughts a chance to play,” I scribbled.

For many years, imagining my future had been difficult. It seemed near impossible to fathom a life I’d want to live, one unburdened by a constant ~~flow~~ bombardment of self-critical thoughts. I considered why I was even still alive when I was a horrible person without whom the world would be better off. What a shame it could have been for me if I had not lived to learn that I can build toward a life I want to live. The absence of an eating disorder is not enough. Something must come in its place.

Dr. D, who does DBT therapy, was the first to help me understand it’s not a patient’s failure to recover when they are trying their best. She helped me. While Dr. M had thought medication would help me, while Ms. Z had centered her efforts on surface level thoughts and attacking them with strategies like writing index cards, while eating disorder treatment programs focused on cultivating “motivation” to live without an eating disorder, none of this helped. None of this helped because they didn’t see me.

## See Me?

Have you ever stared into broken glass  
then saw yourself, saw more of yourself  
in the discarded than in the mirror?  
Shattered? Not a name I’d ever go by,  
but I can’t deny how much this bottle  
thrown on the side of the street looks like me.

Have you ever stared into a brick wall  
then saw yourself, saw more of yourself  
in the wall than in the mirror?  
Motionless? Not a name I’d call myself,  
but my reflections all look like somebody else.

How can it be? This brick wall looks just like me.

Why can't I see me? Why can't I see me?

Frozen in place for now,  
I wonder when these cracks will bring  
the whole thing down.  
Will I strong enough  
to hold myself up  
when my last wall comes  
tumbling down?  
Can something so cracked ever survive?  
All these questions on my mind,  
making it so hard to see me.

Can't see me, can't even see me.  
Why can't I see me? Why can't I see me?

## Those Things Make Happiness

Minuscule ripples in the lake mark the movement of ducklings and the subtlety of happiness. As the emerald mattress cradles our bodies, the sky sheds its warmth—a gift to all of us here in Central Park.

While I scribbled these words in my notebook, I noticed the way the lake stretched its legs in three directions. On that sunny day in New York City, Central Park was crowded. I unearthed joy from the details of my surroundings—the numerous bodies and beings, the prickly texture of the grass and the faraway window frames of towering buildings.

Like individual raindrops building a downpour, the seemingly small observations composed my happiness in that particular moment.

In *A Tree Grows In Brooklyn*, Betty Smith writes:

*"People always think that happiness is a faraway thing," thought Francie, "something complicated and hard to get. Yet, what little things can make it up; a place of shelter when it rains - a cup of strong hot coffee when you're blue; for a man, a cigarette for contentment; a book to read when you're alone - just to be with someone you love. Those things make happiness."*

Receiving an email with "Congratulations" in the subject line, getting A's on exams, landing a dream job—these moments indicating "success" have not brought happiness for me. Why? These moments of good news rely on the promise of our future to bring smiles to our faces.

The sunshine bringing beads of sweat to our foreheads does not promise a better life, but rather demonstrates that we are responding to warm weather and that we are alive. When we are focused on experiencing each moment, there are no promises—only gifts.

## Day Dreamin

My head's in the clouds, that's what you say  
Stop shaking your head,  
I'm tired of trying to change  
Don't you know, this is how I use my brain

I'm not trying, not trying to drift away

Day dreamin, day dreamin

Dreamer wasn't an insult, not until you came around  
In a fog yourself, you yell that I gotta come down  
Your nonsense made me afraid,  
Of who I became

But I know, I know, I prove you wrong everyday

Day dreamin, day dreamin, day dreamin

If I stopped looking up to the sky,  
I ask, who would I be?  
Not me, not me, not me  
Oh I don't want to know, not for the sake of those  
Who dozed off, hours upon years ago

You're sleepin, you're sleepin

I'll keep on

Day dreamin

## Artifact dated 7/6/2021

I'm beginning to think that maybe the presence of darkness is not the main issue of why we suffer. Maybe the issue is we often fight the truth of the darkness' existence.

For example, we might try to diminish the weight of injustice or another's pain because we ourselves are afraid to recognize darker forces for what they are. When we pressure others to contort their feelings, sometimes it might be an ineffective attempt to control or limit darkness. (Ineffective because denying the truth doesn't change it.) Pressure to focus one's energy solely on light (you need to move on, cheer up, it's not so bad, etc.)? Maybe that increases fear, loneliness, distrust, feelings of shame and powerlessness, alienation, or isolation because we really need to see both: the light and the darkness; especially when confronted with pain.

When we accept uncertainty, the fact that death is the flip side of life, that the underside of renewal and hope is loss, we allow each other to be more fully human and natural. The leaves turn brown and drop dead each winter. And still, the world keeps turning and soon enough spring arrives, bearing the rewards of moving through winter: flowers, warmth, newly green trees, more budding and more blossoming. I do not enjoy the cold but I admit winter is really beautiful in its own special way. So are the darker seasons of life, their poignance brings a little glimmer when the sun has set and it seems every night catches you too soon, begins too early.

If we all encouraged each other and ourselves to come alive and be ourselves in all our messy glory, how would our lives change? Maybe we'd make more little mistakes because we'd be more okay with the vulnerability of knowing we are imperfect creatures. And maybe we'd feel more freedom to take risks to show our naked souls and for each other maybe we'd fight more for the right to just be because we'd learn a lot from those lower-stakes mistakes.

I challenge myself to let the light and darkness coexist, to let myself be fallible, so that I can just be more often, and make the right choices when it matters most.

## Uneasy Street

You say you're waiting for an answer.

Well, I've got a question for you -

What are you waiting for?

You look for permission to  
be who you already are.

Is that what you're waiting for?

Come on, take a stroll with me  
down a road I call  
Uneasy Street  
Life isn't easy, no.  
But it can be free

Oh, you're waiting on the right time?  
Living by the clock, you must obey?  
What are you waiting for?

Come on, come with me  
Life isn't easy, no  
But it can be free  
Once you follow your  
Uneasy Street

Who's Stella?

## Chapter 1

Stella wanted to be a journalist.

She yearned to decipher the twisted language that we speak to find the story beneath the person. Stella dreamed of diving headfirst into the white water rapids of the mind and of riding the raft of reporting along the pathways to the soul. Finding the story beneath the person meant diving deep until Stella could find her way on the raft within the waters leading right to the person's heart.

I met Stella when we were both college freshmen at the interest meeting for the school newspaper. Throughout the

meeting, I followed Stella's emerald eyes while she snuck her way into my brain. Suddenly I couldn't stop thinking about her. Lost at sea, that is the sea of thoughts, I didn't realize that Stella was in front of me until she started to introduce herself.

"Hey, I'm Stella."

"Nice to meet you, Stella." Then I added, "Oh, and I'm Tyler."

"Nice to meet you too," she said with ease.

I stumbled on my words when I first met Stella. Luckily, she didn't think much about first impressions. Stella preferred the getting-to-know-people part, seeing beneath the disguise we use to mask our stories. To get the inside scoop, Stella employed her charisma to uncover the narratives of the individuals she met, seeing beyond her first encounters with them.

"After all," she would say, "It takes a while to get inside someone's head."

There was an unexpected, little smirk on her face as she spoke those words, a silent sign of confidence. I think Stella decided right then and there that she would enter my mind, unearth my story, and exit through my heart. She knew how to disregard first impressions to eventually bring out the vulnerability in people. She always believed that there was a

story in everyone, even in me. No one could be boring to Stella.

She told me, "My dreams are just thoughts, Tyler. Thoughts mull over in your mind until they decide to leave. Yet, you're constantly thinking so new thoughts are always coming and always leaving. It's a cycle that never ceases."

Her mind was never empty. Her brain overflowed with dreams. Lucid bubbles engulfed each dream, each excited thought waiting to become a reality. The bubbles brought her dreams, carried them, into the air until they hit the ceiling. And popped. Tumbling down until the dreams hit her on the head. Each time a dream popped, a new dream would instantly knock on the door to her brain. Soon enough, Stella let the dream in. Her eyes glimmered with dreams, a cycle that never ceases.

## Chapter 2

Stella wanted to be an artist.

You would probably know this already if you happened to step inside her dorm room. Art supplies, sketchbooks, and drawings (some started, some finished) were all over the place.

When I entered Stella's room for the first time, I exclaimed, "Your room is such a mess!"

Stella replied calmly, "Yeah, I know." Then, she added with a smirk, "My room is like life, Tyler."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

Sometimes, I really hated the way she would be all philosophical out of nowhere. Then again, I secretly loved it because her words reminded me that Stella was a mystery being unraveled. And, not so secretly, I was glad to be the one to unravel her. Stella lived to find the story beneath the person, but she rarely let anyone learn her own.

"Life is messy so my room is messy too," she explained.

"Except your room is probably even messier than life," I joked.

Stella retorted, "Well, at least my room is real. Your room is neat. Like a utopia of fakeness!" Then hearing her own ridiculousness, she exploded with laughter.

Finally, she pulled herself together to say, "Tyler, you are an idealist and I am a realist," her eyes flickering playfully.

Getting to know Stella was like walking through the butterfly garden at a zoo. You never know when a butterfly will land on you. When a butterfly lands on your shoulder, it brings joy, but you also know it will fly away at any moment. Or, I just feared this is what getting to know Stella would be like.

Stella jumped onto her bed. While kicking her legs back and forth, she flashed a smile at me. Patting the spot next to her, she motioned for me to join her. So we sat next to each

other on the bed and listened to the quiet noise of fluttering hearts.

All at once, Stella leaped off of the bed and grabbed both of my hands.

I blurted out, "What?" I really wasn't sure what she was doing.

"You're taller than me. I need to stand up and you should stay sitting," she said rather matter-of-factly like I knew exactly what she was talking about.

"Again, what?"

She paused and then said, "Do I really have to spell this out for you? I don't want to be standing on my tippy toes when we finally kiss."

Like any college boy would do, I immediately leaned in to kiss her, except it was different. Different good. Because although I could have been any college boy, Stella didn't see me as any college boy. She could see the story in me, the book of Tyler waiting to be read. Stella was the spark that lit the pages of me without burning them. Just enough so that the words were visible.

Anyway we kissed. Our lips fit together like puzzle pieces, forming an image that didn't look like real life even though it was. She put her hands on my shoulders and I toppled over onto her bed. I was pretty embarrassed, but she improvised

with her usual spontaneity. She fell back onto the bed in a way that resembled a trust fall.

Stella was laying on her back, her front facing the ceiling. Her auburn hair fanned out from her head like a lion mane framing her face. Thoughts hastily swam around in my mind. I could feel Stella working her way further into my brain. When I fell asleep, I think I dreamed of our puzzle pieces and the realness and messiness of life. Then again, it's hard to remember dreams once you wake up.

### Chapter 3

Stella wanted to be a novelist. She wanted to make people do that weird thing where you're laughing and crying at the same time, that weird feeling of rawness. To slice the hearts of readers with words and sew them back up with stitches made out of letters. As always the dream became submerged in a bubble, except this bubble never actually burst. This bubble was made out of plastic, not liquid, not glass. It could neither pop nor shatter.

I felt Stella's burning cheeks on my chest. Each of Stella's tears scalded my skin.

I could tell that Stella wanted to communicate her pain with words because I had seen the letters dangle from her lips, waiting to drift into the air. She had told me about her

dreams, the aspirations trapped within the fluffy white walls of the clouds.

I watched as a million thoughts pounded the concrete walls of her mind.

Stella was sitting on my bed, legs crossed. She pressed her teeth into her bottom lip. Her teeth were the prison guards, ensuring that not even a single sentence could slip past the gates.

I silently begged Stella to say something, anything. The letters hung from our lips. Neither of us had the courage at that time to let the letters become spoken words.

Her hair was pulled into a bun, but a few curls bounced on her shoulders. I saw the words circling in her emerald eyes, desperately trying to leap into the air. Stella's rudy cheeks drained until they were devoid of color.

A single tear trickled down her face. She quickly wiped the tear, as if to hide it from me.

"Stella, come here," I said.

Stella uncrossed her legs, got down from the bed, and came to me. I wrapped her in my arms. I made sure not to squeeze her too much. I didn't want to break her.

She bit her lip again.

Finally, she whispered, "Can I have some water?"

I heard her voice crack like crisp leaves of autumn crunching beneath my feet.

I nodded. After grabbing a water bottle from the fridge, I placed the bottle in her hands. I was still envisioning my words stepping on her words like my beat-up sneakers killing dying leaves.

"Thanks, Tyler."

I watched as the water traveled down her throat, filling her body.

Her legs were crossed again, her arms folded across her chest. She looked like she wanted to curl into a ball and sink into herself. Stella was a butterfly who missed her cocoon, her days as a caterpillar.

She put down the water bottle and I engulfed her in my embrace once again. I felt her tears as they transferred to me. I felt her words when I hugged her even if I couldn't hear them.

Suddenly I could see the thoughts swimming to the surface. I could see the letters dangling from her lips once again, but this time I knew she was going to say something.

"Tyler, can I just tell you something?"

"Of course," I replied.

Stella mustered up her fragile strength to say, "I'm stuck in a perpetual game of tug-a-war and it never ends. It never ends and I'm tired of tugging. Everyone's telling me to 'stay

strong.' I think that's bulls**hit**, Tyler. My strength is long gone."

I squeezed her arm and whispered into her ear, "Hmm. It looks like you still have some muscle."

A giggle tumbled out of her mouth.

Her words lingered in the sky somewhere above the ceiling of my room. I started searching for a silver lining, but I could only see the letters forming dark clouds in our heads. No silver, no sign of some sparkling hope. I wished that I could help. I wished that Stella didn't have to tug because eventually the rope would fall apart with all the tugging, thrusting her body to the floor.

I lifted her up and she wrapped her arms around my neck. I carried her and we walked outside. As we gazed into the grayish eyes of the city, the cars zoomed past us like lightning bolts soaring across the streets. We searched the midnight velvet horizon for glimmering silver among the clouds that held Stella's dreams hostage.

...

Two days later, I was the one rocking back and forth on my bed, tears swimming in my head and flowing out through my eyes like a waterfall. Gone. Gone like the tears that left my eyes. My vision was blurry and I constantly thought that I was the

dead one, that I left Stella, not the other way around. Then I'd realize that no, she was gone and I'm still here.

Waking up to silence is almost like never waking up. I woke up, but still I hear the uncertainty - the doubt of life. I wonder if this is what being dead feels like. I hope that death doesn't feel like silence. Yet, I can't help but wonder why being half-asleep makes you doubt your existence. During the period of semi-awareness, you still remember pieces of what you were dreaming about. You remember almost everything until all of the puzzle pieces separate, until the thoughts you dreamt while unconscious become unconscious themselves. Sometimes I fear that dreams can die.

My foot taps the floor in time with my quivering hands. I can't imagine a world where Stella could die. I don't have to imagine it though because that world is real. It's too real, too silent.

Still shaking, I roll out of bed and land on the floor. I can't get up, so I just sit there. I've never been the smooth one. I stumble a lot - the ultimate clutz.

I'm falling all over again. I'm falling, yes, but for a girl who is already gone. I really hope that dreams live past the end of life. Dreams better not be finite adventures because I need the adventure to last. I want to believe so badly that I will remember Stella, but why do we forget dreams once we wake

up? How could consciousness kill the thoughts that already permeated the walls of my brain? I need to know that the noise of life doesn't drown out the silence of death.

Stella, please be an enduring adventure. Become something without a limit, an infinite something! You can be like quicksand. Just don't swallow me up. You can be boundless and uncounted and never measured by the years of your existence. I don't want you to end, Stella.

Tears slide down my face like kids swooshing down a cold, metal slide. I feel like a playground in the winter - vast and empty and frozen with pain.

I quit the school newspaper. I quit crying. I can't quit imagining the butterfly garden. Over and over again, I imagine the butterfly flying off my shoulder. I felt special for a brief section of time, but now it's over. I yearn to be a playground during the summer. Unfortunately, I don't think that I have the power to choose.

Her words become a refrain, her words are trapped in my ears.

"My dreams are just thoughts, Tyler. Thoughts mull over in your mind until they decide to leave. Yet, you're constantly thinking so new thoughts are always coming and always leaving. It's a cycle that never ceases."

Stella, why couldn't you be the cycle that never ceases?  
Aren't you the process of thinking instead of the thought?  
Aren't you the dreamer instead of the dream?

A heart attack: a war waged by the heart.

A heart attack: a battle started by the soul.

A heart attack: the stupid fight that slain the fighter.

A heart attack: what killed Stella.

A heart attack: what forced Stella to ultimately exit  
through my heart.

Stella wanted to be a journalist.

Stella wanted to be an artist.

Stella was wrong. Dreams formed while awake are not like thoughts. The majority of thoughts leave unremembered. Most thoughts leave. Many are so far gone that they can never live in your brain again. Yet, you remember the aspirational kind of dreams. Even the ones that do not become full realities. Especially the ones that you share. Dreams can last beyond their inception.

A thought is the first impression. A dream is the getting-to-know-you part. I never lived in her brain, so I couldn't know Stella's thoughts. Her dreams, however, I will know and I will not forget. I wrote the book you are reading so that no one can forget the dreams. Anyway the point is that dreams are not the same as thoughts. They bear no similarity.

Stella's emerald eyes glimmered with dreams. If dreams can survive death, Stella is in fact a cycle that never ceases.

### Who's Monk Monk?

"But this monkey isn't Monk Monk," Lily protested on one icy afternoon in January. "This is a different monkey."

Her mom was trying to convince Lily that a pink stuffed monkey at the store, among rows of identical such monkeys, was Lily's friend, Monk Monk. This was supposed to make Lily feel better about forgetting her dear friend on the airplane and leaving Monk Monk — no abandoning him! (Oh, poor monk monk!)

As you might expect, Lily was not convinced. Her Monk Monk had a certain wide-open expression when he looked at Lily. The fuschia fur was soft around his eyes, making his particular look appear so inviting and so calm to Lily.

Lily could hardly look at the many Monk Monk impersonators sitting side by side on the shelves. After all, she knew deep down — from the cotton of her favorite polka-dot dress with the green stripes to underneath her skin and bones and all the way into her stubborn heart — that there was only one Monk Monk. And he must be very lost at this very moment. And this thought brought those tiny red spider webs to the corners of Lily's eyes, turning them watery.

Indeed, Lily could not hold it in any longer, not standing there in front of a display lined with all the fake Monk-Monks. She cried out over and over and over again during the course of seven minutes that felt like all of time mashed together.

As she wailed and cried out, Lily's beautiful, stubborn heart cried in, "How could I forget about my dear friend? I love Monk Monk. How could I forget about someone I love so much? It's all my fault. That's why we are here in this store. And now I'm making my mommy sad because I am unhappy with these copy-cat Monk Monks. I don't want any of these pink monkeys because none of these monkeys are the real Monk Monk. They just remind me of the real Monk Monk and how I abandoned him and made him lost. I don't like being lost and I don't think Monk Monk would like being lost. I think Monk Monk must be as scared as I was when my momma and dad turned off the lights one night and I couldn't sleep because I thought my room turned into a black hole and would swallow me up if I closed my eyes all the way."

But her mama could not hear Lily's insides, a fact that made the crying-spiders in Lily's eyes work even faster and frantically spin their red criss-cross, zig-zag silk. In fact, Lily's mom couldn't even see the crying-spiders in her daughter's eyes. Lily's mom just saw Lily screaming, in-between sobs, "THIS is NOT MY monk MONK! No! No. NO! MONK monk." And, "Monk monk. MONK MONK. No no no no noooooOOOOOO!"

However, Lily wants me to make it absolutely, positively clear to you, my dear Reader, that she did not really want a new toy monkey from the store on this icy January afternoon.

Was there something else Lily wanted, then, you ask? Well, Lily really wanted her momma to hear the words her stubborn heart was saying, instead of the words she hollered for the whole store to hear. Or, Lily wished she knew how to tell her momma the inside thoughts. And Lily hoped that if she could hear her insides, her momma would tell Lily that the airline people would take care of Monk Monk and love him dearly. Lily even wished her mom could tell

somehow if Monk Monk knew Lily loved him because now Lily could no longer tell him so herself.

You must be able to fathom it, right? You see, Lily believed that Monk Monk was gone forever. She knew she could not find him in this toy store full of copy-cats, not anywhere except for where she left him.

She also suspected she wouldn't ever find him in the room downstairs from her house where she had lost and found her baby doll before. This room was also where mama took her blankets and they swirled around and around and came back all warm and toasty like cinnamon waffles. But for Lily, the fact that she could not rescue Monk Monk from feeling like he was lost in a black hole was not the worst part of the situation. For Lily, the worst part was that yucky stuff she felt on the inside for forgetting Monk Monk on that airplane.

## This One Precious Life

### Part I: Lily & Mitch

#### Question No. 1:

What kind of milk belongs in my bowl of cereal?

Mitch began the sweltering 18th of August the way he started every day: with Fruit Loops.

The dark rounds of his speckled green eyes followed the trail of whole milk as the liquid crashed into the cereal bowl, just like a waterfall, with all the splashes and ripples, Mitch thought, very much to himself. He quietly declared (also to himself), "Ah, Mitch's breakfast waterfall! I've got to tell Harvey about this later!"

Just as he said it out loud in his head, Mitch realized he was going to have to come up with a better name if he was gonna say it out loud-out loud. "Breakfast waterfall," sounded a little too boring, and awkward, Mitch considered silently. Though, it is often the boring and awkward things that make life so extraordinary. Though, Mitch wouldn't realize this quite magical fact of life until much later.

Half of the time, Mitch was forced to put up with skim milk in his cereal. That was the kind of milk his mom used for her coffee. Mitch didn't understand this because as it seemed very apparent to him, the milk that *belonged in cereal* - which *was a meal*, after all - seemed far more important than what little *drop* of milk you pour into a cup of coffee.

Mitch, on the other side of the coin, was not completely out of the loop about the reasoning behind his mom's milk of choice. The skim milk had to do with an entirely different matter of grocery priorities, but then again, Mitch did not like to think about such things. He tried his hardest to push such things toward the furthest corners of his mind. And most of the time, Mitch was successful in avoiding thoughts about why his mom refused to drink the milk that he did, the kind of milk that belonged in his bowl of Fruit Loops.

None of this mattered anyway, not this week. This week, Mitch was staying at his dad's place down the block and around the corner from his mom's townhouse that lacked whole milk.

Question No. 2:

Why can't you just leave me alone already, Mitch?

Lily stood still. Completely still. As still as one little 13-year-old girl could stand in front of a 13-year-old boy who was staring right at her bare ribs.

"You just look like you've lost a lot of weight," Mitch noted, with a twinge of worry in his voice that Lily wouldn't dare perceive.

To Lily, Mitch's comment just hung there, in the air, in no hurry to drop down to the million-degrees summer cement. Lily thought she would suffocate to death right there, right then, in her teal bikini with the crisp white ruffles, ruffles that suddenly seemed to Lily so wrong, too frivolous for her lank body, her plain body riddled with stupid bones trying to be seen. For what? Couldn't those ribs just pop back into her flesh and stop attracting such unwanted attention? Couldn't she just live and be left alone, left alone to wear her stupid bikini at the stupid YMCA pool?

"I h a v e n't l o s t w e i g h t," Lily replied. "N o n o , M i c h a e l." The ends of her words seemed to evaporate all of the sudden, splitting into little pieces she couldn't quite catch and definitely couldn't put back together again.

Mitch looked up from Lily's bones. He wanted to peer into her curious brown eyes like he used to, but Lily instinctively turned her glance away from him. He'd never admit it, as a just barely teenage boy, but Mitch always liked looking at Lily's eyes. They had a glint in them that he didn't see in everybody's eyes. Lily stared out into some faraway place. Where? Mitch couldn't tell. Even so, Mitch could tell that the glint was still there, in those eyes. And, all that while, when Mitch stood thinking about Lily's eyes, Lily was recalling a foreign time when she enjoyed this place.

There was in fact a time when all Lily had to do here to get lost in a summer afternoon was scoop shovels and pails full of sand and sink her toes into the calm of the sandbox. Her feet had belonged here then, barefoot and tucked into some unknown quantity of sand grains. The meditation of filling up her palms and letting the sand fall slowly, a steady slip slip slip through her fingers was reassuring, steadying. But before she could really find that sense of peace in her body again, the memory of the sandbox fell away from Lily and the current moment rushed to the surface of her mind.

She was again lost in a summer afternoon, but the new kind of lost was a very different, much less enjoyable kind.

And then. Then, it was as if Lily had gulped down a mixture of Yoohoo, mustard, and American cheese all blended together so she could hardly tell what was what in terms of the ingredients. She just knew it tasted downright awful and that she felt sick. Very, very, very sick.

## Part II: Mitch's Epilogue

Lily studied the squiggly lines, the weaving waves and shades of brown, winding through the wooden table. The intricacies Lily noticed, wherever she turned her intent gaze, are something. Something more important than I used to believe they could be. The simple gift of observation is severely underestimated.

Once, I was holding Lily's hand at Jay St. and I turned toward her to see her chin tilted upward and her eyes locked on something beautiful she had perceived in the ceiling of an otherwise ordinary and somewhat filthy New York City subway station.

“Isn't the pattern so cool? The way those lights and shadows overlap and make those undulating, scoopy waves? It's funny, isn't it — how patterns can make any silly, little, mediocre thing into something so beautiful? Like it turns this ugly station into some sort of poetry?”

Lily sputtered in all this to me in one breath, as she often spoke when she felt such inspiration (from what most of us don't see, even when we pass right by it). And I watched her curls fall over one

eye as she leaned forward and giggled. I had a funny thought right then: it looked like she needed to catch the interesting thing before it fell to the ground and became something mundane again.

I don't know how else to explain it, but Lily noticed what I and most people (I assume) considered more of the same. I learned to try to see the world through Lily's eyes, but her family couldn't do this. To do so would reveal things they didn't want to know. And because of this fact and other facts, they never really saw Lily for who she is. Well, who she was. But more on that, later. I promise. Just please, bear with me for a while, okay.

Your identity is made up of all the things you see in yourself, right? If Lily could have had the chance to really see herself through her own eyes, she would have known she was kind and brave. She would have known that she was stubborn, and the most stubborn when it came to her values. Instead, the people who were supposed to take care of Lily infected those curious, brown eyes of hers.

She really struggled and struggled and struggled to see herself through the same lens she applied to the rest of the world. What Lily really needed, I understand now, was to recognize that her parents had infected her eyes. Yet, I also understand why she didn't come to terms with this, or even see it at all. I know people say parents can be blind to their children's faults, but it's also true that children are blind to their parents' faults. Kids will contort their own minds into a bazillion soft pretzels to preserve the idea that their parents are safe people and capable of protecting them from harm. That's actually a scientific thing too. It's been studied. I'm just not pulling this out of my you know what ...

Anyway, the details Lily saw so clearly and the way she talked about them could make a rat-infested, dirty subway station into a work of art. What else could she have transformed?

She understood that every moment passes and there was something special in each one. Jay St. station could only be exactly that way for a split second, not even. She used to talk about how everything and everyone was always in motion. Even when we stand still, we breathe. Our lungs fill with air, expanding our ribs and abdomen. We breathe out and our ribs and belly contract. Still movement, right? Our hearts beat and blood pumps through our bodies. Our thoughts change. Our limbs shift in place ever so slightly. We are never completely still. All those tiny micro-movements mean something. They change the whole. Everything changes, no matter what.

Now, I think it's time. For the later part I promised you about. I have to come clean about something, okay. I wanted to tell you a true story about Lily. I really did. But ... the reality of Lily's lifetime feels less true to Lily than Part I of this book. I like to believe that in some other place and time, the story I wrote is the reality, that somewhere, somehow, Lily did get to be Lily and Lily got to live.

But from the vantage point of my place and time, Lily killed herself five years ago. She swallowed a bunch of painkillers and never woke up. That's not the story I wanted to tell you so please forgive me for misleading you for a while to bring to life the Lily I wish I didn't have to write about to bring to life. I love Lily. And I know that all she wanted was to live. And I know that may be a surprising thing to say about someone who died by suicide. But, here's the deal - she died before she could survive long enough to find a way out of her mind's contortions, leading her to her distorted beliefs about herself. I wish she had found a way out of her system of protecting herself from the truth so I could hear Lily say the following to herself: To my younger self, you were never to blame for your pain. People abused you and that was never your fault, Lily.

And if this is heartbreaking for you to read, which I kind of hope it is because this is really sad stuff, I'm sorry. But I'm also not. Sometimes, the truth hurts. Real bad. But I'd still rather the truth. Otherwise, as I know now, you lose yourself in all the disguising and hiding and excusing and confusion. Grieving is loving, you know.

I do have hope that there is a Lily out there somewhere who feels free to be who she is. And some days, I lie awake at night wondering about the Lily who I've tried to bring to life in these pages.

I wonder about her sitting on a wooden bench, observing the ripples of pale blue waves on an overcast morning. I imagine her relating the frosted gray-brown color of the bench to the water, or to the sky. I picture her pointing out how much she loved overcast days like this. And then, she'd tell me, for the hundredth time, why she loved overcast days. "The sun isn't strong enough to block my view or give me a headache. And I can stay out longer! I can look wherever I want to look without the sun hurting my eyes. It's my favorite kind of sky, overcast," she'd say.

There'd be more moments when Lily would look at me, and I got this very intense feeling of being seen. Feeling seen. I admit I have doubts now and then about the point of imagining her, remembering. I can basically get anyone to tell me I need to move on. That it's time. Well, what is it time for? They just say, "Don't you think it's about time, Mitch?" All I need to do is go on and talk about Lily for too long and someone, anyone, will tell me this. It makes me want to scream, "Time for WHAT? If you're going to tell me what I should do, then go ahead and tell me! Just stop with all this F\*\*\*ING vague bull\*\*\*\* already! For the love of GOD, PLEASE! Please. Just STOP. Oh, god! Please!!" Of course, I don't say any of that, let alone scream it. I just change the subject and hold out hope that

someone will understand. Maybe writing this book is my way of calling out for the people who get it. I know they're out there. Somewhere.

Also, what they don't understand is that this IS me moving on. This IS me moving forward. For me, that just doesn't mean ignoring, pushing away, you know, forgetting.

I know deep down that I don't need to forget. I don't need to look away. Moving forward doesn't mean avoiding the path that lies ahead. It means moving through the path ahead.

My vision of Lily at 25 years old is real in a sense. By writing this story, I am giving some life to a girl that is otherwise gone. And you know what? I don't see anything wrong with focusing on something others may find sad, because this means something to me. What is this one precious life without trying to make meaning?

## Grieving is Loving

My father lost his brother  
My mama lost her mother  
Way too young  
They didn't talk about it  
Maybe that's why  
They didn't know how to love me  
They didn't know how to hold me

Grieving is loving  
Honor the darkness and you honor the light  
Grieving is loving  
The darkness can be lighter if I can learn how to hold it  
Just let it be

The sound of plates crashing  
On the kitchen floor  
Like an echo in my mind  
I still hear their fights  
Peering from the edge of the hallway

I couldn't tear myself away

Grieving is loving  
Honor the darkness and you honor the light  
Grieving is loving  
The darkness can be lighter if I can learn how to hold it  
Just let it be  
Just let it be  
Because grieving is loving  
Grieving is loving

## Hour of Blue

Frankie was someone I once knew  
When I leaned on Frankie,  
I fell on through  
Yeah it was Frankie who I told my blues

Frankie was someone I once knew  
When Frankie took and took  
What I never gave  
I tumbled down a hole far too familiar to bear alone

In my hour of blue  
Frankie was someone to lean on  
Azure smoke clouded all the red flags in view  
So I sank and I sank until I knew

But that was in my hour of blue

## Hey Lauri

Hey Lauri?  
You beat the bottom of a fractured vase.  
Now I ask myself,  
Did you ever shatter?  
Oh, did you ever break?

Hey Lauri.  
Or, did you forget as I did?  
At first I thought you broke my fall,  
but now I know that was wrong.

I was on my way down,  
but when I reached out each time to climb back up,  
the wind unraveled my fingers.  
I lost my grip.  
You never told me that you were the wind.

Did you ever remember?  
Or, did you ever even forget?  
I forgot for a while, but  
then I stumbled upon my broken glass again.

Hey Lauri?  
If you're out there,  
I fell all the way to the bottom,  
after you left. Yet, somehow I  
pieced my broken self together again.  
Now I know what you did,  
and somehow I made myself whole again.