

# the sun and her flowers

rupi kaur



#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER

also by rupi kaur  
*milk and honey*

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to my makers  
kamaljit kaur and suchet singh  
i am. because of you.  
i hope you look at us  
and think  
your sacrifices were worth it

to my stunning sisters and brother  
prabhdeep kaur  
kirandeep kaur  
saahib singh  
we are in this together

you define love.

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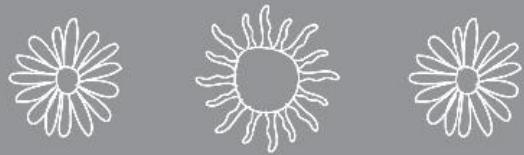
wilting

falling

rooting

rising

blooming



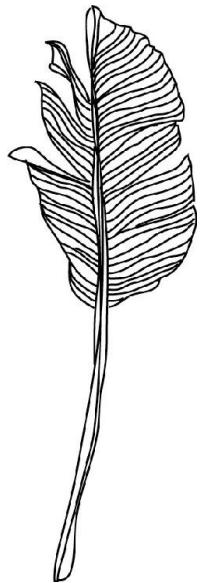
bees came for honey  
flowers giggled as they  
undressed themselves  
for the taking  
the sun smiled

- *the second birth*

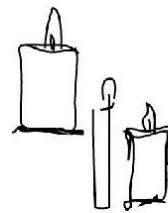
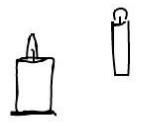


wilting

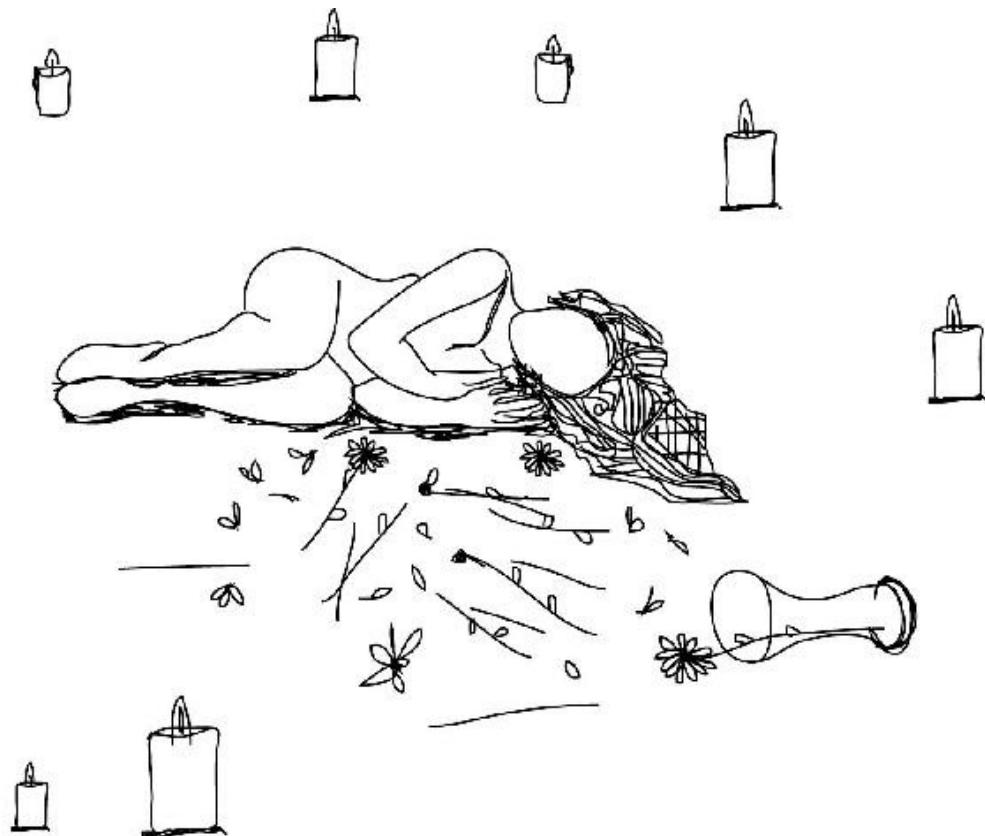
on the last day of love  
my heart cracked inside my body



i spent the entire night  
casting spells to bring you back



i reached for the last bouquet of flowers  
you gave me  
now wilting in their vase  
one  
by  
one  
i popped their heads off  
and ate them



i stuffed a towel at the foot of every door  
*leave* i told the air

*i have no use for you*

i drew every curtain in the house

*go* i told the light

*no one is coming in*

*and no one is going out*

- *cemetery*

you left  
and i wanted you still  
yet i deserved someone  
who was willing to stay



i spend days in bed debilitated by loss i attempt to cry you back but the water is done

and still you have not returned i pinch my belly till it bleeds have lost count of the days sun becomes moon and

moon becomes sun and

i become ghost  
a dozen different thoughts tear through me each second you must be on your  
way  
perhaps it's best if you're not i am okay  
no i am angry  
yes i hate you  
maybe i can't move on  
i will i forgive you  
i want to rip my hair out over and over and over again till my mind exhausts  
itself into a silence

yesterday  
the rain tried to imitate my hands  
by running down your body  
i ripped the sky apart for allowing it

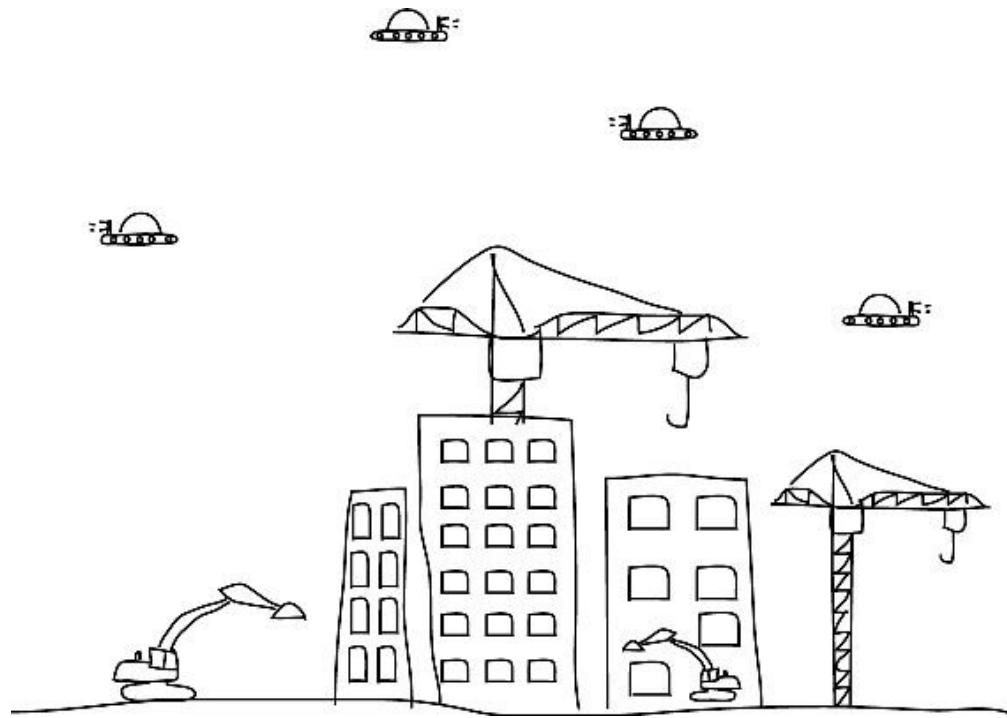
*- jealousy*



in order to fall asleep  
i have to imagine your body  
crooked behind mine  
spoon ladled into spoon  
till i can hear your breath  
i have to recite your name  
till you answer and  
we have a conversation  
only then  
can my mind  
drift off to sleep

- *pretend*

it isn't what we left behind  
that breaks me  
it's what we could've built  
had we stayed



i can still see our construction hats lying exactly where we left them pylons  
unsure of what to guard bulldozers gazing out for our return the planks of wood  
stiff in their boxes yearning to be nailed up but neither of us goes back to tell  
them it is over in time

the bricks will grow tired of waiting and crumble the cranes will droop their  
necks in sorrow the shovels will rust

do you think flowers will grow here when you and i are off

building something new

with someone else

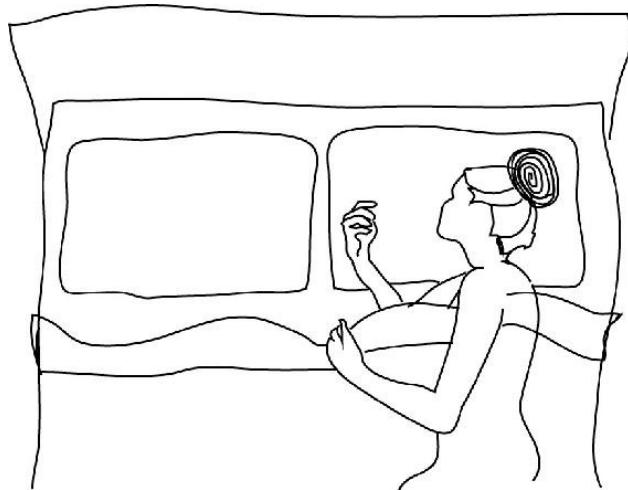
*- the construction site of our future*

i live for that first second in the morning when i am still half-conscious i hear the hummingbirds outside flirting with the flowers i hear the flowers giggling and the bees growing jealous when i turn over to wake you it starts all over again the panting

the wailing

the shock

of realizing  
that you've left - *the first mornings without you*



the hummingbirds tell me  
you've changed your hair  
i tell them i don't care  
while listening to them  
describe every detail

- *hunger*

i envy the winds  
who still witness you

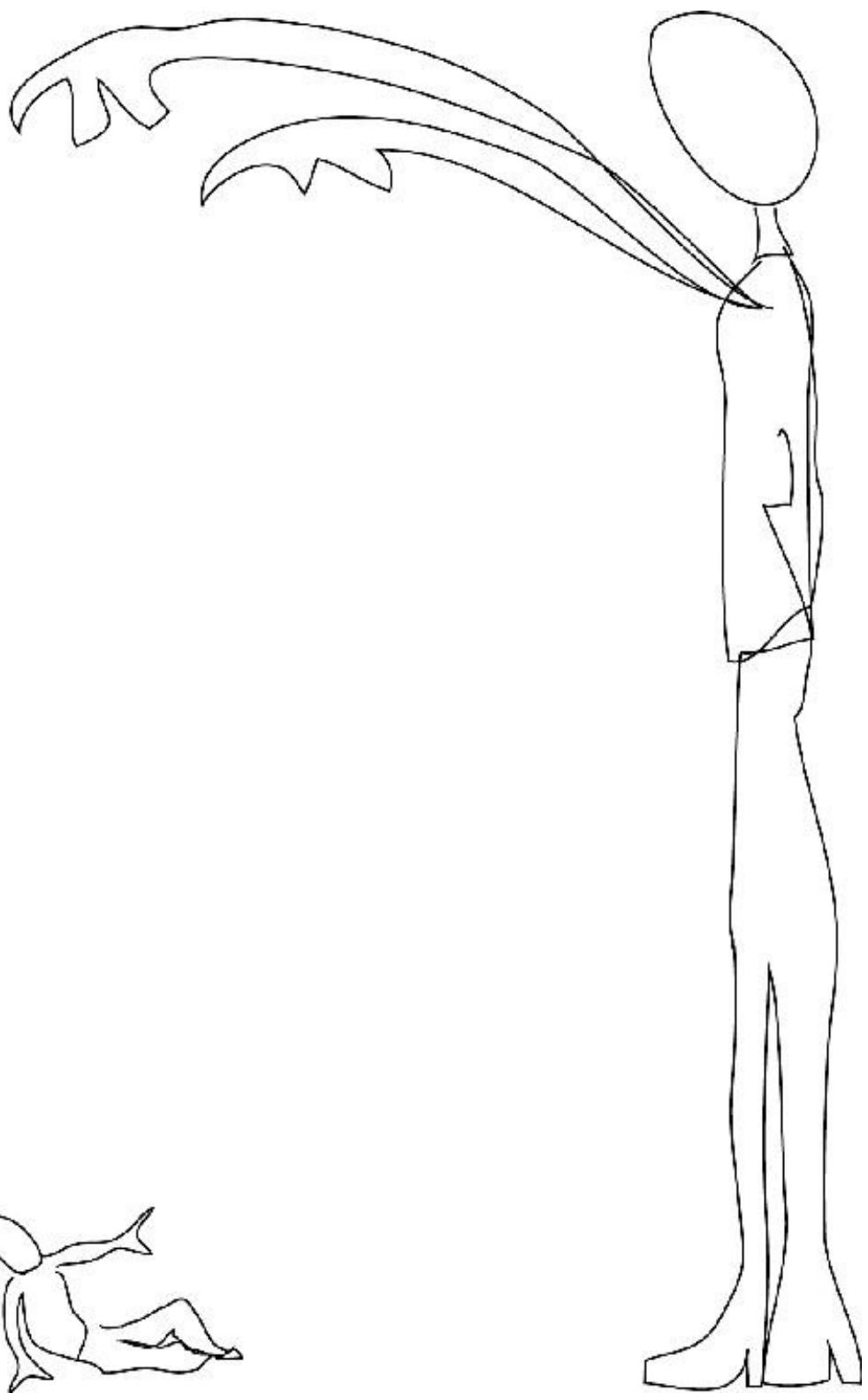
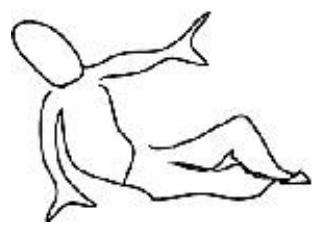


i could be anything  
in the world  
but i wanted to be his

i tried to leave many times but as soon as i got away my lungs buckled under the pressure panting for air i'd return perhaps this is why i let you skin me to the bone

something  
was better than nothing having you touch me  
even if it was not kind was better than not having your hands at all i could take  
the abuse i could not take the absence i knew i was beating a dead thing but did  
it matter  
if the thing was dead when at the very least i had it

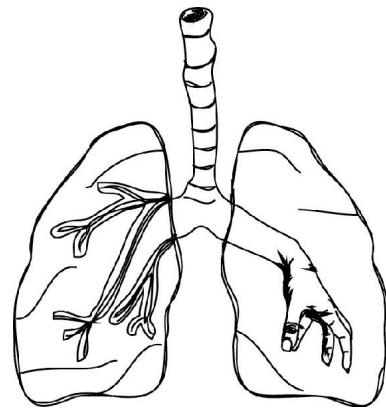
- *addiction*



you break women in like shoes

loving you was breathing  
but that breath disappearing  
before it filled my lungs

- *when it goes too soon*





## **what love looks like**

*what does love look like* the therapist asks one week after the breakup

and i'm not sure how to answer her question except for the fact that i thought love

looked so much like you that's when it hit me

and i realized how naive i had been to place an idea so beautiful on the image of a person as if anybody on this entire earth could encompass all love represented as if this emotion seven billion people tremble for would look like a five foot eleven medium-sized brown-skinned guy

who likes eating frozen pizza for breakfast *what does love look like* the therapist asks again this time interrupting my thoughts

midsentence and at this point i'm about to get up and walk right out the door

except i paid far too much money for this hour so instead i take a piercing look at her the way you look at someone

when you're about to hand it to them lips pursed tightly preparing to launch into conversation eyes digging deeply into theirs

searching for all the weak spots

they have hidden somewhere  
hair being tucked behind the ears as if you have to physically  
prepare for a conversation on the philosophies or rather  
disappointments of what love looks like

*well i tell her i don't think love is him anymore* if love was him  
he would be here wouldn't he  
if he was the one for me  
wouldn't he be the one sitting across from me if love was him it  
would have been simple *i don't think love is him anymore* i repeat i  
think love never was  
i think i just wanted something  
was ready to give myself to something i believed was bigger than  
myself and when i saw someone  
who could probably fit the part i made it very much my intention

to make him my counterpart

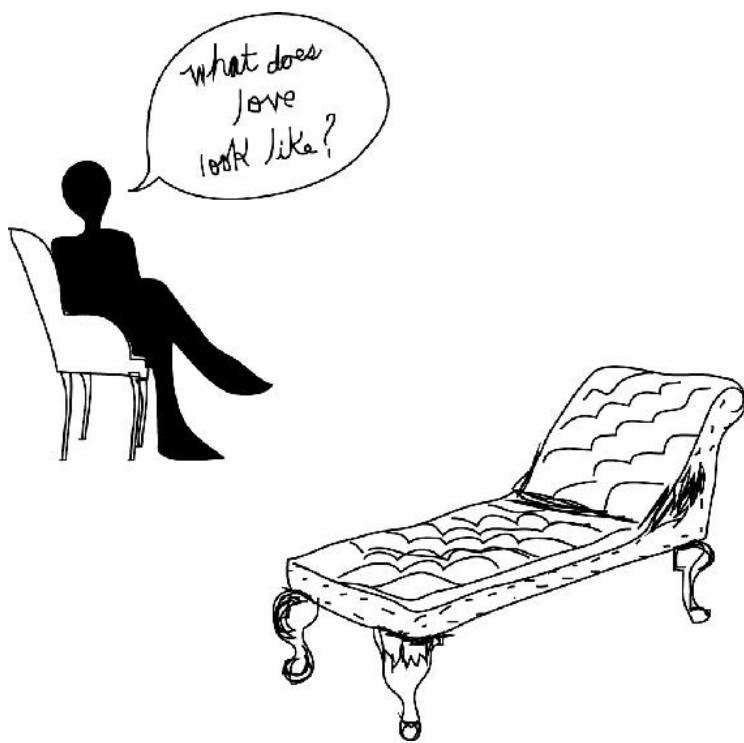
and i lost myself to him

he took and he took  
wrapped me in the word *special* until i was so convinced he had  
eyes only to see me hands only to feel me  
a body only to be with me

oh how he emptied me

*how does that make you feel* interrupts the therapist  
well i said *it kind of makes me feel like shit* maybe we're all looking  
at it wrong we think it's something to search for out there  
something meant to crash into us  
on our way out of an elevator  
or slip into our chair at a cafe somewhere appear at the end of an  
aisle at the bookstore looking the right amount of sexy and  
intellectual but i think love starts *here* everything else is just desire  
and projection of all our wants needs and fantasies but those  
externalities could never work out if we didn't turn inward and learn  
how to love ourselves in order to love other people love does not  
look like a person

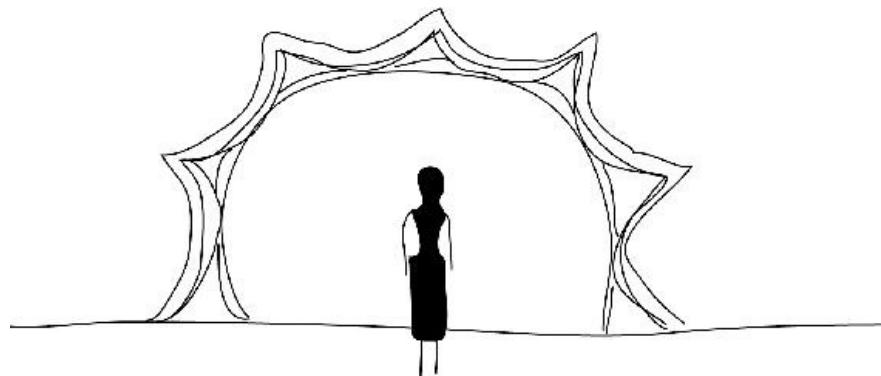
love is our actions  
love is giving all we can  
even if it's just the bigger slice of cake love is understanding  
we have the power to hurt one another but we are going to do  
everything in our power to make sure we don't  
love is figuring out all the kind sweetness we deserve and when  
someone shows up  
saying they will provide it as you do but their actions seem to break  
you  
rather than build you love is knowing whom to choose



you cannot  
walk in and out of me  
like a revolving door  
i have too many miracles  
happening inside me  
to be your convenient option

*- not your hobby*

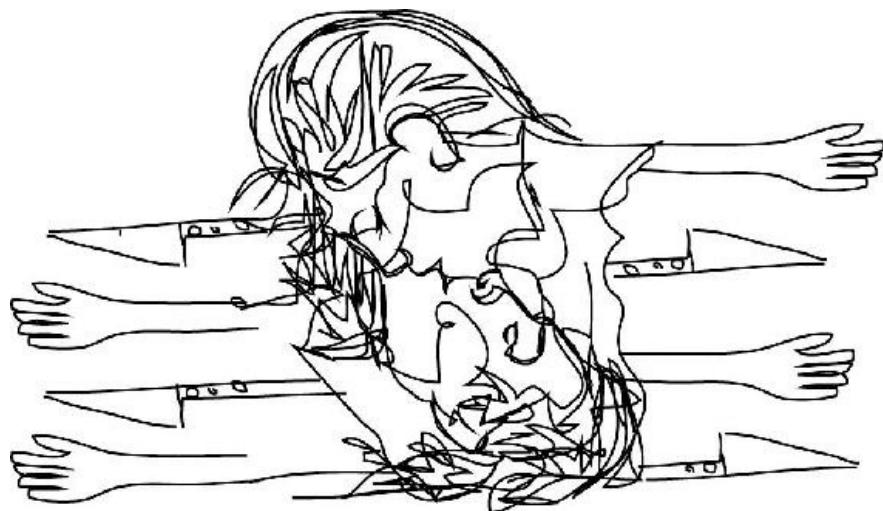
you took the sun with you  
when you left



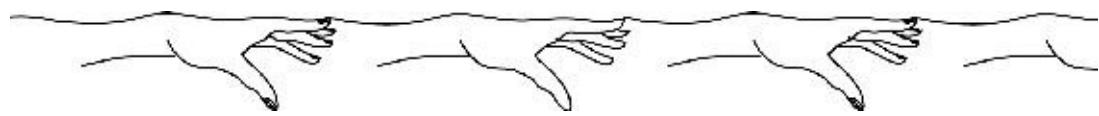
i remained committed  
long after you were gone  
i could not lift my eyes  
to meet eyes with someone else  
looking felt like betrayal  
what excuse would i have  
when you came back  
and asked where my hands had been

- *loyal*

when you plunged the knife into me  
you also began bleeding  
my wound became your wound  
didn't you know  
love is a double-edged knife  
you will suffer the way you make me suffer



i think my body knew you would not stay



i long  
for you  
but you long  
for someone else  
i deny the one  
who wants me  
cause i want someone else

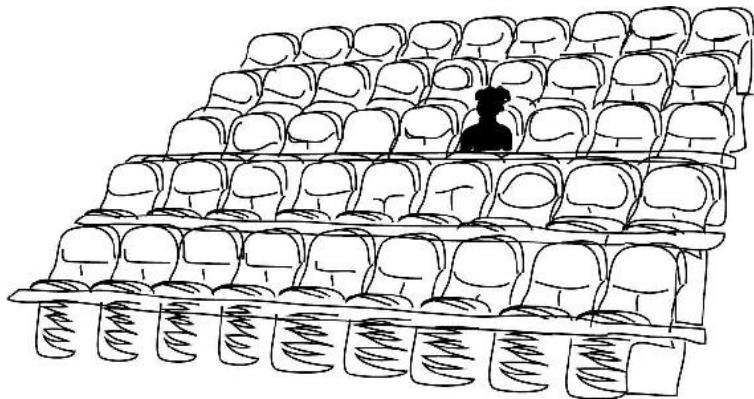
*- the human condition*



i wonder if i am

beautiful enough for you  
or if i am beautiful at all i change what i am wearing five times before i see you  
wondering which pair of jeans will make my body more tempting to undress tell  
me  
is there anything i can do to make you think  
*her she is so striking she makes my body forget it has knees* write it in a letter  
and address it to all the insecure parts of me your voice alone drives me to tears  
yours telling me i am beautiful yours telling me i am enough

you're everywhere  
except right here  
and it hurts



show me a picture  
i want to see the face of the woman who made you forget the one you had at  
home what day was it and  
what excuse did you feed me  
i used to thank the universe for bringing you to me did you enter her right as i  
asked the almighty  
to grant you all you wanted did you find it in her did you come crawling out of  
her with what you couldn't in me

what draws you to her  
tell me what you like  
so i can practice



your absence is a missing limb

**questions** there is a list of questions i want to ask but never will  
there is a list of questions i go through in my head every time i'm  
alone and my mind can't stop itself from searching for you there is a  
list of questions i want to ask  
so if you're listening somewhere here i am asking them

what do you think happens to the love that's left behind when two  
lovers leave how blue do you think it gets before it passes away  
does it pass away  
or does it still exist somewhere waiting for us to come back when  
we lied to ourselves by calling this unconditional and left which one  
of us hurt more i shattered into a million little pieces and those  
pieces shattered into a million more crumbled into dust till there  
was nothing left of me but the silence tell me how love  
how did the grieving feel for you how did the mourning hurt how  
did you peel your eyes open after every blink knowing i'd never be  
there staring back it must be hard to live with *what ifs* there must  
always be this constant dull aching in the pit of your stomach trust  
me

i feel it too  
how in the world did we get here how did we live through it and  
how are we still living how many months did it take  
before you stopped thinking of me or are you still thinking of me  
cause if you are

then maybe i am too

thinking of you

thinking of me

with me

in me

around me

everywhere

you and me and us

do you still touch yourself to thoughts of me do you still imagine  
my naked naked tiny tiny body pressed into yours  
do you still imagine the curve of my spine and  
how you wanted to rip it out of me cause the way it dipped into my  
perfectly rounded bottom drove you crazy

baby

sugar baby

sweet baby

ever since we left  
how many times did you pretend it was my hand stroking you how  
many times did you search for me in your fantasies and end up  
crying instead of coming don't you lie to me  
i can tell when you're lying cause there's always that little bit of  
arrogance in your response are you angry with me are you okay  
and would you tell me if you're not and if we ever see each other  
again do you think you'd reach out and hold me like you said you  
would the last time we spoke and  
you talked of the next time we would or do you think we'd just look  
shake in our skin as we pine to  
absorb as much as we can of each other cause by this time we've  
probably got  
someone else waiting at home we were good together weren't we  
and is it wrong that i'm asking you these questions tell me love

that you have been

looking for these answers too

you call to tell me you miss me i turn to face the front door of the house waiting  
for a knock

days later you call to say you need me but still aren't here

the dandelions on the lawn are rolling their eyes in disappointment the grass has  
declared you yesterday's news what do i care

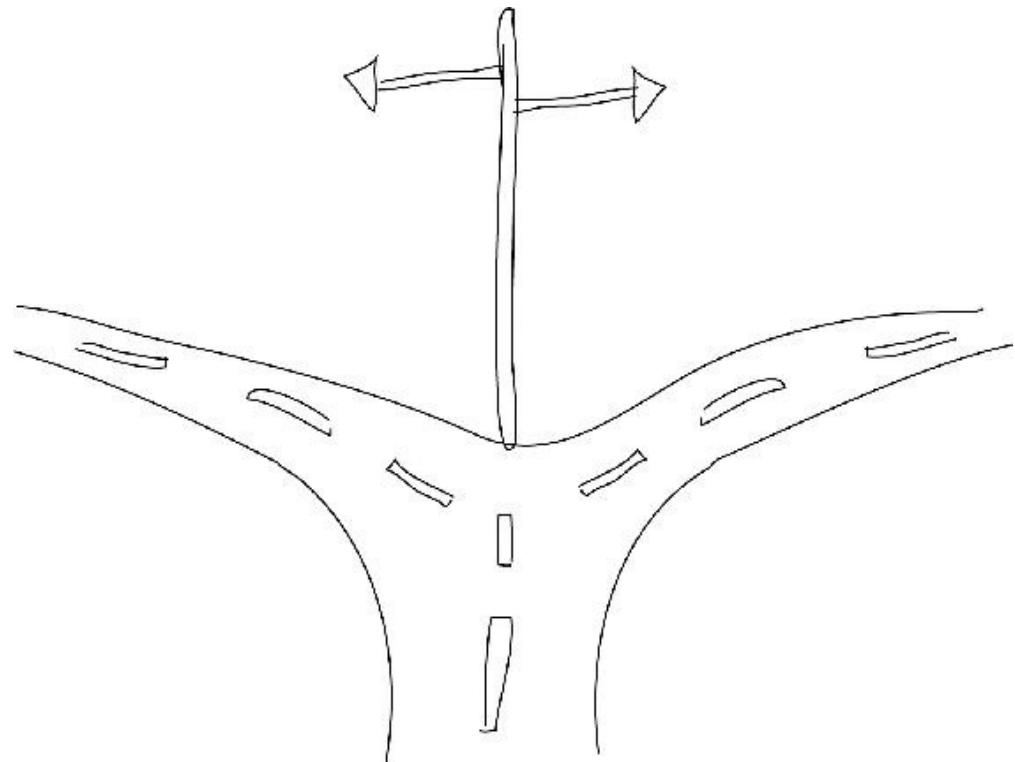
if you love me

or miss me

or need me  
when you aren't doing anything about it if i'm not the love of your life i'll be the  
greatest loss instead

where do we go from here my love when it's over and i'm standing between us  
whose side do i run to

when every nerve in my body is pulsing for you when my mouth waters at the  
thought when you are pulling me in just by standing there how do i turn around  
and choose myself



day by day i realize  
everything i miss about you  
was never there in the first place

*- the person i fell in love with was a mirage*

they leave  
and act like it never happened  
they come back  
and act like they never left

- *ghosts*

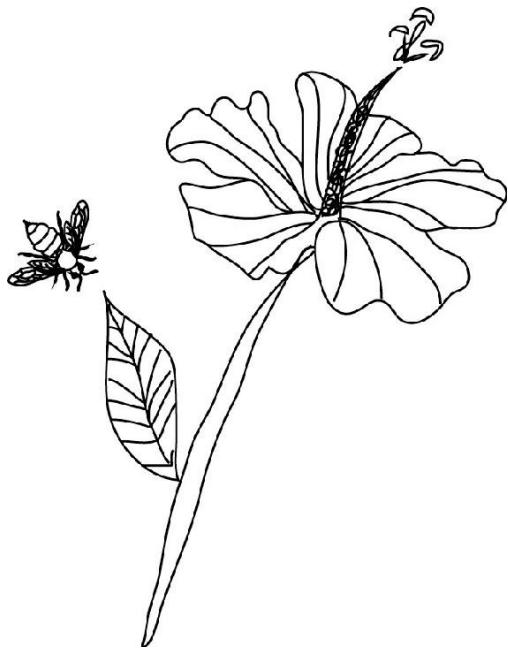


i tried to find it  
but there was no answer  
at the end of the last conversation

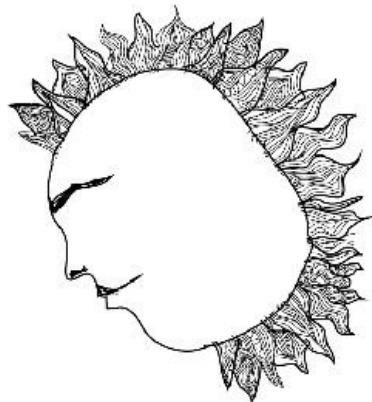
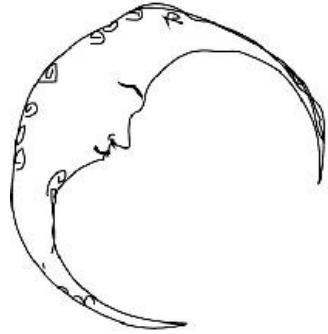
- *closure*

you ask  
if we can still be friends  
i explain how a honeybee  
does not dream of kissing  
the mouth of a flower  
and then settle for its leaves

- *i don't need more friends*



why is it  
that when the story ends  
we begin to feel all of it



*rise said the moon*

and the new day came  
*the show must go on* said the sun life does not stop for anybody it drags you by  
the legs

whether you want to move forward or not that is the gift  
life will force you to forget how you long for them your skin will shed till there  
is not a single part of you left they've touched your eyes finally just your eyes  
not the eyes which held them you will make it to the end of what is only the  
beginning go on  
open the door to the rest of it - *time*



falling

i notice everything i do not have  
and decide it is beautiful

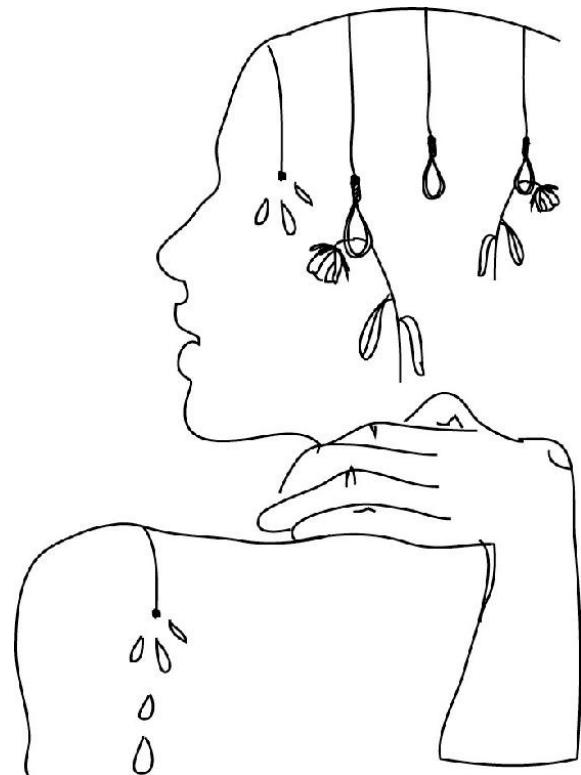


i hardened under the last loss. it took something human out of me. i used to be so deeply emotional i'd crumble on demand. but now the water has made its exit. of course i care about the ones around me. i'm just struggling to show it. a wall is getting in the way. i used to dream of being so strong nothing could shake me. now. i am. so strong. that nothing shakes me.  
and all i dream is to soften.

- *numbness*

yesterday  
when i woke up  
the sun fell to the ground and rolled away  
flowers beheaded themselves  
all that's left alive here is me  
and i barely feel like living

*- depression is a shadow living inside me*



*why are you so unkind to me*  
my body cries

*cause you don't look like them*  
i tell her

you are waiting for someone  
who is not coming back  
meaning  
you are living your life  
hoping that someone will realize  
they can't live theirs without you

- *realizations don't work like that*

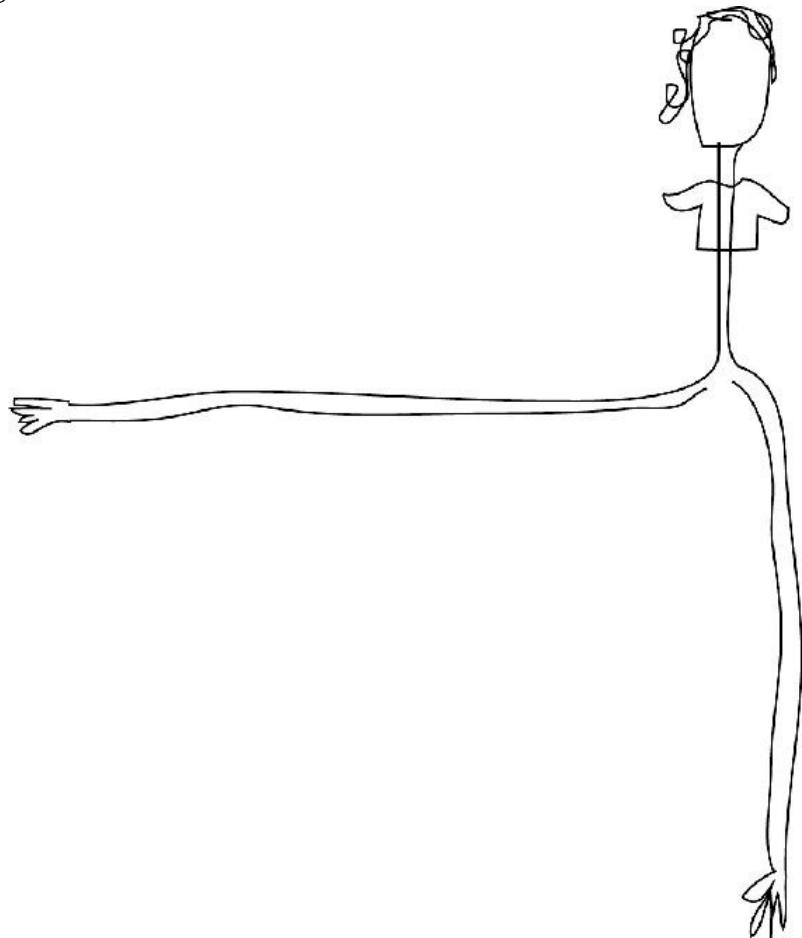


a lot of times  
we are angry at other people  
for not doing what  
we should have done for ourselves

- *responsibility*

why  
did you leave a door  
hanging  
open between my legs  
were you lazy  
did you forget  
or did you purposely leave me unfinished

- *conversations with god*



they did not tell me it would hurt like this no one warned me  
about the heartbreak we experience with friends *where are the albums* i thought  
there were no songs sung for it i could not find the ballads or read the books  
dedicated to writing the grief we fall into when friends leave it is the type of  
heartache that does not hit you like a tsunami it is a slow cancer the kind that  
does not show up for months has no visible signs is an ache here

a headache there

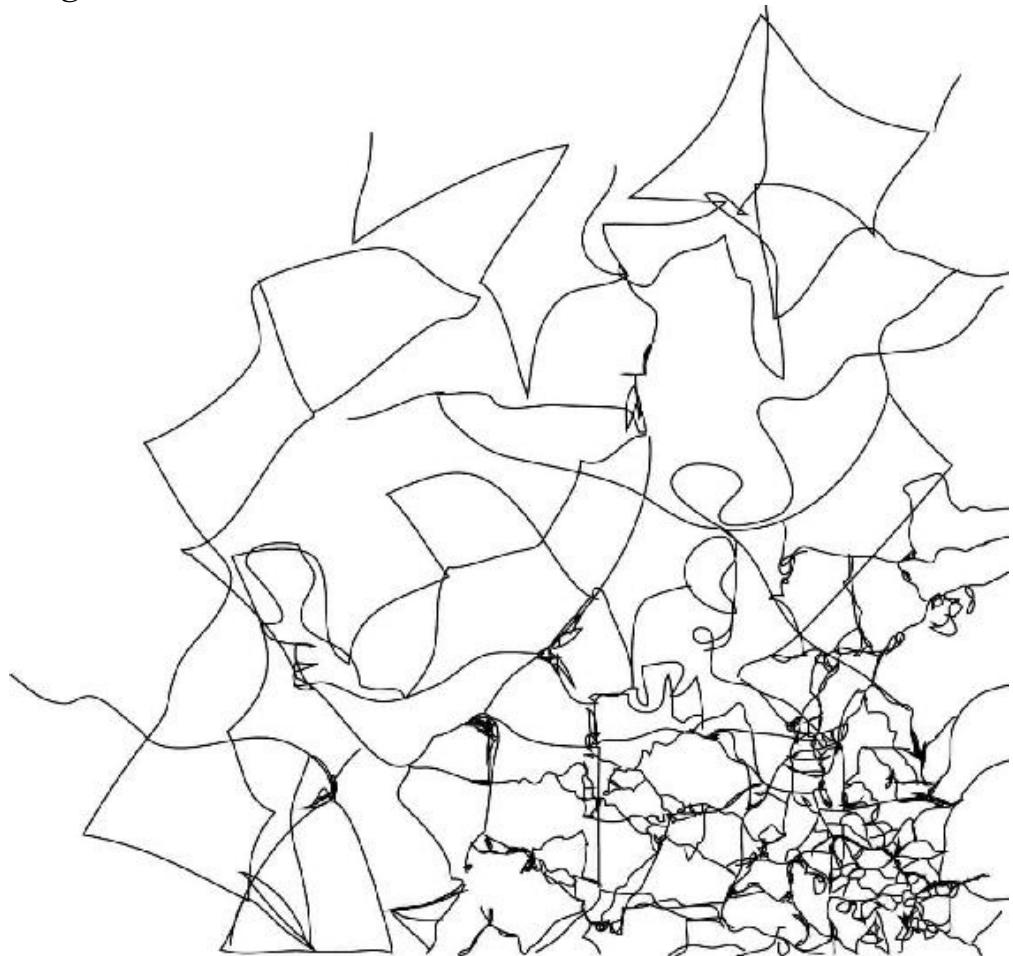
but manageable

cancer or tsunami

it all ends the same a friend or a lover a loss is a loss is a loss - *the underrated heartache*

i hear a thousand kind words about me  
and it makes no difference  
yet i hear one insult  
and all confidence shatters

*- focusing on the negative*



**home** it began as a typical thursday from what i recall sunlight  
kissed my eyelids good morning i remember it exactly

climbing out of bed  
making coffee to the sound of children playing outside putting  
music on

loading the dishwasher  
i remember placing flowers in a vase in the middle of the kitchen  
table only when my apartment was spotless did i step into the  
bathtub  
wash yesterday out of my hair i decorated myself  
like the walls of my home were decorated with frames bookshelves  
photos i hung a necklace around my neck hooked earrings in

applied lipstick like paint  
swept my hair back—just your typical thursday we ended up at a  
get-together with friends at the end you asked if i needed a ride  
home and i said yes cause our dads worked at the same company  
and you'd been to my place for dinner many times but i should have  
known  
when you began to confuse  
kind conversation with flirtation when you told me to let my hair  
down when instead of driving me home  
toward the bright intersection of lights and life—you took a left to  
the road that led nowhere  
i asked where we were going  
you asked if i was afraid  
my voice threw itself over the edge of my throat landed at the  
bottom of my belly and hid for months all the different parts in me  
turned the lights off shut the blinds

locked the doors  
while i hid at the back of some  
upstairs closet of my mind as someone broke the windows—you  
kicked the front door in—you

took everything

and then someone took me  
—it was you.

who dove into me with a fork and a knife eyes glinting with  
starvation  
like you hadn't eaten in weeks i was a hundred and ten pounds of  
fresh meat you skinned and gutted with your fingers like you were  
scraping the inside of a cantaloupe clean as i screamed for my  
mother  
you nailed my wrists to the ground turned my breasts into bruised  
fruit this home is empty now

no gas

no electricity

no running water

the food is rotten  
from head to foot i am layered in dust fruit flies. webs. bugs.

someone call the plumber  
my stomach is backed up—i've been vomiting since call the  
electrician  
my eyes won't light up  
call the cleaners to wash me up and hang me to dry when you broke  
into my home  
it never felt like mine again i can't even let a lover in without  
getting sick i lose sleep after the first date lose my appetite  
become more bone and less skin forget to breathe  
every night my bedroom becomes a psych ward where panic attacks  
turn men  
into doctors to keep me calm every lover who touches me—feels  
like you their fingers—you  
mouths—you  
until they're not the ones  
on top of me anymore—it's you and i am so tired

of doing things your way  
—it isn't working  
i've spent years trying to figure out  
how i could have stopped it but the sun can't stop the storm from  
coming the tree can't stop the ax  
i can't blame myself for having a hole  
the size of your manhood in my chest anymore it's too heavy to  
carry your guilt—i'm setting it down i'm tired of decorating this  
place with your shame  
as if it belongs to me it's too much to walk around with  
what your hands have done if it's not my hands that have done it the  
truth comes to me suddenly—after years of rain the truth comes like  
sunlight  
pouring through an open window it takes a long time to get here but  
it all comes full circle  
it takes a broken person to come searching  
for meaning between my legs it takes a complete. whole. perfectly  
designed  
person to survive it it takes monsters to steal souls and fighters to  
reclaim them  
this home is what i came into this world with was the first home

will be the last home  
you can't take it  
there is no space for you

no welcome mat

no extra bedrooms  
i'm opening all the windows

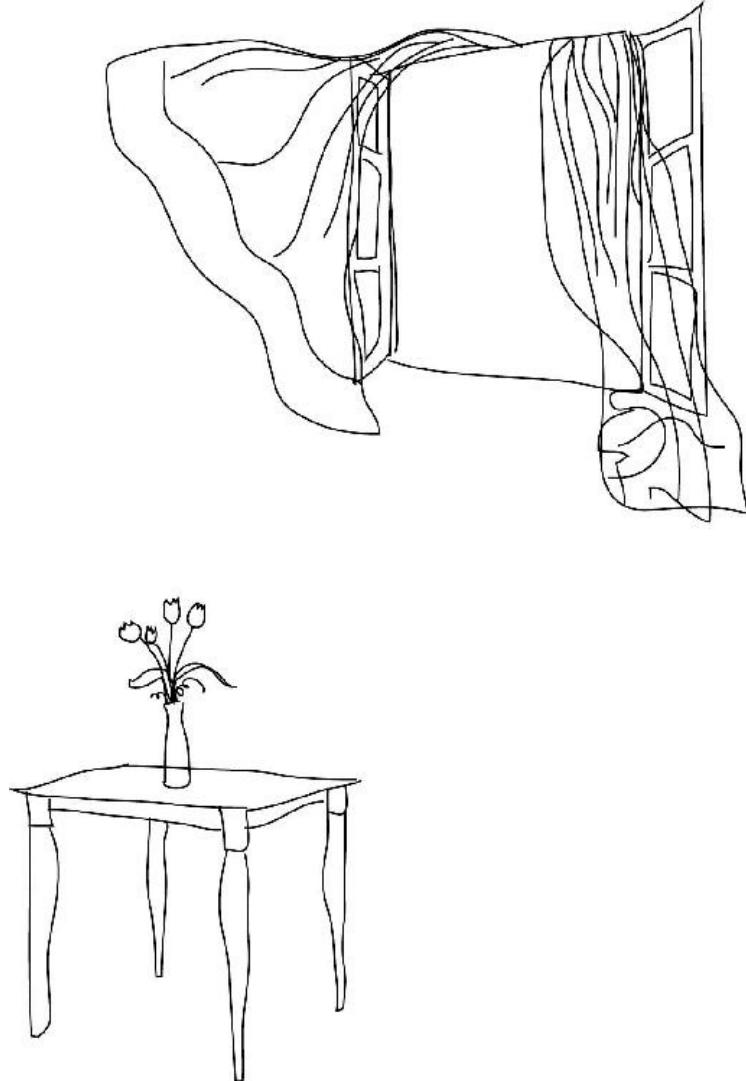
airing it out  
putting flowers in a vase  
in the middle of the kitchen table lighting a candle  
loading the dishwasher with all of my thoughts until they're spotless

scrubbing the countertops  
and then

i plan to step into the bathtub wash yesterday out of my hair  
decorate my body in gold

put music on

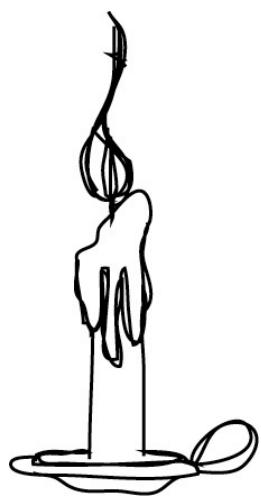
sit back  
put my feet up  
and enjoy  
this typical thursday afternoon



when snow falls  
i long for grass  
when grass grows  
i walk all over it  
when leaves change color  
i beg for flowers  
when flowers bloom  
i pick them

- *unappreciative*

tell them i was the  
warmest place you knew  
and you turned me cold



at home that night

i filled the bathtub with scorching water tossed in spearmint from the garden two  
tablespoons almond oil some milk

and honey

a pinch of salt

rose petals from the neighbor's lawn i soaked myself in the mixture desperate to  
wash the dirty off the first hour

i picked pine needles from my hair counted them one two three lined them up on  
their backs the second hour

i wept

a howling escaped me who knew girl could become beast during the third hour i  
found bits of him on bits of me the sweat was not mine the white between my  
legs not mine

the bite marks

not mine

the smell

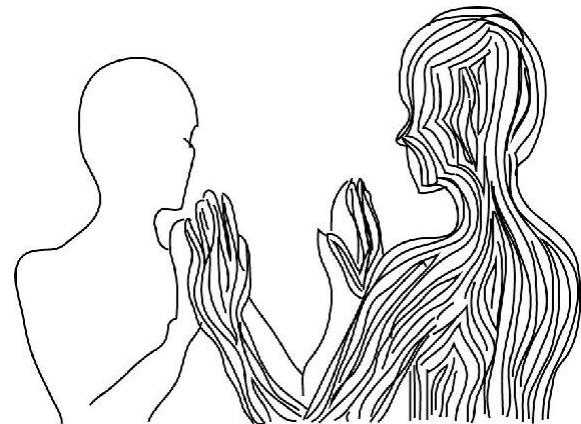
not mine

the blood

mine

the fourth hour i prayed

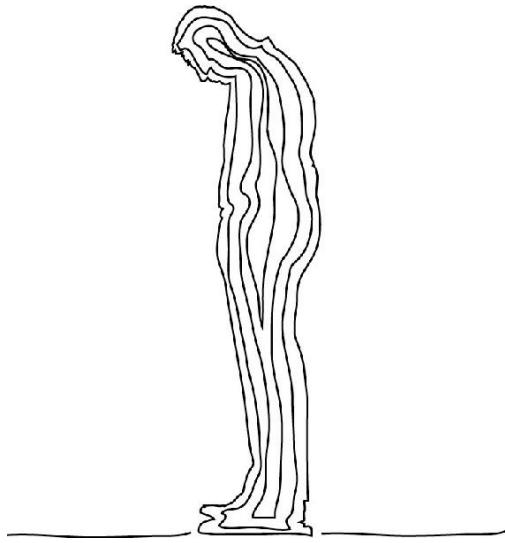
it felt like you threw me  
so far from myself  
i've been trying to find my way back ever since



i reduced my body to aesthetics  
forgot the work it did to keep me alive  
with every beat and breath  
declared it a grand failure for not looking like theirs  
searched everywhere for a miracle  
foolish enough to not realize  
i was already living in one

the irony of loneliness  
is we all feel it  
at the same time

- *together*



my girlhood was too much hair thin limbs coated in velvet it was neighborhood tradition for the other young girls and i to frequent basement salons on a weekly basis run by women in a house

who were my mother's age had my mother's skin

but looked nothing like my simple mother they had brown skin with yellow hair meant for white skin streaks like zebras

slits for eyebrows

i looked at my own caterpillars with shame and dreamt mine would be that thin i sit timidly in the makeshift waiting area

hoping a friend from school would not drop by a bollywood music video is playing on a tiny television screen in the corner someone is getting their legs waxed or hair dyed when the auntie calls me in

i walk into the room and make small talk

she leaves for a moment

while i undress my lower half i slide my pants and underwear off lie down on the spa bed and wait when she returns she positions my legs like an open butterfly

soles of feet together  
knees pointing in opposite directions first the disinfectant wipe then the cold  
jelly  
*how is school and what are you studying* she asks turns the laser on  
places the head of the machine on my pubic bone and just like that it begins the  
hair follicles around my clitoris begin burning with each zap

i wince

shivering with pain

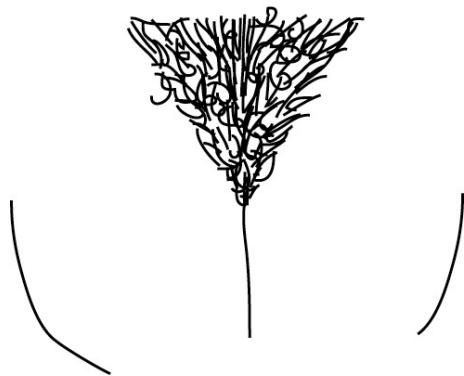
why do i do this

why do i punish my body for being exactly as it's meant to be i stop myself halfway through the regret when i think of him and how i'm too embarrassed to show him unless it's clean

i bite down on my lip

and ask if we're almost finished - *basement aesthetician*

¤



we have been dying  
since we got here  
and forgot to enjoy the view

- *live fully*

you were mine  
and my life was full  
you are no longer mine  
and my life  
is full



my eyes  
make mirrors out of every reflective surface they pass searching for something  
beautiful looking back my ears fish for compliments and praise but no matter  
how far they go looking nothing is enough for me

i go to clinics and department stores for pretty potions and new techniques i've  
tried the lasers

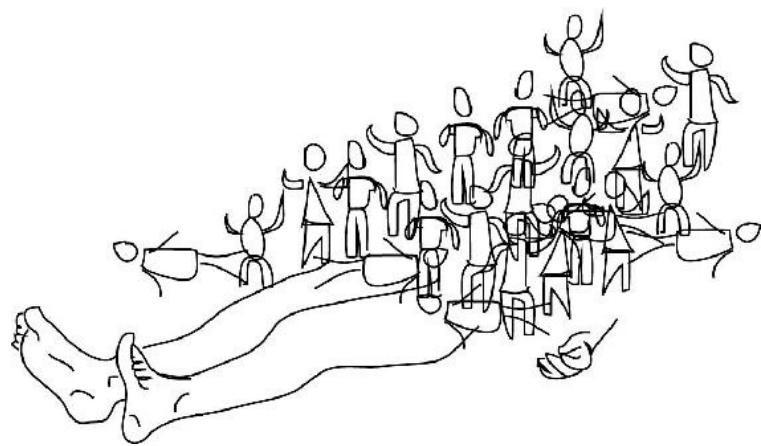
i've tried the facials

i've tried the blades and expensive creams for a hopeful minute they fill me  
make me glow from cheek to cheek but as soon as i feel beautiful their magic  
disappears suddenly where am i supposed to find it i am willing to pay any price  
for a beauty that makes heads turn every moment day and night

*- a never-ending search*

this place makes me  
the kind of exhausted that has  
nothing to do with sleep  
and everything to do with  
the people around me

- *introvert*

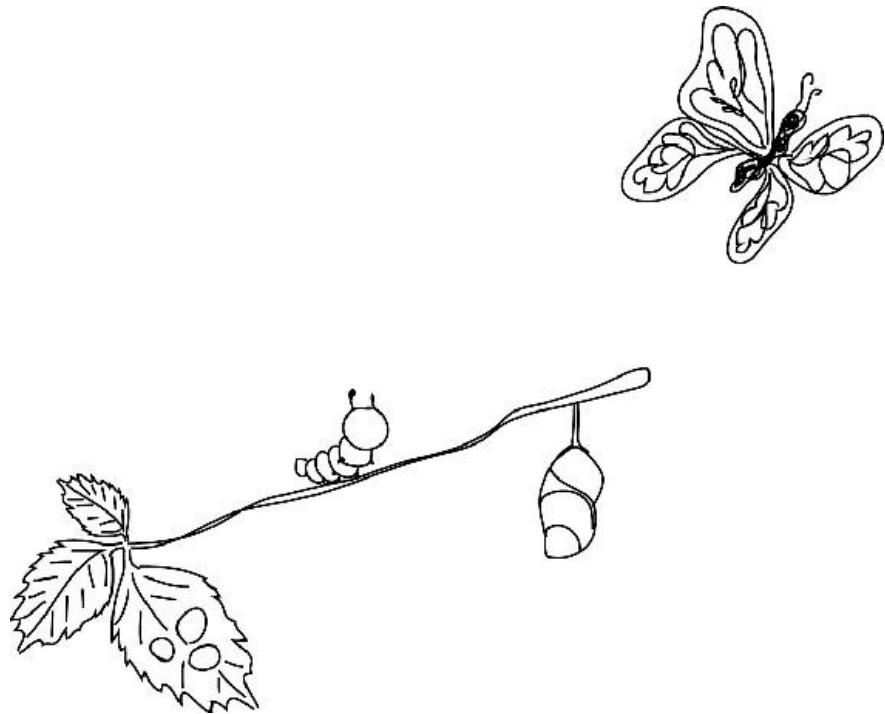


you must see no worth in yourself  
if you find me worth less  
after you've touched me  
as if your hands on my body  
magnify you  
and reduce me to nothing

- *worth is not something we transfer*

you do not just wake up and become the butterfly

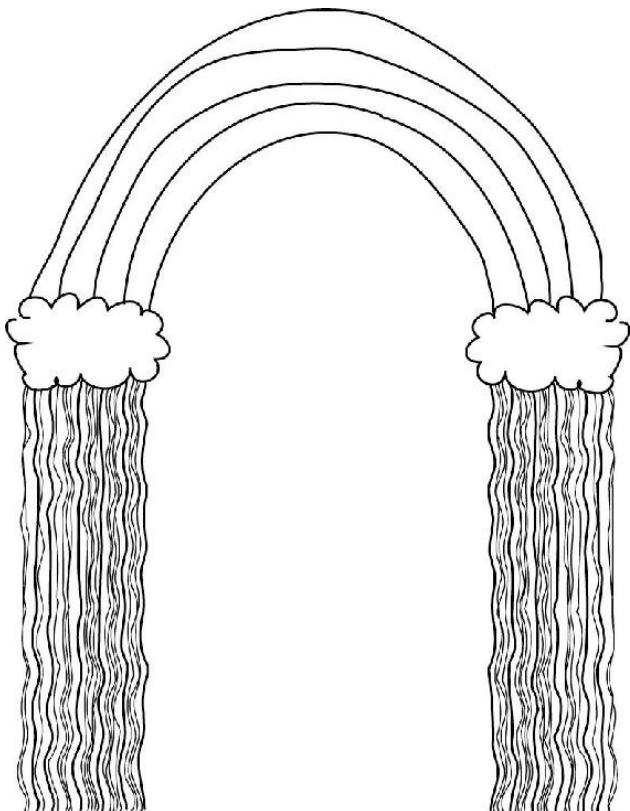
- *growth is a process*



i am having a difficult time right now comparing myself to other people i am stretching myself thin trying to be them making fun of my face like my father calling it ugly

starving out this premature double chin before it melts into my shoulders like candle wax fixing the bags under my eyes that carry the rape bookmarking surgical procedures for my nose there is so much that needs tending to can you point me in the right direction i want to take this body off which way back to the womb

like the rainbow  
after the rain  
joy will reveal itself  
after sorrow



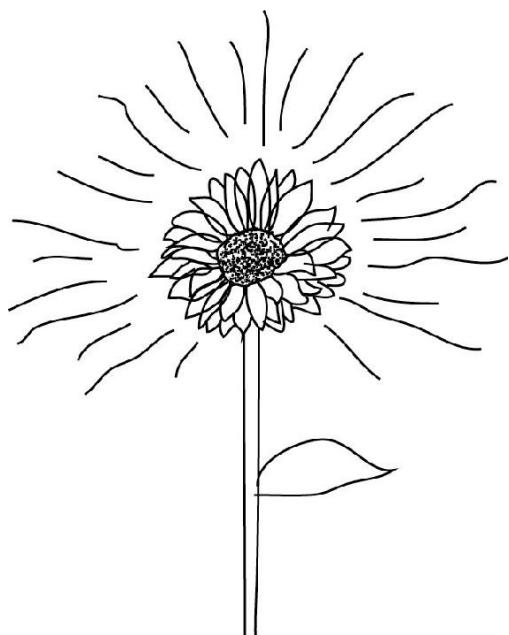
*no* was a bad word in my home *no* was met with the lash erased from our vocabulary

beaten out of our backs  
till we became well-behaved kids who obediently nodded *yes* to everything  
when he climbed on top of me every part of my body wanted to reject it but i  
couldn't say *no* to save my life when i tried to scream  
all that escaped me was silence i heard *no* pounding her fist on the roof of my  
mouth

begging to let her out  
but i had not put up the exit sign never built the emergency staircase there was  
no trapdoor for *no* to escape from i want to ask all the  
parents and guardians a question what use was obedience then when there were  
hands  
that were not mine inside me - *how can i verbalize consent as an adult if i was  
never taught to as a child*

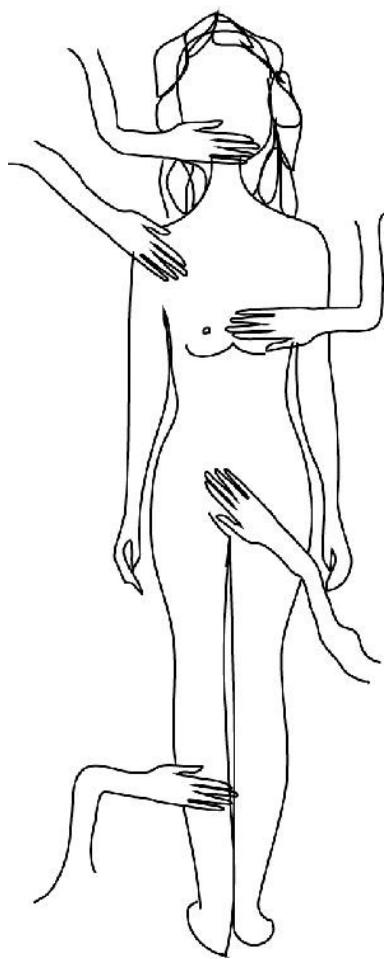
despite knowing  
they won't be here for long  
they still choose to live  
their brightest lives

- *sunflowers*



when you find her  
tell her not a day goes by when i do not think of her that girl who thinks you are  
everything she asked for when you bounce her off the walls and she cries  
tell her i cry with her too the sound of drywall crunching into itself as it's beaten  
with her head also lives in my ears tell her to run to me i have already unscrewed  
my front door off its frame opened all the windows inside there is a warm bath  
running she does not need your kind of love i am proof she will get out and find  
her way back to herself if i could survive you so will she

parts of my body still ache  
from the first time they were touched



**the art of growing** i felt beautiful until the age of twelve when my body began to ripen like new fruit and suddenly the men looked at my newborn hips with salivating lips the boys didn't want to play tag at recess they wanted to touch all the new and unfamiliar parts of me the parts i didn't know how to wear didn't know how to carry and tried to bury in my rib cage

*boobs* they said

and i hated that word  
hated that i was embarrassed to say it that even though it was  
referring to my body it didn't belong to me

it belonged to them

and they repeated it like

they were meditating upon it  
*boobs* he said

*let me see yours* there is nothing worth seeing here but guilt and  
shame i try to rot into the earth below my feet but i am still standing  
one foot across

from his hooked fingers and when he charges to feast on my half  
moons i bite into his forearm and decide *i hate this body* i must have  
done something terrible to deserve it when i go home i tell my  
mother

*the men outside are starving* she tells me

i must not dress with my breasts hanging said *the boys will get  
hungry if they see fruit* says i should sit with my legs closed like a  
woman oughta

or the men will get angry and fight said i can avoid all this trouble if  
i just learn to act like a lady but the problem is  
that doesn't even make sense

i can't wrap my head around the fact

that i have to convince half the world's population my body is not  
their bed

i am busy learning the consequences of womanhood when i should  
be learning science and math instead i like cartwheels and  
gymnastics so i can't imagine walking around with my thighs  
pressed together like they're hiding a secret

as if the acceptance of my own body parts will invite thoughts of  
lust in their heads i will not subject myself to their ideology cause  
slut shaming is rape culture virgin praising is rape culture

i am not a mannequin in the window

of your favorite shop you can't dress me up or  
throw me out when i am worn you are not a cannibal

your actions are not my responsibility you will control yourself

the next time i go to school  
and the boys hoot at my backside

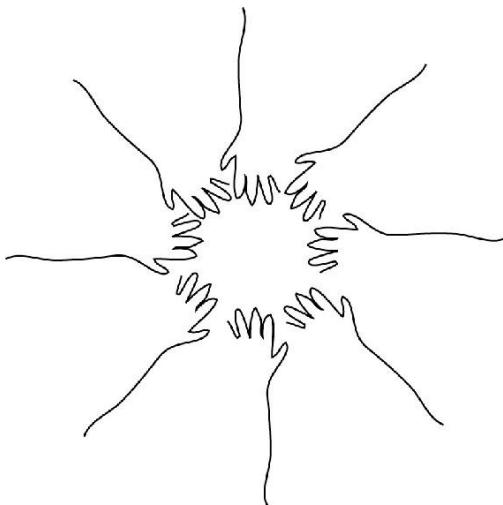
i push them down

foot over their necks

and defiantly say  
*boobs* and the look in their eyes is priceless

when the world comes crashing at your feet  
it's okay to let others  
help pick up the pieces  
if we're present to take part in your happiness  
when your circumstances are great  
we are more than capable  
of sharing your pain

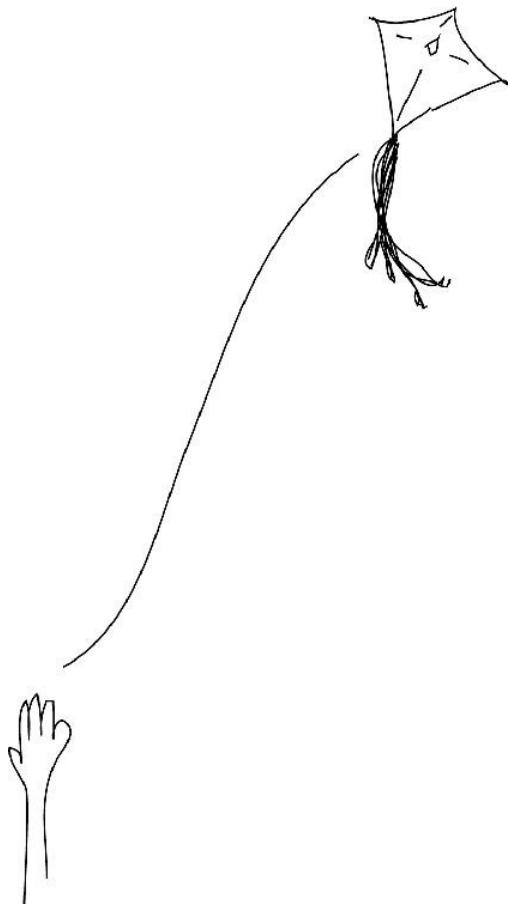
- *community*



i do not weep  
because i'm unhappy  
i weep because i have everything  
yet i am unhappy

let it go  
let it leave  
let it happen  
nothing  
in this world  
was promised or  
belonged to you anyway

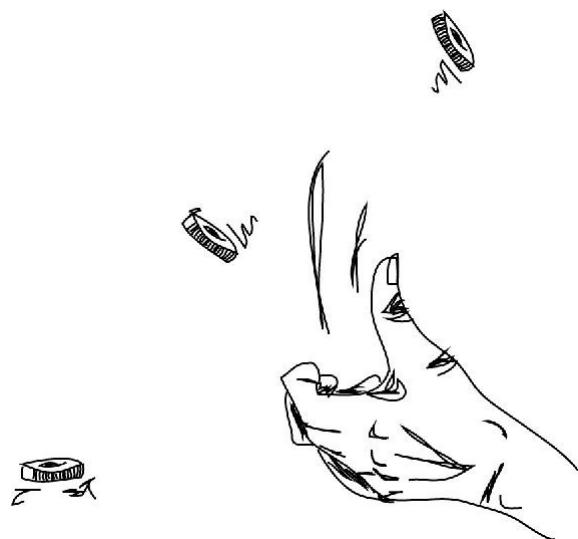
- *all you own is yourself*



wish pure love and soft peace  
upon the ones  
who've been unkind to you  
and keep moving forward

*- this will free you both*

yes  
it is possible  
to hate and love someone  
at the same time  
i do it to myself  
every day



somewhere along the way  
i lost the self-love  
and became my greatest enemy i thought i'd seen the devil before in the uncles  
who touched us as children the mobs that burned our city to the ground but i'd  
never seen someone as hungry  
for my flesh as i was i peeled my skin off just to feel awake wore it inside out  
sprinkled it with salt to punish myself turmoil clotted my nerves my blood  
curdled  
i even tried to bury myself alive but the dirt recoiled  
*you have already rotted* it said *there is nothing left for me to do - self-hate*

the way you speak of yourself  
the way you degrade yourself  
into smallness  
is abuse

- *self-harm*



when i hit the rock bottom  
that exists after the rock bottom  
and no rope or hand appeared  
i wondered  
what if nothing wants me  
because i do not want me

*- i am both the poison and the antidote*

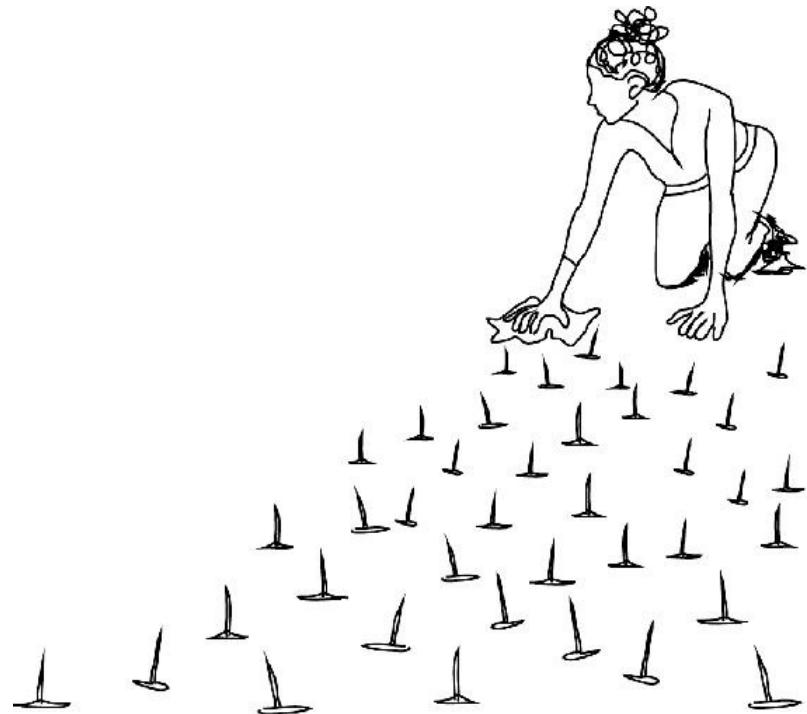
first

i went for my words  
the *i can'ts*. *i won'ts*. *i am not good enoughs*.  
i lined them up and shot them dead then i went for my thoughts invisible and  
everywhere there was no time to gather them one by one i had to wash them out  
i wove a linen cloth out of my hair soaked it in a bowl of mint and lemon water  
carried it in my mouth as i climbed up my braid to the back of my head down on  
my knees i began to wipe my mind clean it took twenty-one days my knees  
bruised but

i did not care

i was not given the breath in my lungs to choke it out i would scrub the self-hate  
off the bone till it exposed love

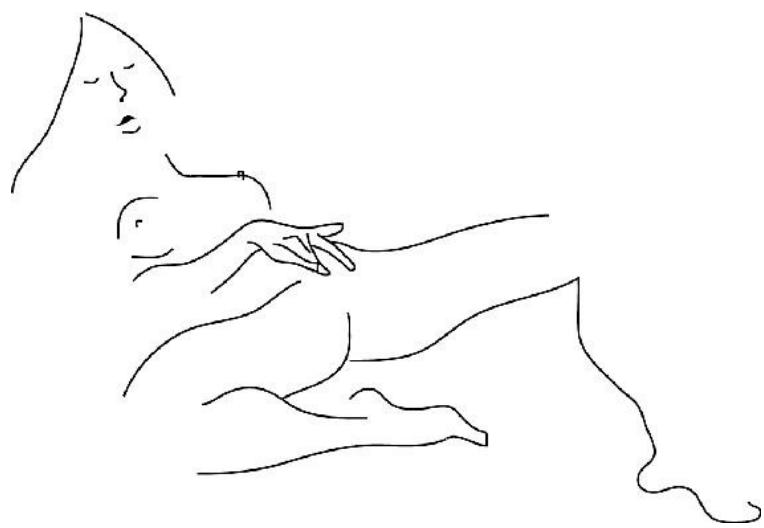
- *self-love*



i have survived far too much to go quietly  
let a meteor take me  
call the thunder for backup  
my death will be grand  
the land will crack  
the sun will eat itself

*- the day i leave*

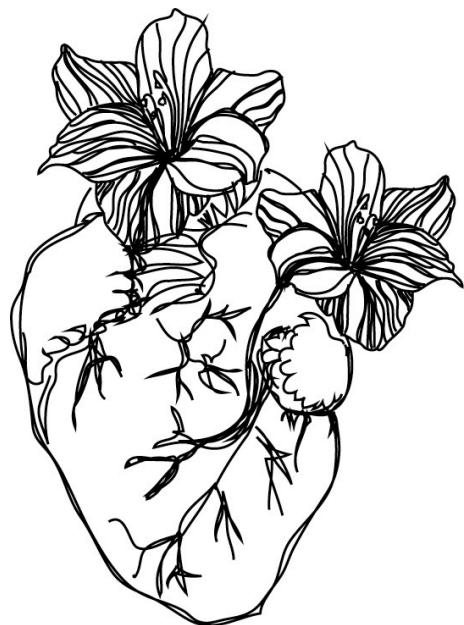
i want to honeymoon myself



if i am the longest relationship  
of my life  
isn't it time to  
nurture intimacy  
and love  
with the person  
i lie in bed with each night

- *acceptance*

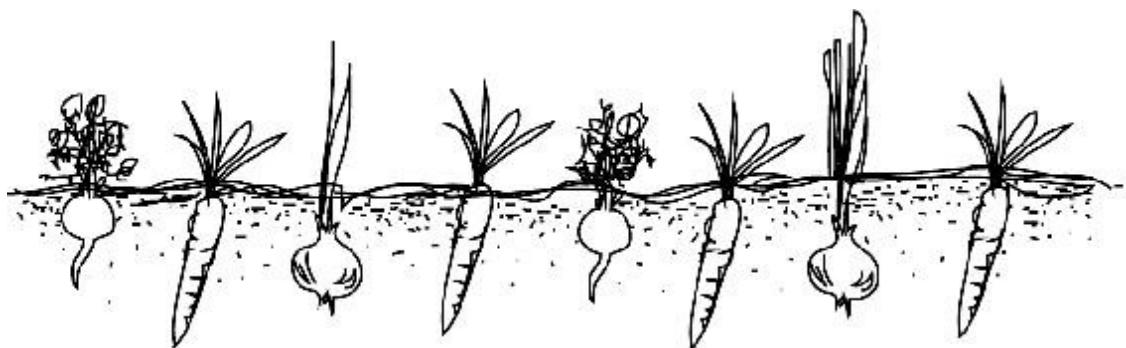
what is stronger  
than the human heart  
which shatters over and over  
and still lives



i woke up thinking the work was done  
i would not have to practice today  
how naive to think healing was that easy  
when there is no end point  
no finish line to cross  
healing is everyday work

you have so much  
but are always hungry for more  
stop looking up at everything you don't have  
and look around at everything you do

- *where the satisfaction lives*

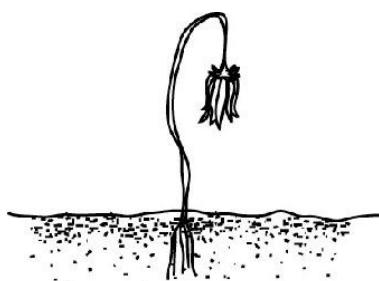


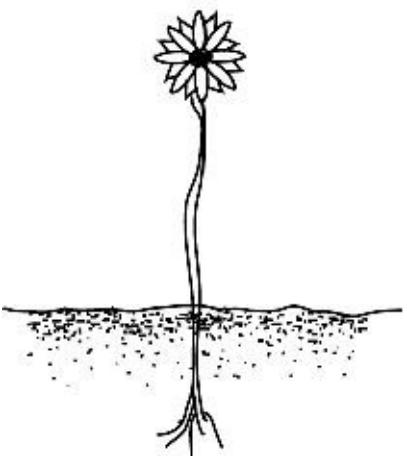
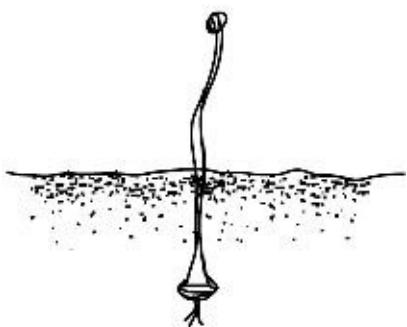
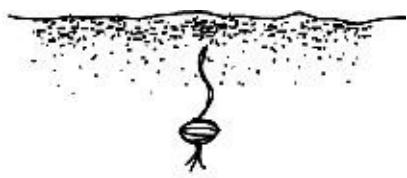
you can imitate a light like mine  
but you cannot become it

and here you are living  
despite it all



*this is the recipe of life*  
said my mother  
as she held me in her arms as i wept  
*think of those flowers you plant*  
*in the garden each year*  
*they will teach you*  
*that people too*  
*must wilt*  
*fall*  
*root*  
*rise*  
*in order to bloom*

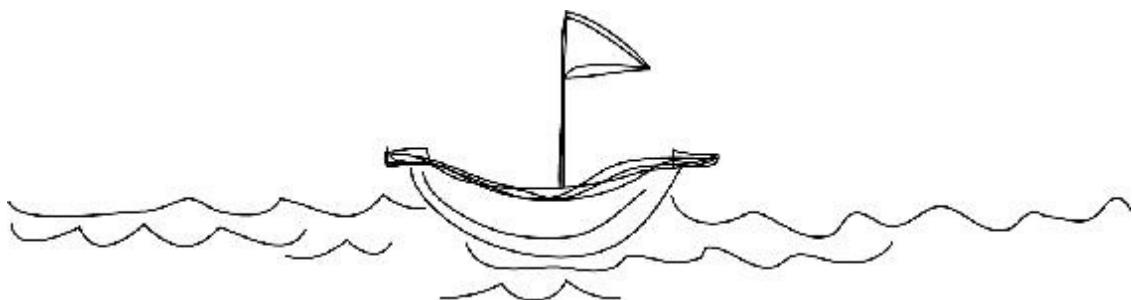




rooting

they have no idea what it is like  
to lose home at the risk of  
never finding home again  
to have your entire life  
split between two lands and  
become the bridge between two countries

- *immigrant*



*look at what they've done  
the earth cried to the moon  
they've turned me into one entire bruise*

*- green and blue*

you are an open wound  
and we are standing  
in a pool of your blood

- refugee camp



when it came to listening

my mother taught me silence  
*if you are drowning their voice with yours how will you hear them* she asked

when it came to speaking

she said *do it with commitment every word you say is your own responsibility*

when it came to being

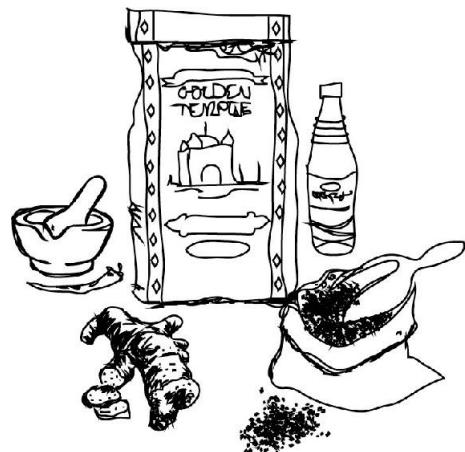
she said *be tender and tough at once you need to be vulnerable to live fully but rough enough to survive it all* when it came to choosing

she asked me to be thankful

for the choices i had that

she never had the privilege of making - *lessons from mumma*

leaving her country  
was not easy for my mother  
i still catch her searching for it  
in foreign films  
and the international food aisle



i wonder where she hid him. her brother who had died only a year before. as she sat in a costume of red silk and gold on her wedding day. she tells me it was the saddest day of her life. how she had not finished mourning yet. a year was not enough. there was no way to grieve that quick. it felt like a blink. a breath. before the news of his loss had sunk in the decor was already hung up. the guests had started strolling in. the small talk. the rush. all mirrored his funeral too much. it felt as though his body had just been carried away for the cremation when my father and his family arrived for the wedding celebrations.

- *amrik singh (1959–1990)*

i am sorry this world  
could not keep you safe  
may your journey home  
be a soft and peaceful one

- *rest in peace*



your legs buckle like a tired horse running for safety drag them by the hips and move faster you do not have the privilege to rest in a country that wants to spit you out you have to keep

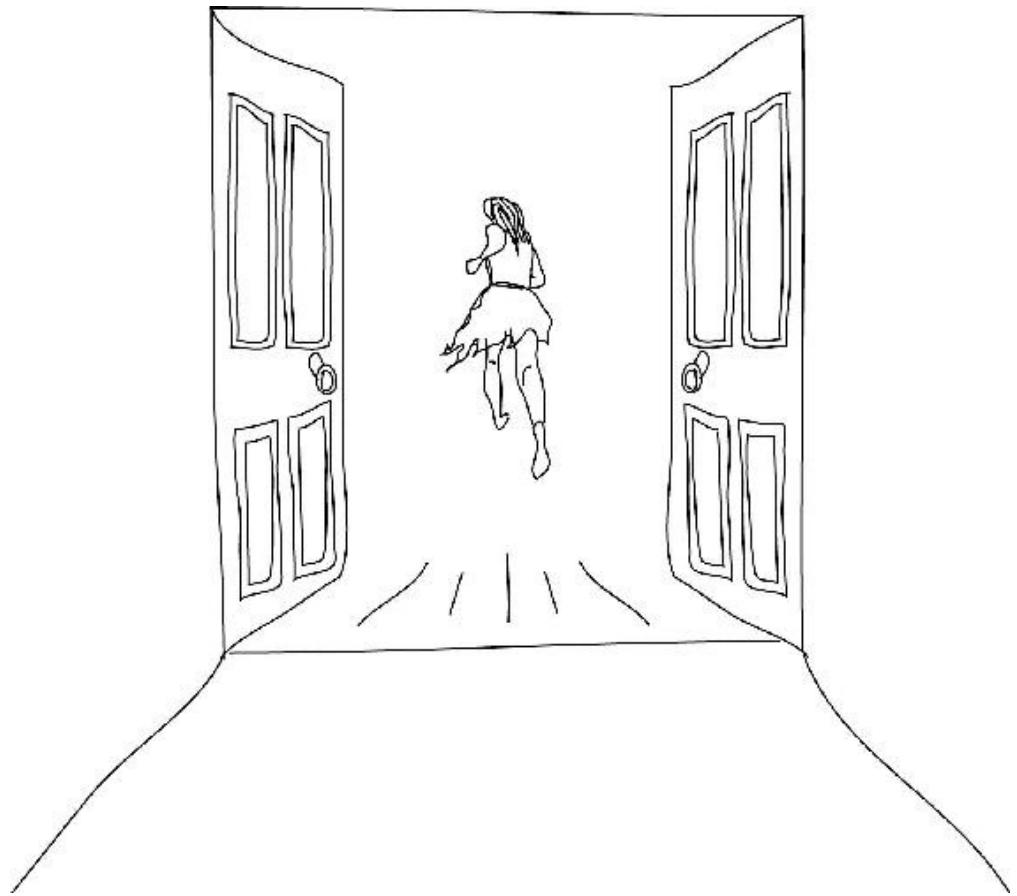
going and going

and going

till you reach the water  
hand over everything in your name for a ticket onto the boat next to a hundred  
others like you packed like sardines  
you tell the woman beside you *this boat is not strong enough to carry this much  
sorrow to a shore what does it matter* she says *if drowning is easier than staying*  
how many people has this water drunk up is it all one long cemetery bodies  
buried without a country perhaps the sea is your country perhaps the boat sinks  
because it is the only place that will take you - *boat*

*what if we get to their doors  
and they slam them shut i ask*

*what are doors she says  
when we've escaped the belly of the beast*

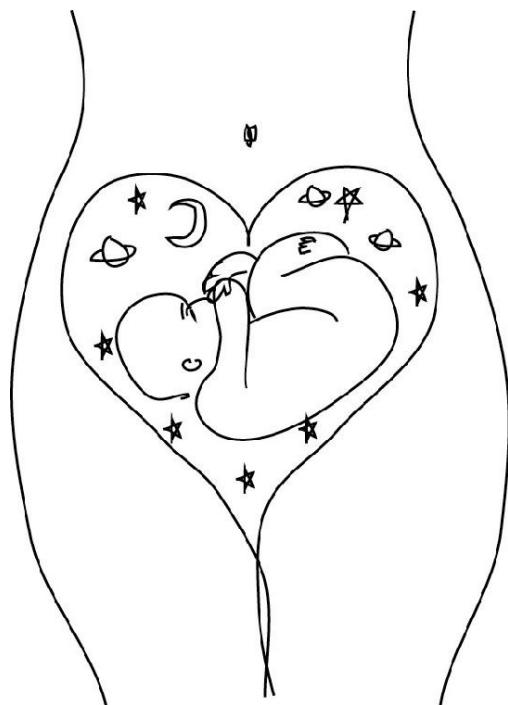


borders  
are man-made  
they only divide us physically  
don't let them make us  
turn on each other

- *we are not enemies*

after the surgery  
she tells me  
how bizarre it is  
that they just took out  
the first home of her children

- *hysterectomy february 2016*



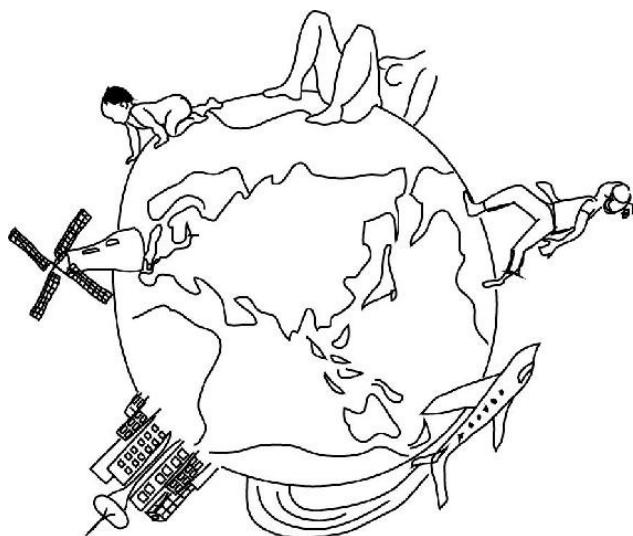
bombs brought entire cities down to their knees today  
refugees boarded boats knowing their feet may never touch land again police  
shot people dead for the color of their skin last month i visited an orphanage of  
abandoned babies left on the curbside like waste later at the hospital i watched a  
mother lose both her child and her mind somewhere a lover died  
how can i refuse to believe my life is anything short of a miracle if amidst all  
this chaos

i was given this life

- *circumstances*

perhaps we are all immigrants  
trading one home for another  
first we leave the womb for air  
then the suburbs for the filthy city  
in search of a better life

some of us just happen to leave entire countries



my god  
is not waiting inside a church or sitting above the temple's steps my god  
is the refugee's breath as she's running is living in the starving child's belly is  
the heartbeat of the protest my god  
does not rest between pages written by holy men

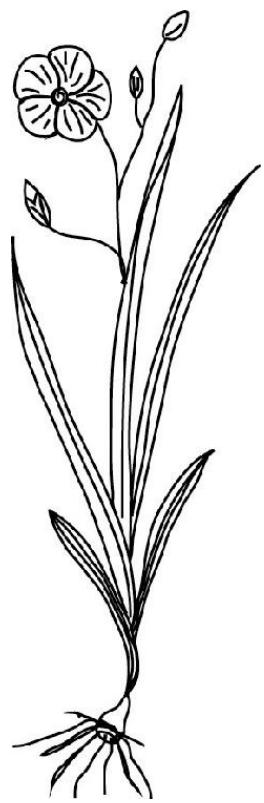
my god  
lives between the sweaty thighs of women's bodies sold for money was last seen  
washing the homeless man's feet my god

is not as unreachable as  
they'd like you to think  
my god is beating inside us infinitely

## **advice i would've given my mother on her wedding day**

1. you are allowed to say *no*
2. years ago his father beat the language of love  
out of your husband's back  
he will never know how to say it  
but his actions prove he loves you
3. go with him  
when he enters your body and goes to that place  
sex is not dirty
4. no matter how many times his family brings it up  
do not have the abortion just because i'm a girl  
lock the relatives out and swallow the key  
he will not hate you
5. take your journals and paintings  
across the ocean when you leave  
these will remind you who you are  
when you get lost amid new cities  
they will also remind your children  
you had an entire life before them
6. when your husbands are off  
working at the factories  
make friends with all the other  
lonely women in the apartment complex  
this loneliness will cut a person in half  
you will need each other to stay alive
7. your husband and children will take from your plate  
we will emotionally and mentally starve you  
all of it is wrong  
don't let us convince you that  
sacrificing yourself is  
how you must show love

8. when your mother dies  
fly back for the funeral  
money comes and goes  
a mother is once in a lifetime
9. you are allowed to spend  
a couple dollars on a coffee  
i know there was a time when  
we could not afford it  
but we are okay now. breathe.
10. you can't speak english fluently  
or operate a computer or cell phone  
we did that to you. it is not your fault.  
you are not any less than the  
other mothers with their  
flashy phones and designer clothing  
we confined you to the four walls of this home  
and worked you to the bone  
you have not been your own property for decades
11. there was no rule book for how  
to be the first woman in your lineage  
to raise a family on a strange land by yourself
12. you are the person i look up to most
13. when i am about to shatter  
i think of your strength  
and harden
14. i think you are a magician
15. i want to fill the rest of your life with ease
16. you are the hero of heroes  
the god of gods

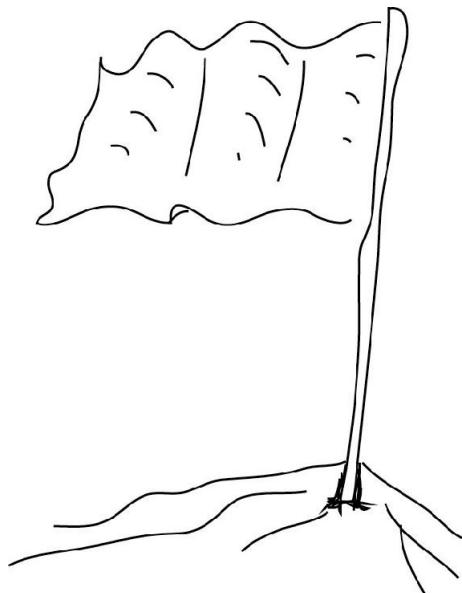


in a dream  
i saw my mother  
with the love of her life  
and no children  
it was the happiest i'd ever seen her

- *what if*

you split the world  
into pieces and  
called them countries  
declared ownership on  
what never belonged to you  
and left the rest with nothing

- *colonize*



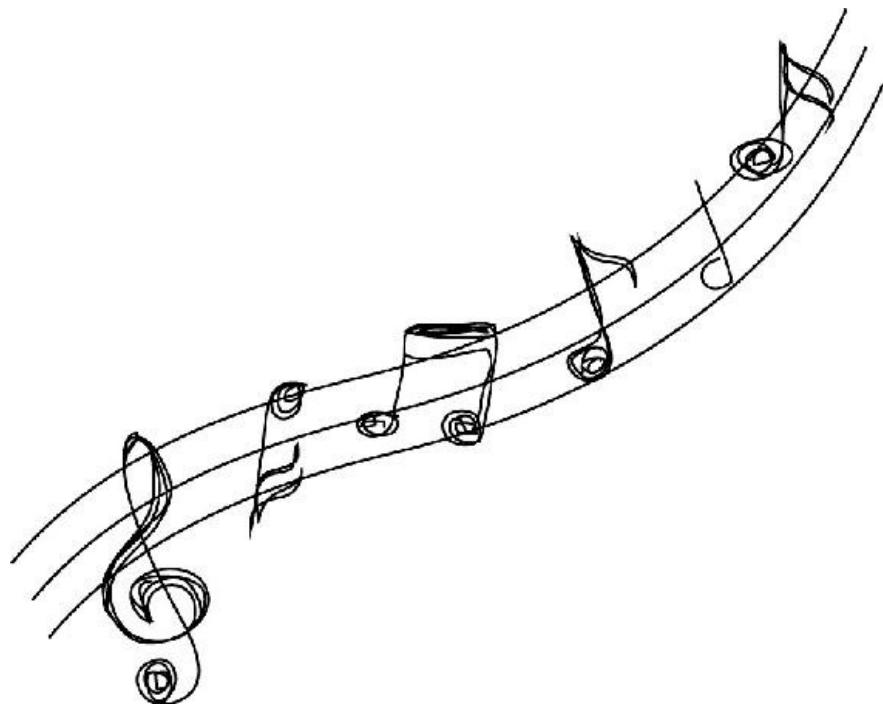
my parents never sat us down in the evenings to share stories of their younger days. one was always working. the other too tired. perhaps being an immigrant does that to you.

the cold terrain of the north engulfed them. their bodies were hard at work paying in blood and sweat for their citizenship. perhaps the weight of the new world was too much. and the pain and sorrow of the old was better left buried.

i do wish i had unburied it though. i wish i'd pried their silence apart like a closed envelope. i wish i'd found a small opening at its very edge. pushed a finger inside and gently torn it open. they had an entire life before me which i am a stranger to. it would be my greatest regret to see them leave this place before i even got to know them.

my voice  
is the offspring  
of two countries colliding  
what is there to be ashamed of  
if english  
and my mother tongue  
made love  
my voice  
is her father's words  
and mother's accent  
what does it matter if  
my mouth carries two worlds

- *accent*



for years they were separated by oceans left with nothing but little photographs  
of each other smaller than passport-size photos hers was tucked into a golden  
locket his slipped inside his wallet at the end of the day

when their worlds went quiet studying them was their only intimacy this was a  
time long before computers when families in that part of the world had not seen  
a telephone or laid their almond eyes on a colored television screen long before  
you and i

as the wheels of the plane touched tarmac she wondered if this was the place had  
she boarded the right flight should've asked the air hostess twice like her  
husband suggested

walking into baggage claim

her heart beat so heavy  
she thought it might fall out eyes darting in every direction searching for what to  
do next when suddenly

right there

in the flesh

he stood  
not a mirage—a man

first came relief

then bewilderment  
they'd imagined this reunion for years had rehearsed their lines  
but her mouth seemed to forget she felt a kick in her stomach when she saw the  
shadows circling his eyes and shoulders carrying an invisible weight it looked  
like the life had been drained out of him where was the person she had wed she  
wondered  
reaching for the golden locket the one with the photo of the man her husband did  
not look like anymore - *the new world had drained him*



what if  
there isn't enough time  
to give her what she deserves  
do you think  
if i begged the sky hard enough  
my mother's soul would  
return to me as my daughter  
so i can give her  
the comfort she gave me  
my whole life

i want to go back in time and sit beside her. document her in a home movie so my eyes can spend the rest of their lives witnessing a miracle. the one whose life i never think of before mine. i want to know what she laughed about with friends. in the village within houses of mud and brick. surrounded by acres of mustard plant and sugarcane. i want to sit with the teenage version of my mother. ask about her dreams. become her pleated braid. the black kohl caressing her eyelids. the flour neatly packed into her fingertips. a page in her schoolbooks. even to be a single thread of her cotton dress would be the greatest gift.

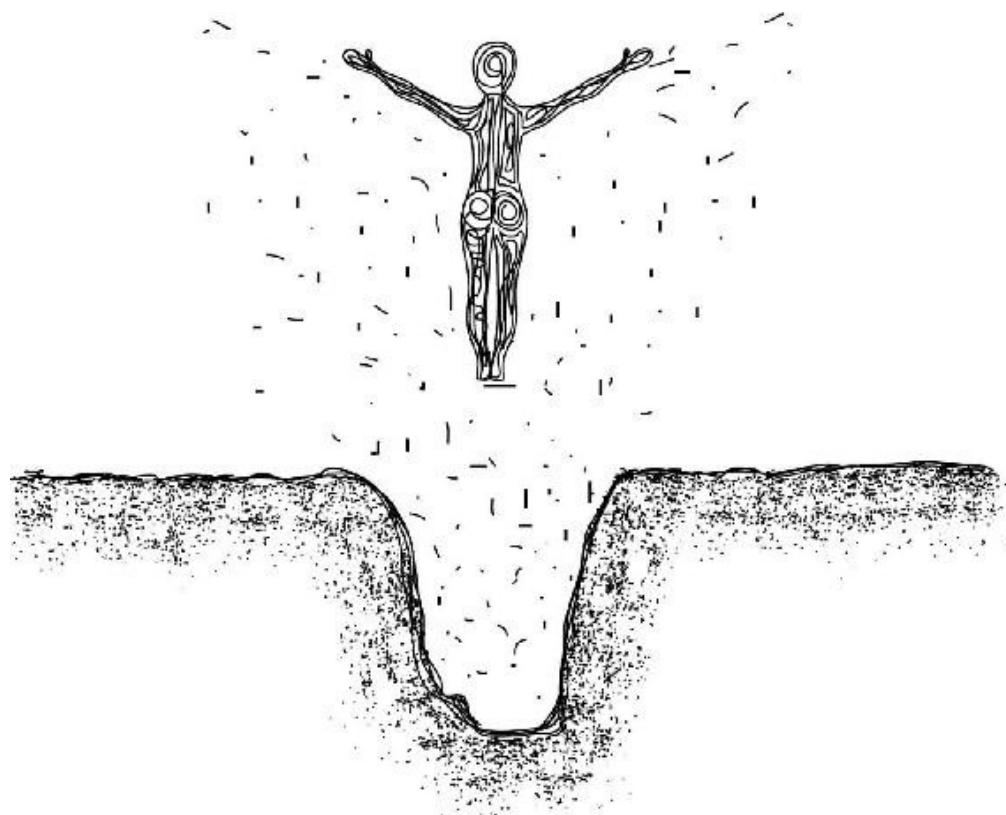
*- to witness a miracle*



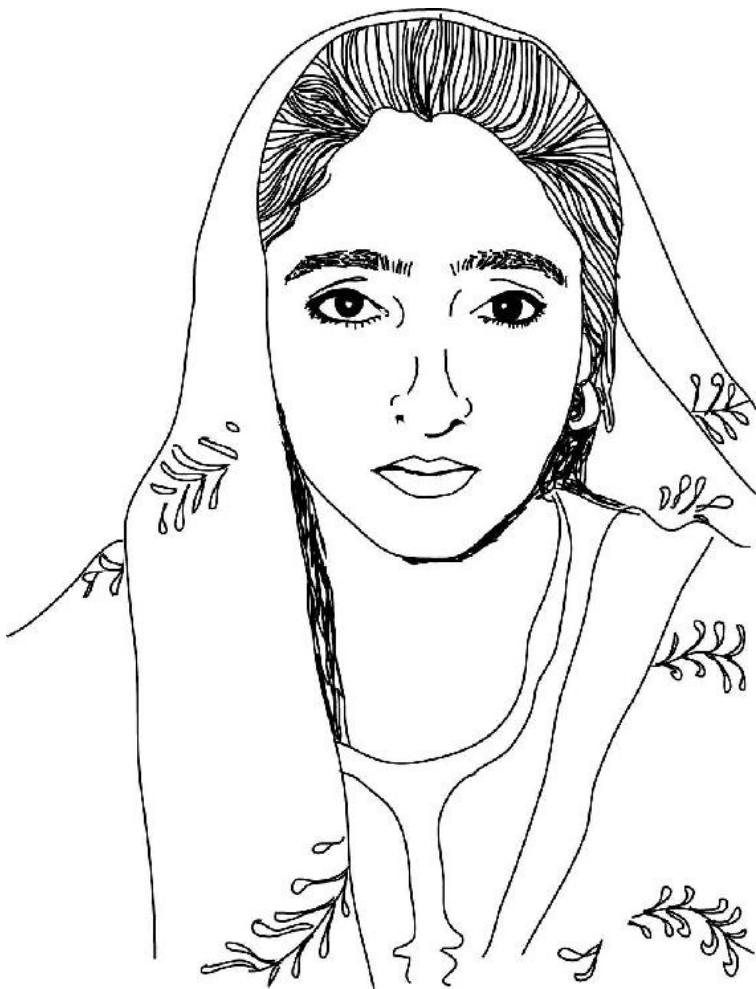
remember the body  
of your community  
breathe in the people  
who sewed you whole  
it is you who became yourself  
but those before you  
are a part of your fabric

*- honor the roots*

when they buried me alive i dug my way  
out of the ground with palm and fist i howled so loud the earth rose in fear and  
the dirt began to levitate my whole life has been an uprising one burial after  
another - *i will find my way out of you just fine*



my mother sacrificed her dreams  
so i could dream



**broken english** i think about the way my father  
pulled the family out of poverty without knowing what a vowel was  
and my mother raised four children  
without being able to construct  
a perfect sentence in english a discombobulated couple  
who landed in the new world with hopes that left the bitter taste of  
rejection in their mouths no family

no friends

just man and wife

two university degrees that meant nothing one mother tongue that was broken now one swollen belly with a baby inside a father worrying about jobs and rent cause no matter what this baby was coming and they thought to themselves for a split second *was it worth it to put all of our money*

*into the dream of a country that is swallowing us whole* papa looks at his woman's eyes

and sees loneliness living where the iris was wants to give her a home in a country that looks at her with the word *visitor* wrapped around its tongue on their wedding day

she left an entire village to be his wife now she left an entire country to be a warrior and when the winter came they had nothing but the heat of their own bodies to keep the coldness out

like two brackets they faced one another to hold the dearest parts of them—their children—close they turned a suitcase full of clothes into a life

and regular paychecks to make sure the children of immigrants wouldn't hate them for being the children of immigrants they worked too hard

you can tell by their hands

their eyes are begging for sleep

but our mouths were begging to be fed and that is the most artistic thing i have ever seen it is poetry to these ears

that have never heard what passion sounds like and my mouth is full of *likes* and *ums* when

i look at their masterpiece cause there are no words in the english language

that can articulate that kind of beauty i can't compact their existence into twenty-six letters and call it a description i tried once

but the adjectives needed to describe them

don't even exist so instead i ended up with pages and pages full of words followed by commas and more words and more commas

only to realize there are some things

only to realize there are some things  
in the world so infinite they could never use a full stop

so how dare you mock your mother  
when she opens her mouth and  
broken english spills out don't be ashamed of the fact that  
she split through countries to be here so you wouldn't have to cross  
a shoreline her accent is thick like honey

hold it with your life  
it's the only thing she has left of home don't you stomp on that richness  
instead hang it up on the walls of museums  
next to dali and van gogh her life is brilliant and tragic  
kiss the side of her tender cheek  
she already knows what it feels like to have an entire nation laugh  
when she speaks she is more than our punctuation and language we might be able to paint pictures and write stories but she made an entire world for herself how is that for art

rising

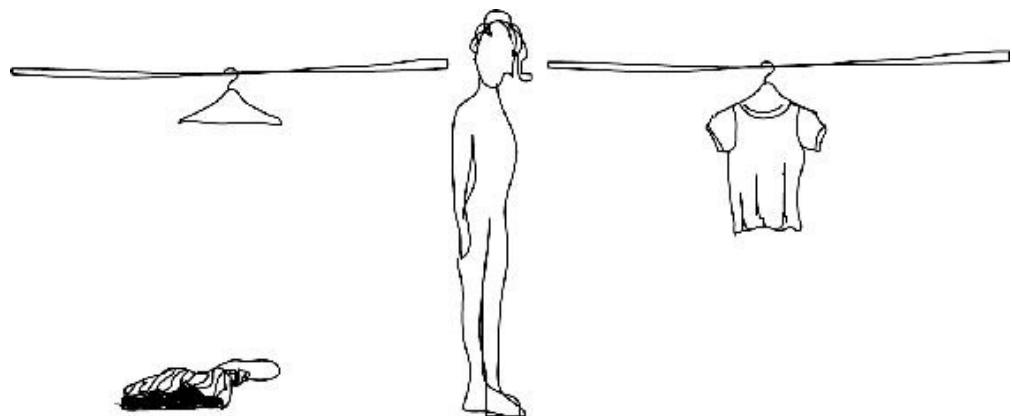
on the first day of love  
you wrapped me in the word *special*



you must remember it too how the rest of the city slept while we sat awakened  
for the first time we hadn't touched yet  
but we managed to travel in and out of each other with our words our limbs  
dizzying with enough electricity to form half a sun  
we drank nothing that night but i was intoxicated  
i went home and thought *are we soul mates*

i feel apprehensive  
cause falling into you  
means falling out of him and  
i had not prepared for that

-forward

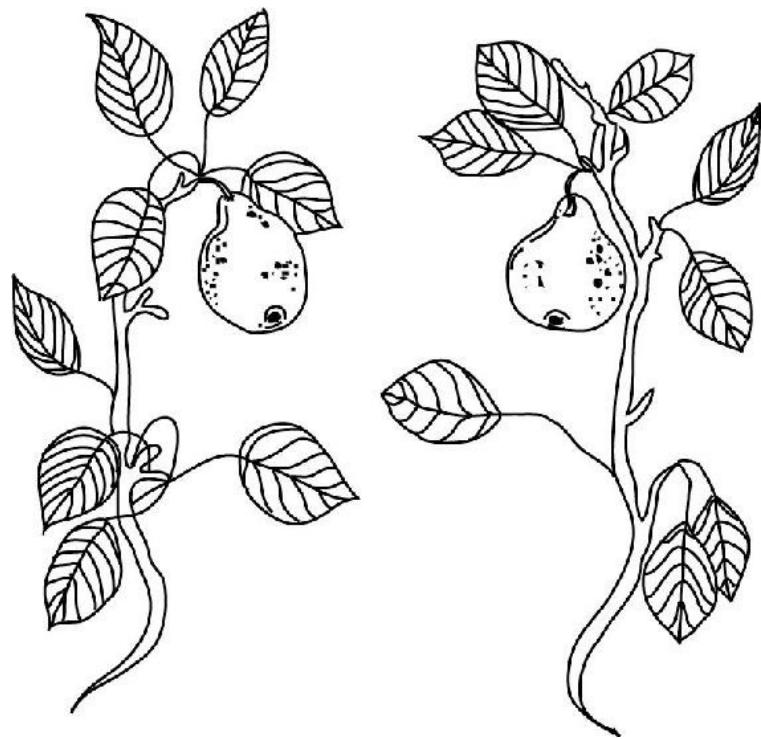


how do i welcome in kindness when i have only practiced spreading my legs for  
the terrifying what am i to do with you if my idea of love is violence but you are  
sweet

if your concept of passion is eye contact but mine is rage

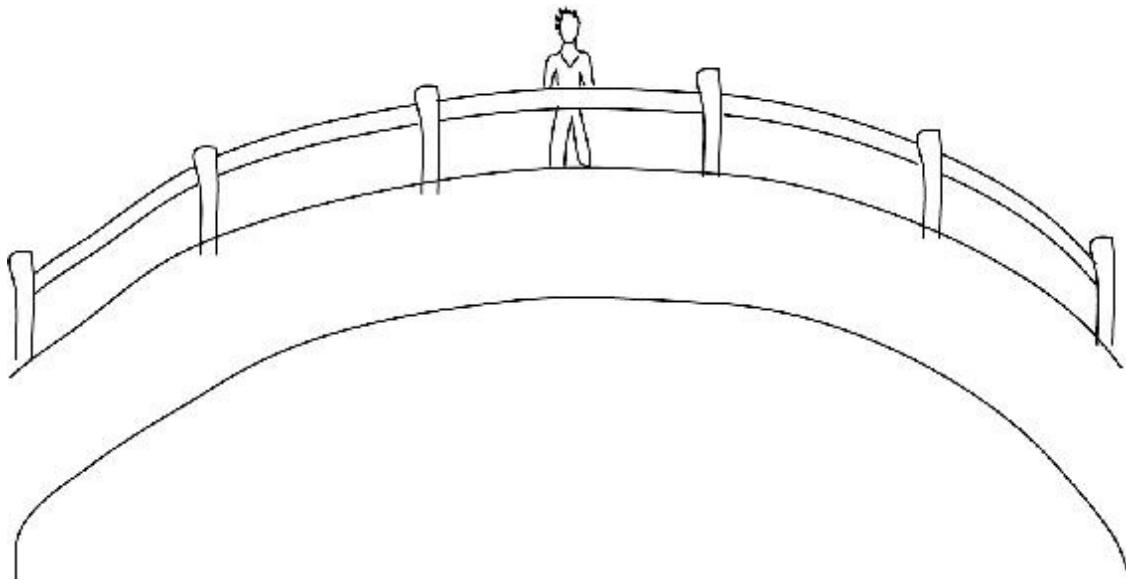
how can i call this intimacy if i crave sharp edges but your edges aren't even  
edges they are soft landings how do i teach myself to accept a healthy love if all  
i've ever known is pain

i will welcome  
a partner  
who is my equal



never feel guilty for starting again

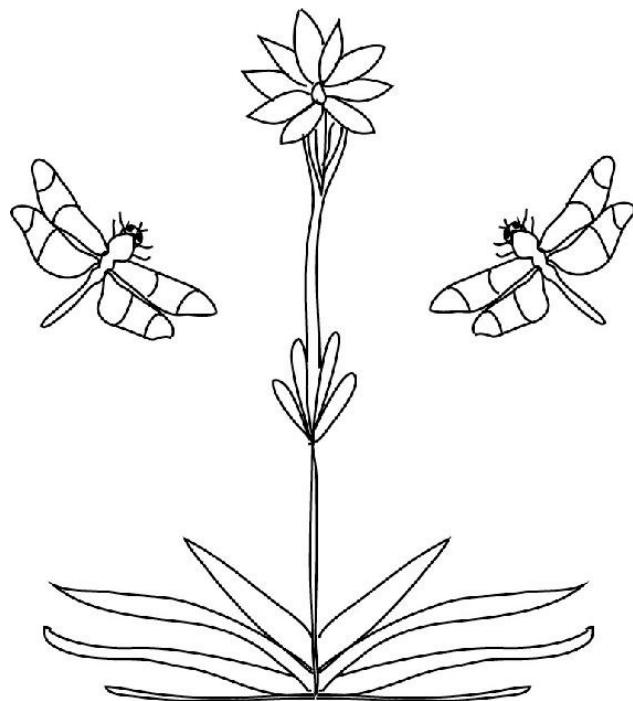
the middle place is strange  
the part between them and the next is an awakening from how you saw to how  
you will see  
this is where their charm wears off where they are no longer  
the god you made them out to be when the pedestal you carved out of your bone  
and teeth no longer serves them they are unmasked and made mortal again - *the  
middle place*



when you start loving someone new  
you laugh at the indecisiveness of love  
remember when you were sure  
the last one was *the one*  
and now here you are  
redefining *the one* all over again

- *a fresh love is a gift*

i do not need the kind of love  
that is draining  
i want someone  
who energizes me



i am trying to not make you pay for their mistakes i am trying to teach myself  
you are not responsible for the wound

how can i punish you for what you have not done you wear my emotions like a  
decorated army vest you are not cold or savage or hungry

you are medicinal you are not them

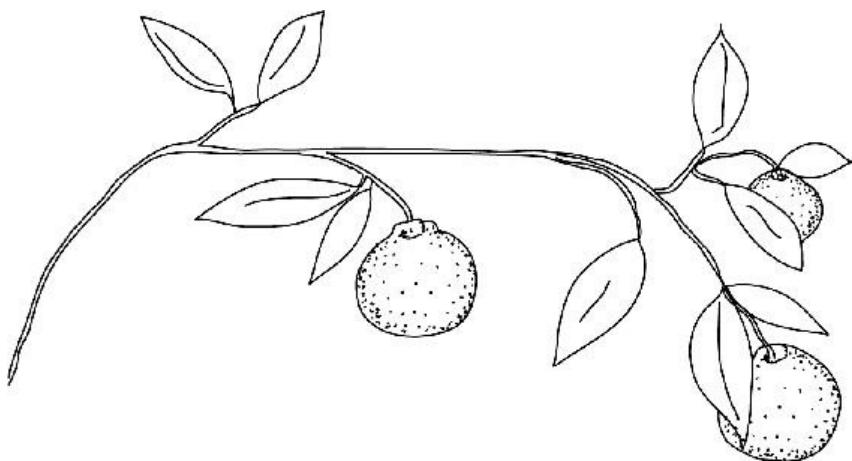
he makes sure to look right at me as he places his electric fingers on my skin  
*how does that feel* he asks commanding my attention  
responding is out of the question i quiver with anticipation  
excited and terrified for what's to come he smiles  
knows this is what satisfaction looks like i am a switchboard

he is the circuits  
my hips move with his—rhythmic my voice isn't my own when i moan—it is  
music like fingers on a violin string he sparks enough electricity within me to  
power a city when we finish i look right at him and tell him

*that was magic*

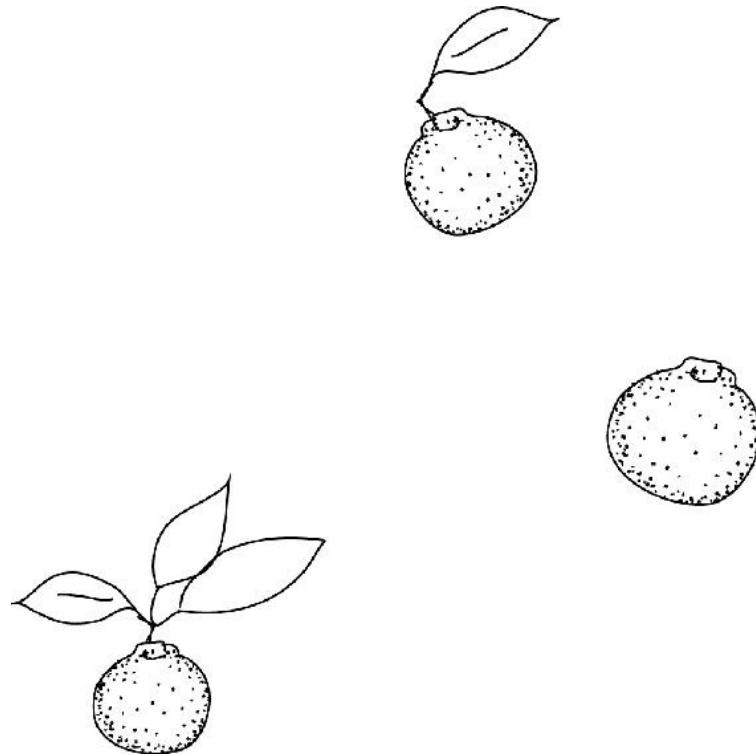


when i walked into the coffee shop and saw you. my body did not react like it had the first time. i waited for my heart to abandon me. for my legs to freeze up. to fall to the ground crying at your sight. nothing happened. there was no connection or movement inside when we locked eyes. you looked like a regular guy with your regular clothes and regular coffee. nothing profound about you. i don't give myself enough credit. my body must have cleansed itself of you long ago. must have gotten tired of me behaving like i'd lost the best thing to have happened. and wrung the insecurities out while i was busy wallowing in pity. that day i had no makeup on. my hair was all over the place. i was wearing my brother's old t-shirt and pajama pants. yet i felt like a gleaming siren. a mermaid. i did a little dance in the car while driving home. even though we were both under the same roof of that coffee shop. i was still solar systems away from you.



the orange trees refused to blossom  
unless we bloomed first  
when we met  
they wept tangerines  
can't you tell  
the earth has waited its whole life for this

*- celebration*



why am i always running in circles between wanting you to want me and when  
you want me

deciding it is too emotionally naked for me to live with

why do i make loving me so difficult as if you should never have to witness the  
ghosts i have tucked under my breast i used to be more open

when it came to matters like this my love - *if only we'd met when i was that  
willing*

i could not contain myself any longer  
i ran to the ocean  
in the middle of the night  
and confessed my love for you to the water  
as i finished telling her  
the salt in her body became sugar



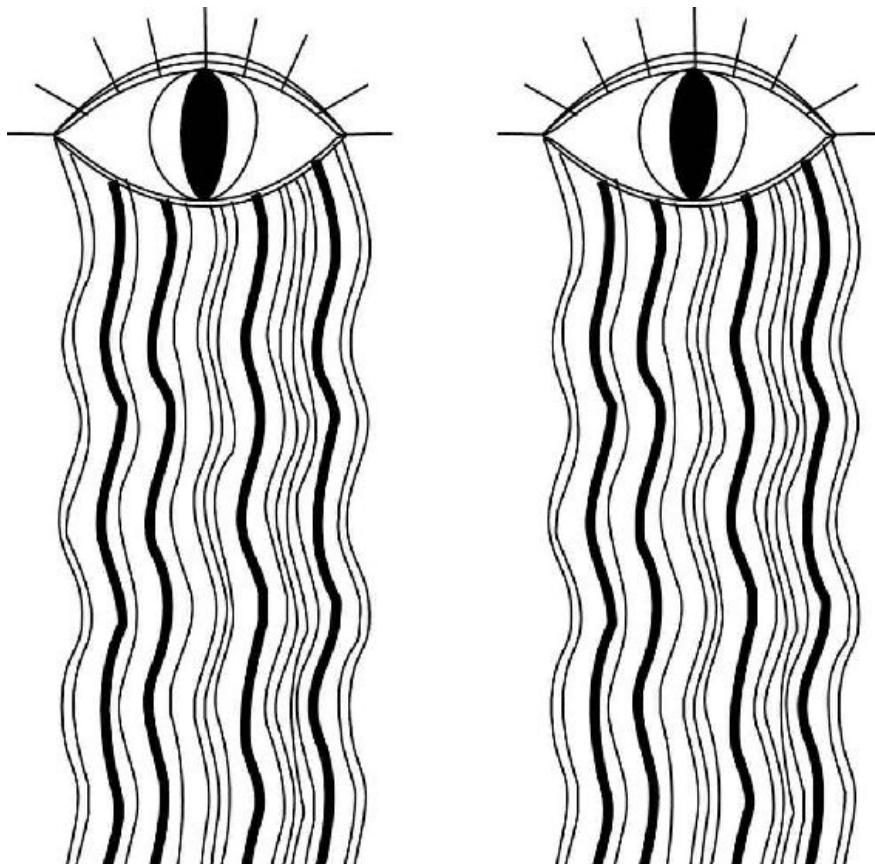
(ode to sobha singh's *sohni mahiwal*)

i say *maybe this is a mistake. maybe we need more than love to make this work.*

you place your lips on mine. when our faces are buzzing with the ecstasy of kissing you say *tell me that isn't right.* and as much as i'd like to think with my head. my racing heart is all that makes sense. there. right there is the answer you're looking for. in my loss of breath. my lack of words. my silence. my inability to speak means you've filled my stomach with so many butterflies that even if this is a mistake. it could only be right to be this wrong with you.

a  
man  
who cries

- *a gift*



if i'm going to share my life with a partner it would be foolish not to ask myself twenty years from now

is this person going to be someone i still laugh with or am i just distracted by their charm do i see us evolving into new people by the decade

or does the growing ever come to a pause i don't want to be distracted by the looks or the money i want to know if they pull the best or the worst out of me deep at the core are our values the same in thirty years will we still jump into bed like we're twenty can i picture us in old age conquering the world

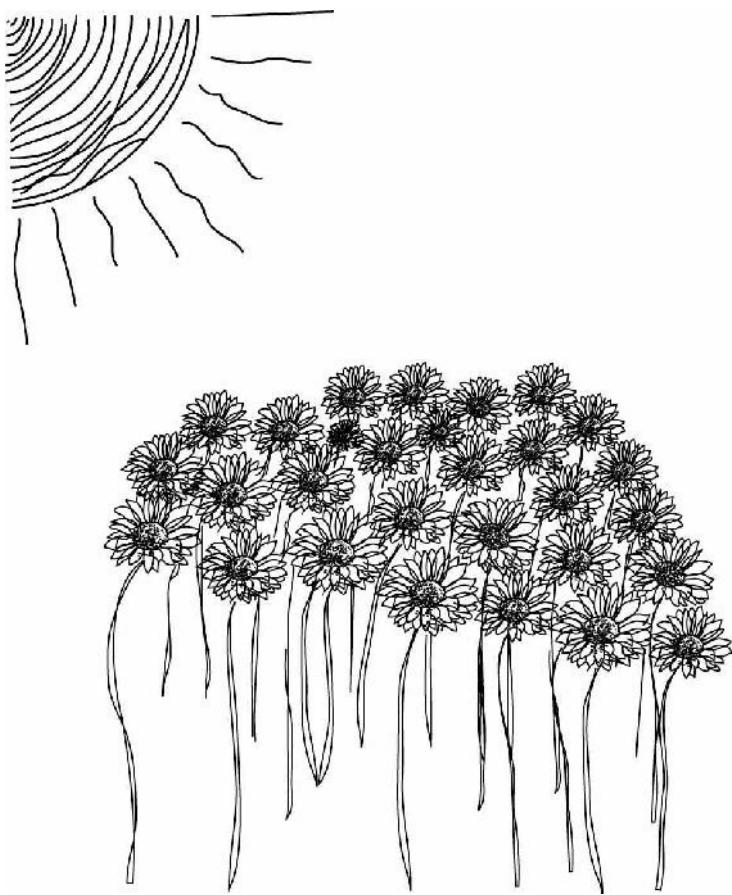
like we've got young blood running in our veins

- *checklist*

*what is it with you and sunflowers he asks i point to the field of yellow outside sunflowers worship the sun i tell him only when it arrives do they rise when the sun leaves*

*they bow their heads in mourning that is what the sun does to those flowers it's what you do to me*

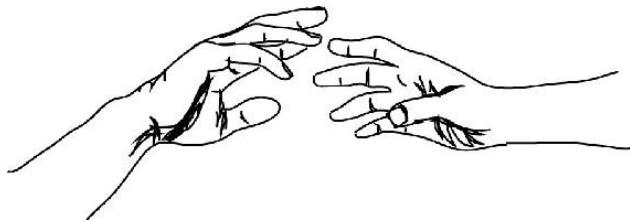
- *the sun and her flowers*



sometimes  
i stop myself from  
saying the words out loud  
as if leaving my mouth too often  
might wear them down

- *i love you*

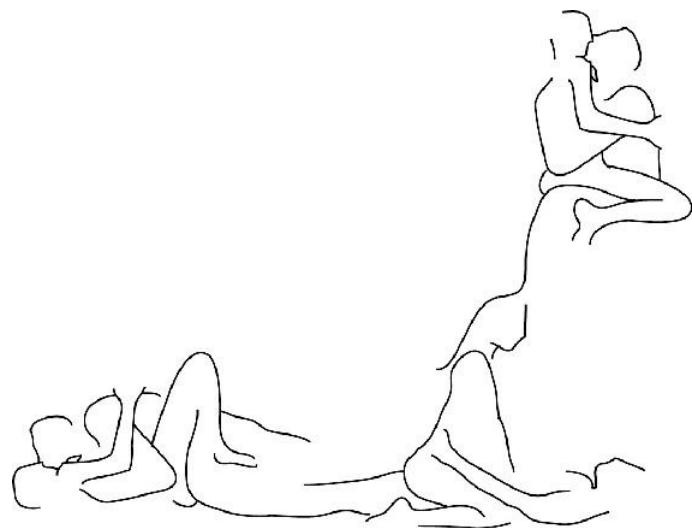
the most important conversations we'll have are with our fingers when yours nervously graze mine for the first time during dinner they'll tighten with fear when you ask to see me again next week but as soon as i say yes they'll stretch out in ease when they grasp one another while we're beneath the sheets the two of us will pretend we're not weak in the knees when i get angry they'll pulse with bitter cries but when they tremble for forgiveness you'll see what apologies look like and when one of us is dying on a hospital bed at eighty-five your fingers will grip mine to say things words can't describe - *fingers*



this morning  
i told the flowers  
what i'd do for you  
and they blossomed

there is no place  
i end and you begin  
when your body  
is in my body  
we are one person

- *sex*



if i had to walk to get to you it would take eight hundred and twenty-six hours on  
bad days i think about it

what i might do if the apocalypse comes and the planes stop flying

there is so much time to think so much empty space wanting to be consumed but  
no intimacy around to consume it it feels like being stuck at a train station

waiting and waiting and waiting for the one with your name on it when the moon  
rises on this coast but the sun still burns shamelessly on yours i crumble

knowing even our skies are different we have been together so long but have we  
really been together if your touch has not held me long enough to imprint itself  
on my skin

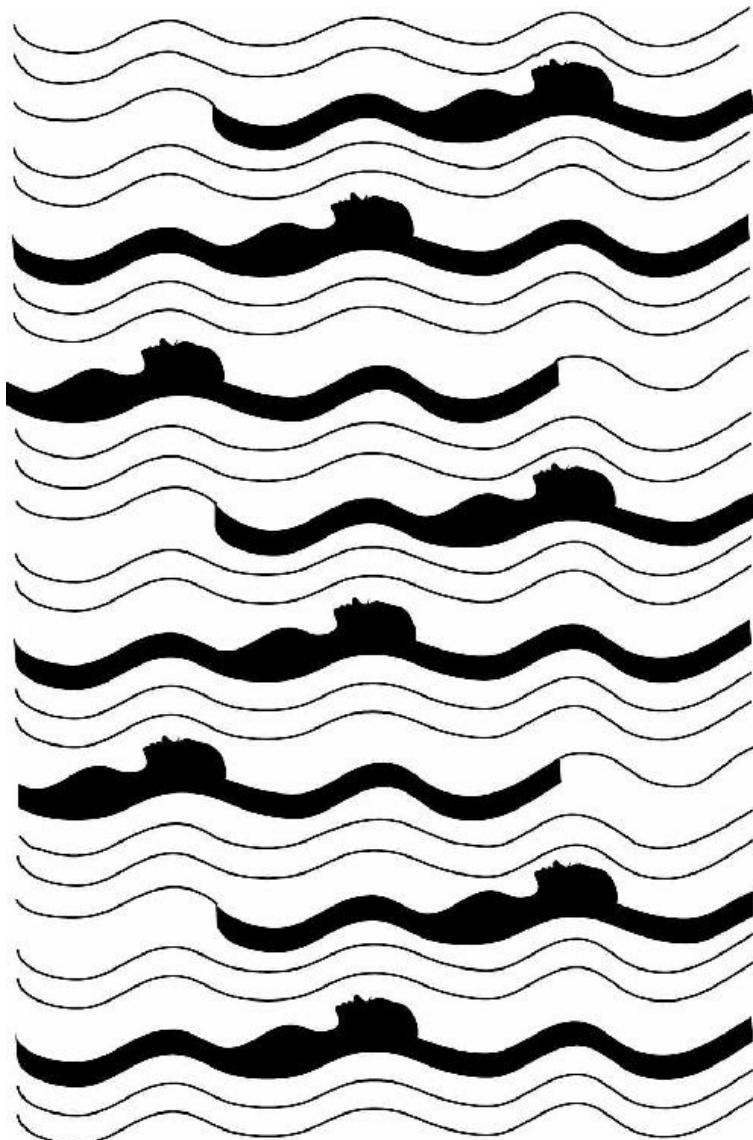
i try my hardest to stay present but without you here

everything at its best

is only mediocre

- *long distance*

i am  
made of water  
of course i am emotional



they should feel like home  
a place that grounds your life  
where you go to take the day off

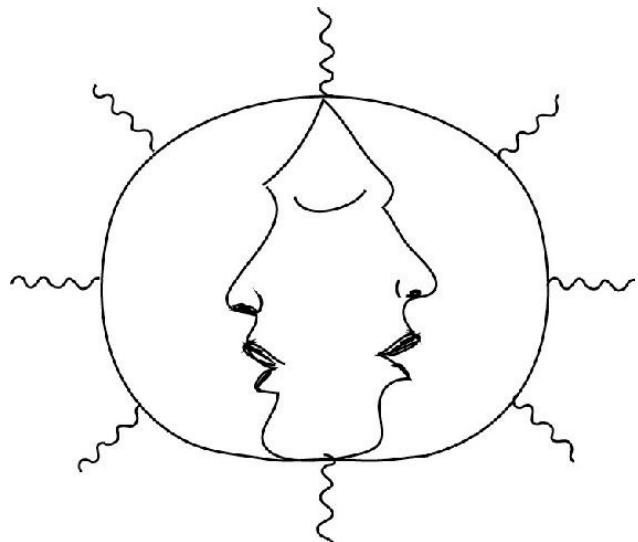
- *the one*

the moon is responsible  
for pulling tides  
out of still water  
darling  
i am the still water  
and you are the moon



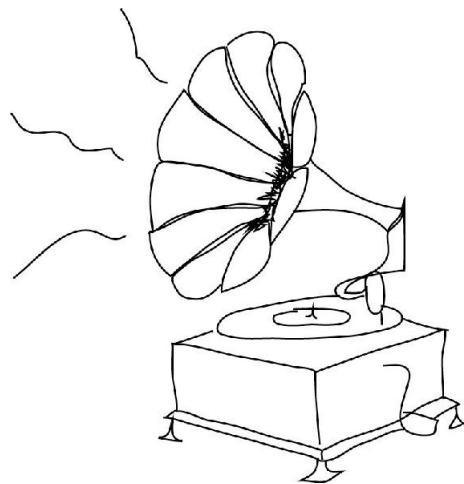
the right one does not  
stand in your way  
they make space for you  
to step forward

when you are  
full  
and i am  
full  
we are two suns



your voice does to me  
what autumn does to trees  
you call to say hello  
and my clothes fall naturally

together we are an endless conversation

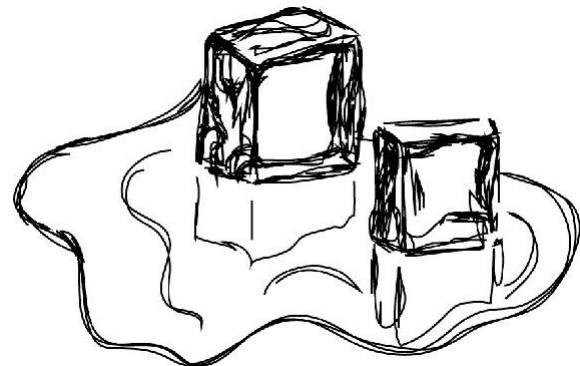


when death  
takes my hand  
i will hold you with the other  
and promise to find you  
in every lifetime

- *commitment*

it was as though  
someone had slid ice cubes  
down the back of my shirt

- *orgasm*

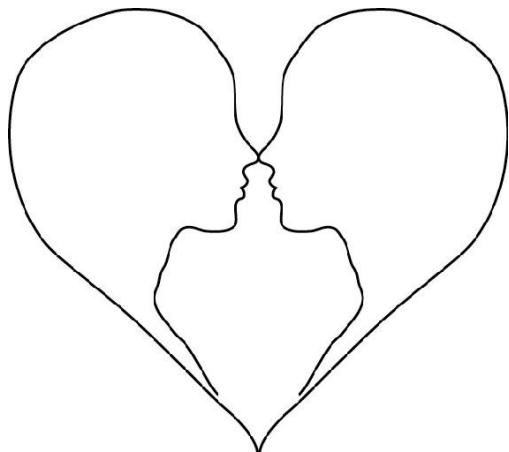


you have  
been  
inside me  
before

- *another lifetime*

god must have kneaded you and i from the same dough  
rolled us out as one on the baking sheet must have suddenly realized how unfair  
it was  
to put that much magic in one person and sadly split that dough in two how else  
is it that  
when i look in the mirror i am looking at you

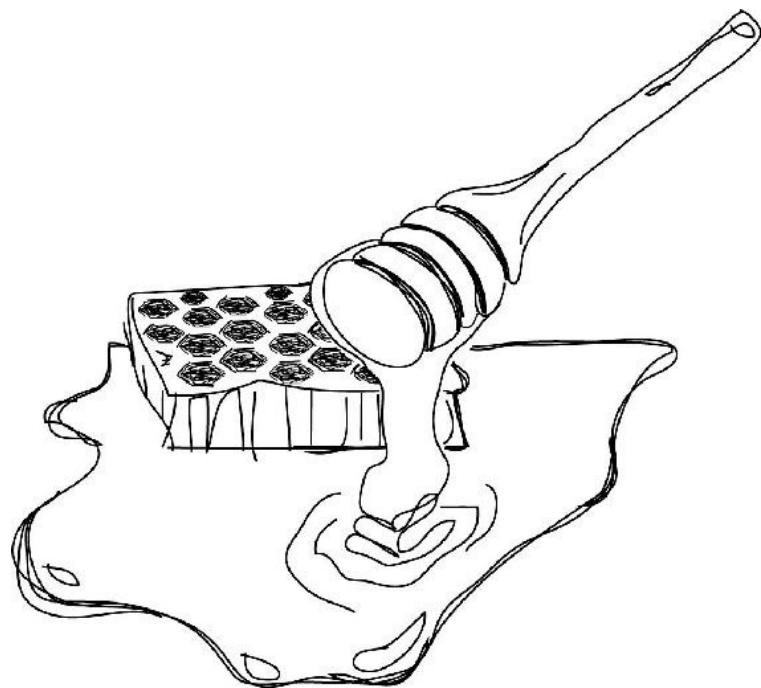
when you breathe  
my own lungs fill with air that we just met but we  
have known each other our whole lives if we were not made as one to begin with  
- *our souls are mirrors*



to be  
two legs  
on one body

- *a relationship*

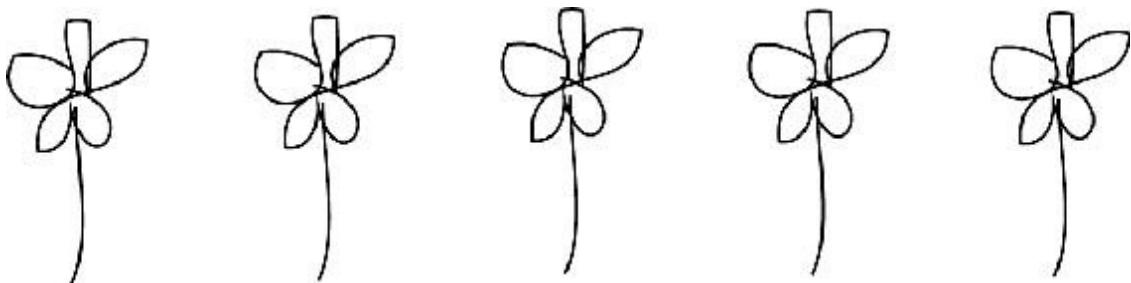
you must have a  
honeycomb  
for a heart  
how else  
could a man  
be this sweet



if you got any more beautiful  
the sun would leave its place  
and come for you

- *the chase*

it has been one of the greatest and most difficult years of my life. i learned everything is temporary. moments. feelings. people. flowers. i learned love is about giving. everything. and letting it hurt. i learned vulnerability is always the right choice because it is easy to be cold in a world that makes it so very difficult to remain soft. i learned all things come in twos. life and death. pain and joy. salt and sugar. me and you. it is the balance of the universe. it has been the year of hurting so bad but living so good. making friends out of strangers. making strangers out of friends. learning mint chocolate chip ice cream will fix just about everything. and for the pains it can't there will always be my mother's arms. we must learn to focus on warm energy. always. soak our limbs in it and become better lovers to the world. for if we can't learn to be kind to each other how will we ever learn to be kind to the most desperate parts of ourselves.



blooming

the universe took its time on you  
crafted you to offer the world  
something different from everyone else  
when you doubt  
how you were created  
you doubt an energy greater than us both

*- irreplaceable*



when the first woman spread her legs to let the first man in what did he see when  
she led him down the hallway toward the sacred room what sat waiting what  
shook him so deeply that all confidence shattered from then on

the first man

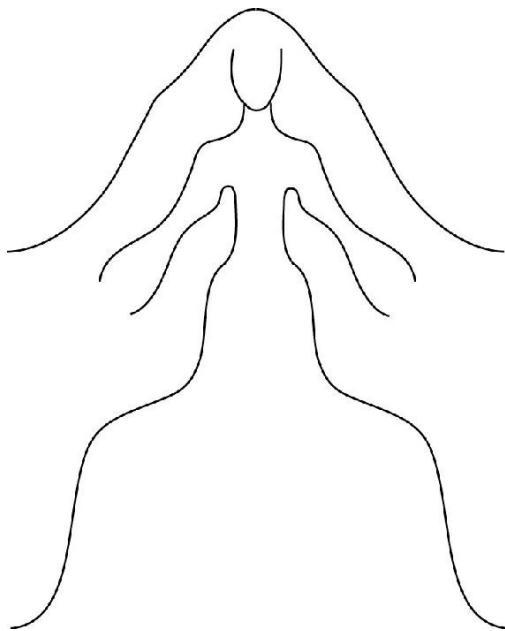
watched the first woman every night and day built a cage to keep her in so she could sin no more he set fire to her books called her witch and shouted whore until the evening came when his tired eyes betrayed him the first woman noticed it as he unwillingly fell asleep the quiet humming the drumming a knocking between her legs a doorbell

a voice

a pulse  
asking her to open up and off her hand went running down the hall  
toward the sacred room she found

god

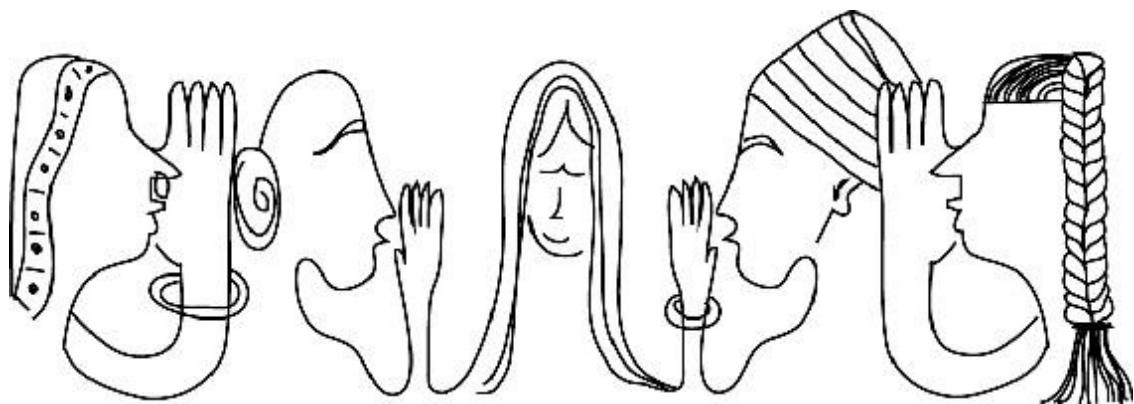
the magician's wand the snake's tongue sitting inside her smiling - *when the first woman drew magic with her fingers*



i will no longer  
compare my path to others

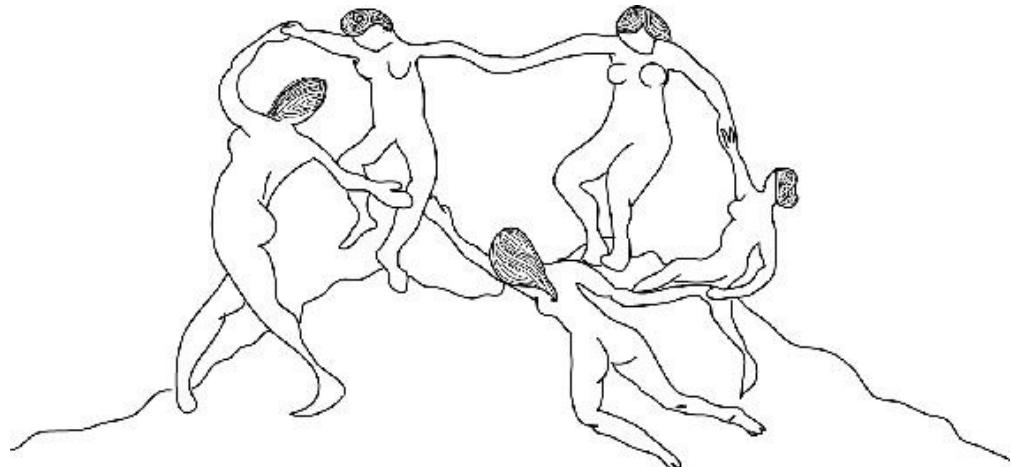
- *i refuse to do a disservice to my life*

i am the product of all the ancestors getting together  
and deciding these stories need to be told



many tried  
but failed to catch me i am the ghost of ghosts everywhere and nowhere i am  
magic tricks within magic within magic none have figured out i am a world  
wrapped in worlds folded in suns and moons you can try but  
you won't get those hands on me

upon my birth  
my mother said  
*there is god in you*  
*can you feel her dancing*

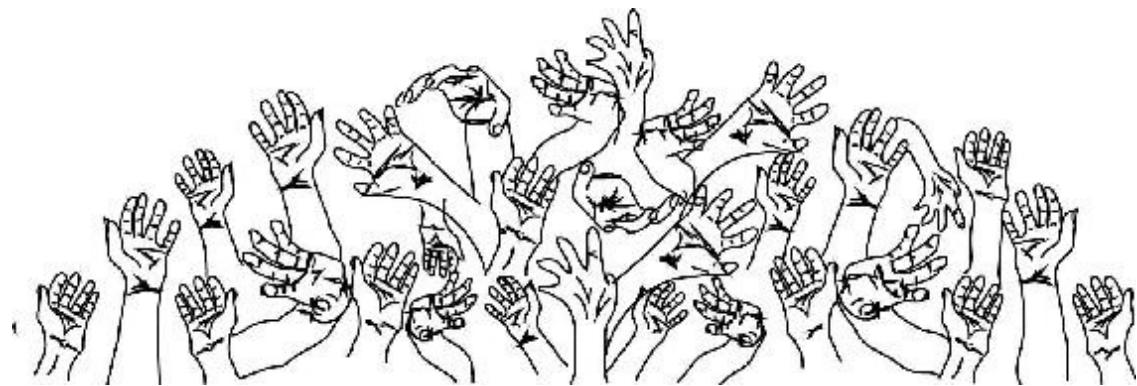


(ode to matisse's *dance*)

as a father of three daughters it would have been normal  
for him to push marriage on us this has been the narrative for the women in my  
culture for hundreds of years instead he pushed education knowing it would set  
us free in a world that wanted to contain us he made sure that we learned to walk  
independently

there are far too many mouths here  
but not enough of them are worth  
what you're offering  
give yourself to a few  
and to those few  
give heavily

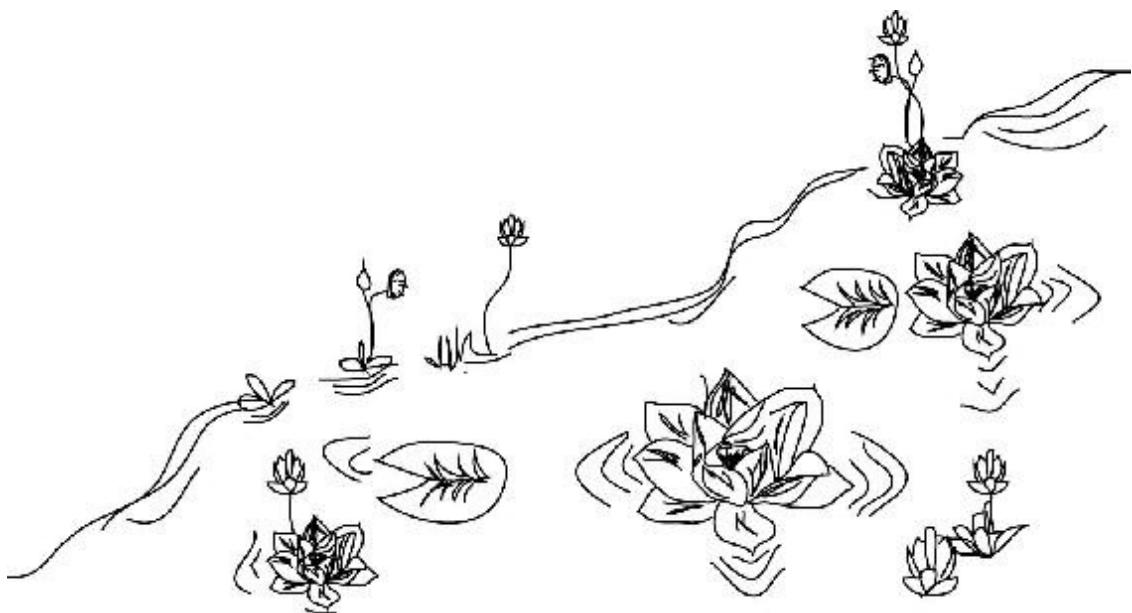
*- invest in the right people*



i am of the earth

and to the earth i shall return once more life and death are old friends and i am  
the conversation between them i am their late-night chatter their laughter and  
tears what is there to be afraid of if i am the gift they give to each other this  
place never belonged to me anyway i have always been theirs

to hate  
is an easy lazy thing  
but to love  
takes strength  
everyone has  
but not all are  
willing to practice



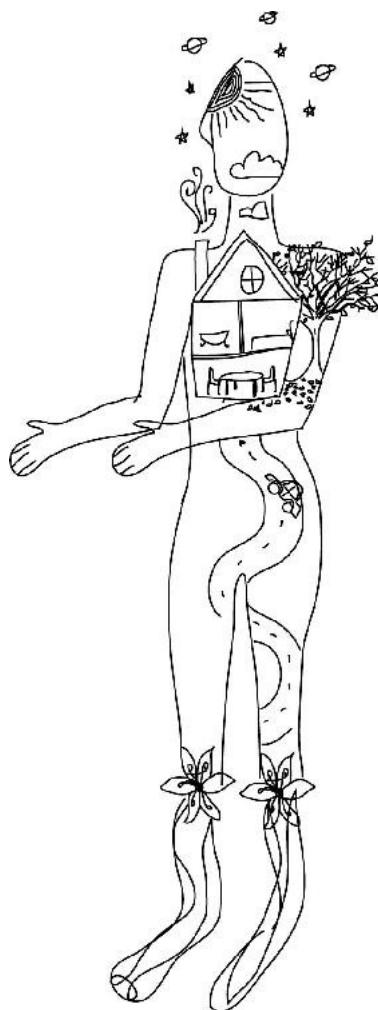
beautiful brown girl

your thick hair is a mink coat not all can afford beautiful brown girl

you hate the hyperpigmentation  
but your skin can't help  
carrying as much sun as possible you are a magnet for the light  
unibrow—the bridging of two worlds vagina—so much darker than the rest of  
you cause it is trying to hide a gold mine you will have dark circles too early  
—appreciate the halos beautiful brown girl  
you pull god out of their bellies

look down at your body  
whisper  
*there is no home like you*

- *thank you*



learning to not envy  
someone else's blessings  
is what grace looks like

i am the first woman in my lineage with freedom of choice. to craft her future whichever way i choose. say what is on my mind when i want to. without the whip of the lash. there are hundreds of firsts i am thankful for. that my mother and her mother and her mother did not have the privilege of feeling. what an honor. to be the first woman in the family who gets to taste her desires. no wonder i am starving to fill up on this life. i have generations of bellies to eat for. the grandmothers must be howling with laughter. huddled around a mud stove in the afterlife. sipping on steaming glasses of milky masala chai. how wild it must be for them to see one of their own living so boldly.



(ode to amrita sher-gil's *village scene* 1938)

trust your body  
it reacts to right and wrong  
better than your mind does

- *it is speaking to you*

i stand  
on the sacrifices  
of a million women before me  
thinking  
*what can i do*  
*to make this mountain taller*  
*so the women after me*  
*can see farther*

- legacy



when i go from this place dress the porch with garlands as you would for a wedding my dear pull the people from their homes and dance in the streets when death arrives

like a bride at the aisle send me off in my brightest clothing serve ice cream with rose petals to our guests there's no reason to cry my dear i have waited my whole life for such a beauty to take my breath away

when i go  
let it be a celebration for i have been here

i have lived

i have won at this game called life - *funeral*

it was when i stopped searching for home within others  
and lifted the foundations of home within myself  
i found there were no roots more intimate  
than those between a mind and body  
that have decided to be whole

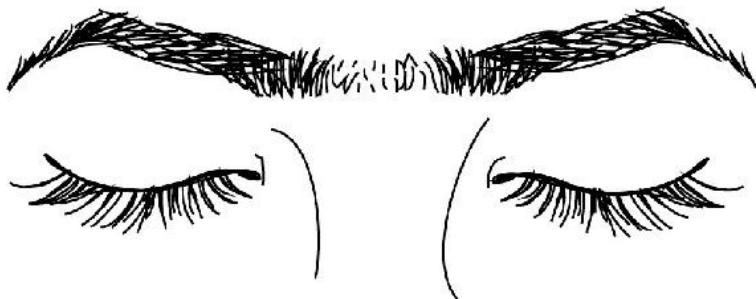


what good am i  
if i do not fill the plates  
of the ones who fed me  
but fill the plates of strangers

*-family*

even if they've been separated  
they'll end up together  
you can't keep lovers apart  
no matter how much  
i pluck and pull them  
my eyebrows always  
find their way  
back to each other

- *unibrow*



a child and an elder sat across from each other at a table a cup of milk and tea  
before them the elder asked the child  
if she was enjoying her life the child answered yes

life was good but  
she couldn't wait to grow up and do grown-up things  
then the child asked the elder the same question he too said life was good  
but he'd give anything to go back to an age where moving and dreaming were  
still possibilities they both took a sip from their cups but the child's milk had  
curdled the elder's tea had grown bitter there were tears running from their eyes

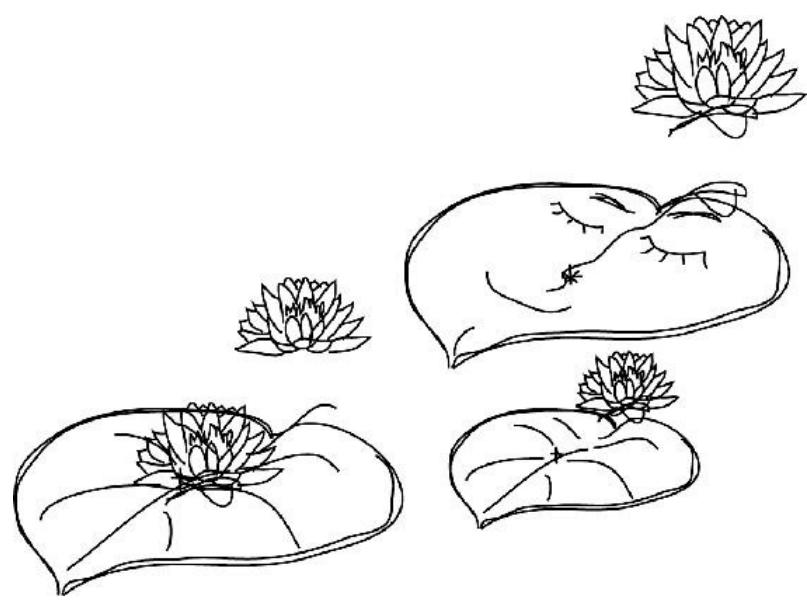
the day you have everything  
i hope you remember  
when you had nothing



she is not a porn category  
or the type you look for  
on a friday night  
she is not needy or easy or weak

*- daddy issues is not a punch line*

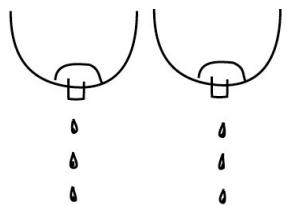
i long to be a lily pad



i made change after change on the road to perfection but when i finally felt  
beautiful enough  
their definition of beauty suddenly changed

what if there is no finish line and in an attempt to keep up  
i lose the gifts i was born with for a beauty so insecure it can't commit to itself -  
*the lies they sell*

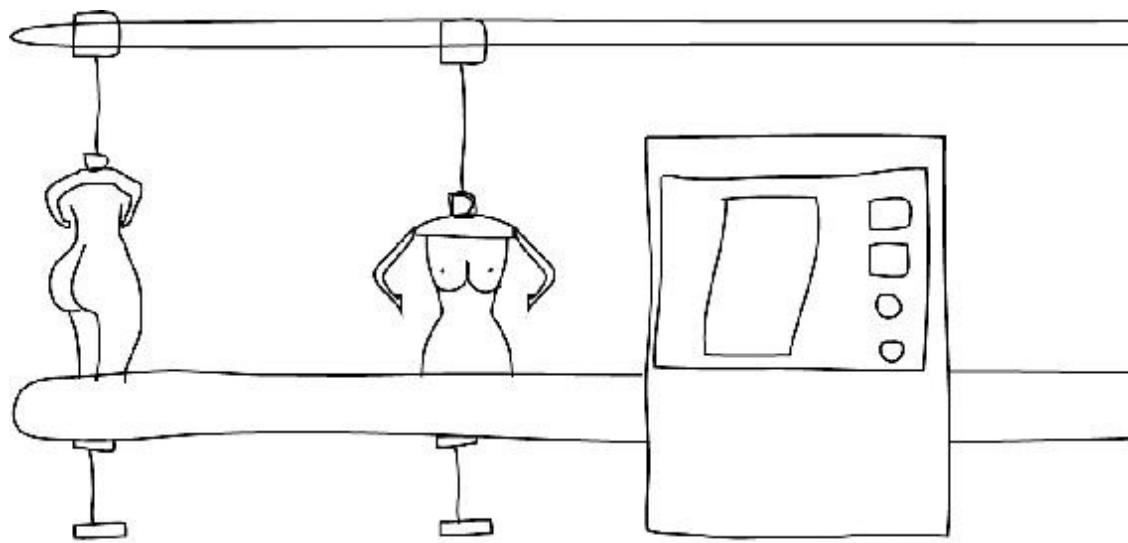
you want to keep  
the blood and the milk hidden  
as if the womb and breast  
never fed you



a

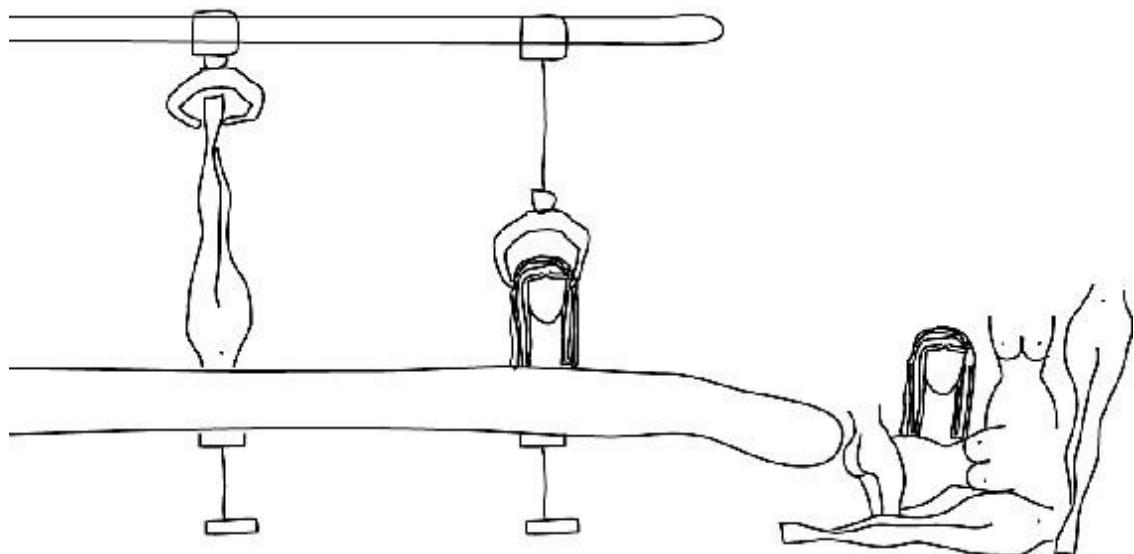


it is a trillion-dollar industry that would collapse  
if we believed we were beautiful enough already



their concept of beauty  
is manufactured  
i am not

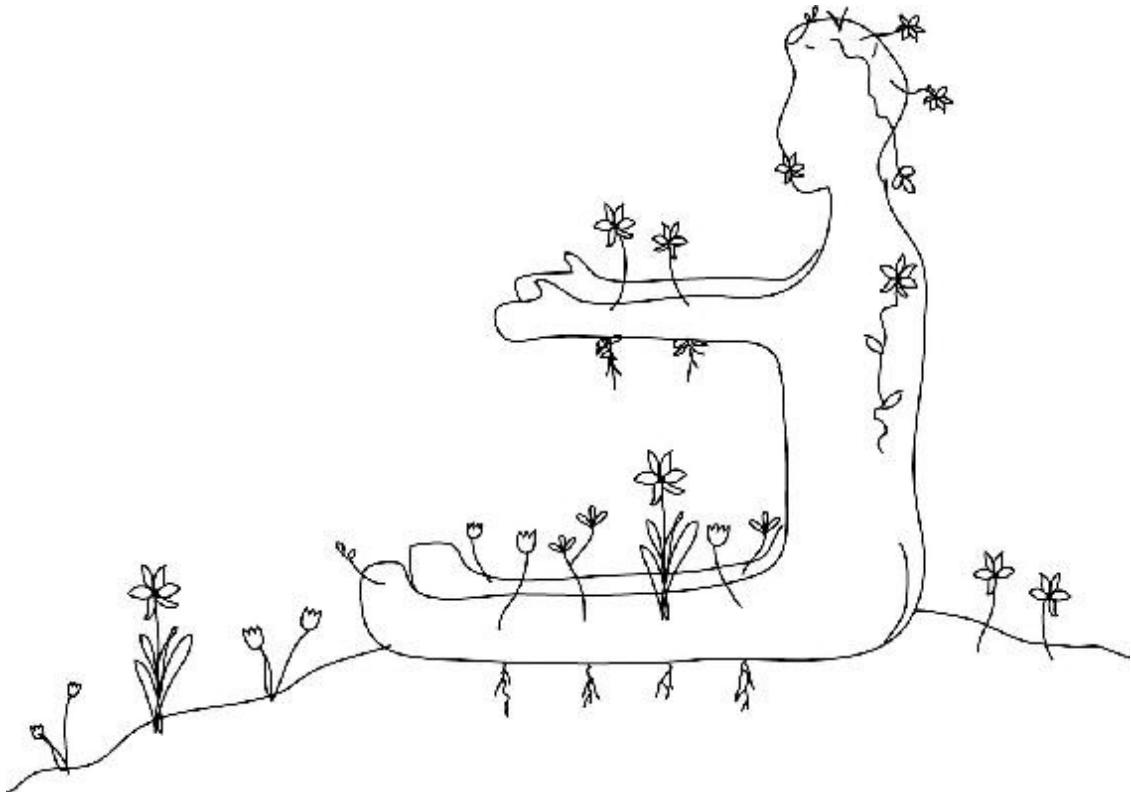
- *human*



how do i shake this envy  
when i see you doing well  
sister how do i love myself enough to know  
your accomplishments are not my failures

*- we are not each other's competition*

it is a blessing  
to be the color of earth  
do you know how often  
flowers confuse me for home

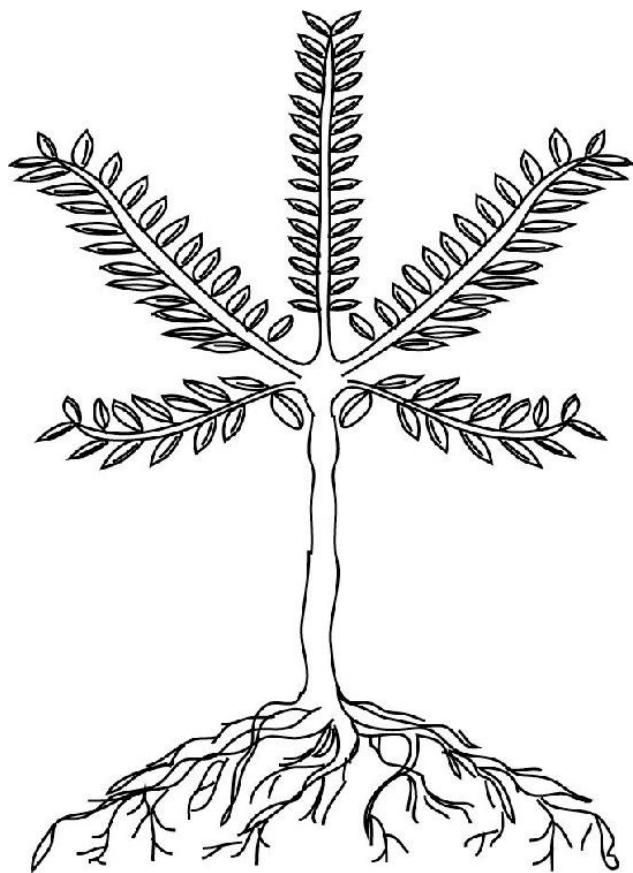


we need more love  
not from men  
but from ourselves  
and each other

- *medicine*

you are a mirror  
if you continue to starve yourself of love  
you'll only meet people who'll starve you too  
if you soak yourself in love  
the universe will hand you those  
who'll love you too

*- a simple math*

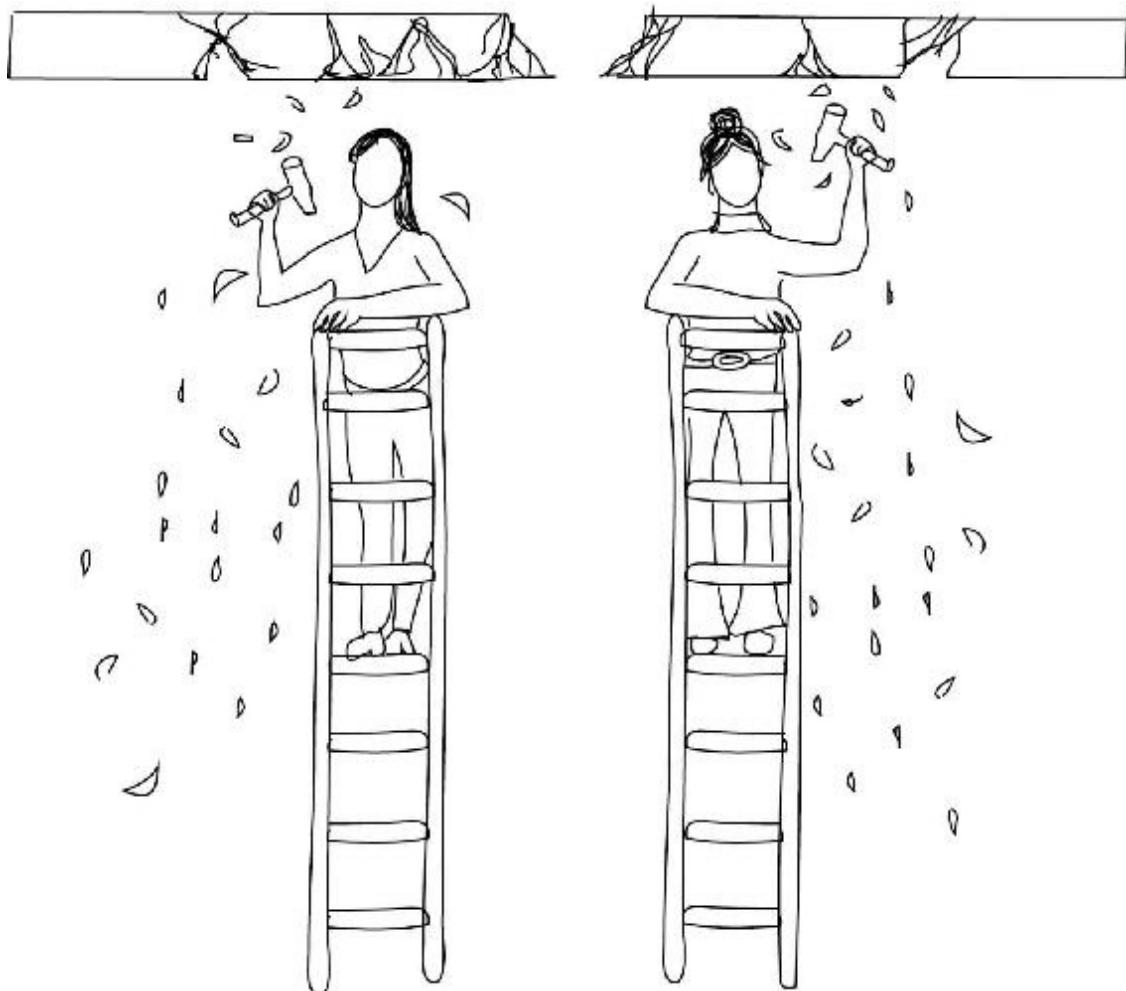


how much  
or how little  
clothing she has on  
has nothing to do with how free she is

*- covered | uncovered*

there are mountains growing  
beneath our feet  
that cannot be contained  
all we've endured  
has prepared us for this  
bring your hammers and fists  
we have a glass ceiling to shatter

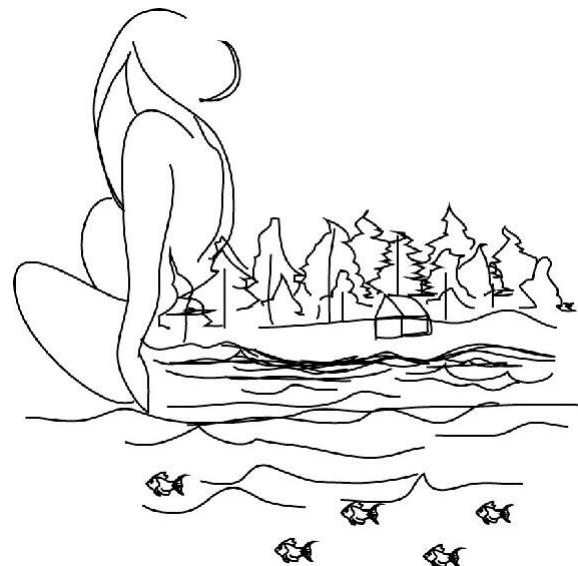
- let's leave this place roofless



it isn't blood that makes you my sister  
it's how you understand my heart  
as though you carry it  
in your body

*what is the greatest lesson a woman should learn*

that since day one  
she's already had everything she needs within herself  
it's the world that convinced her she did not



they convinced me

i only had a few good years left before i was replaced by a girl younger than me  
as though men yield power with age but women grow into irrelevance they can  
keep their lies for i have just gotten started i feel as though i just left the womb  
my twenties are the warm-up for what i'm really about to do wait till you see me  
in my thirties now that will be a proper introduction to the nasty. wild. woman in  
me.

how can i leave before the party's started rehearsals begin at forty i ripen with  
age

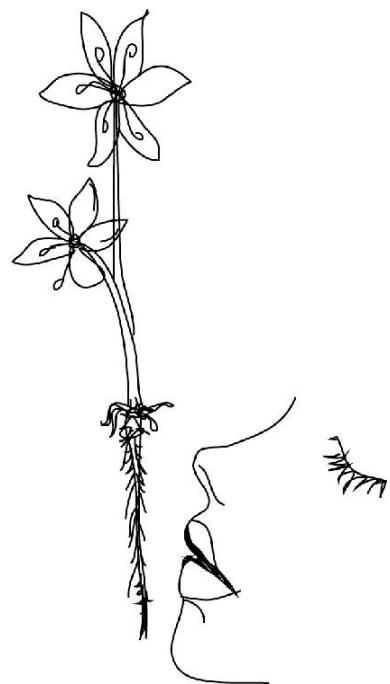
i do not come with an expiration date and now

for the main event

curtains up at fifty  
let's begin the show

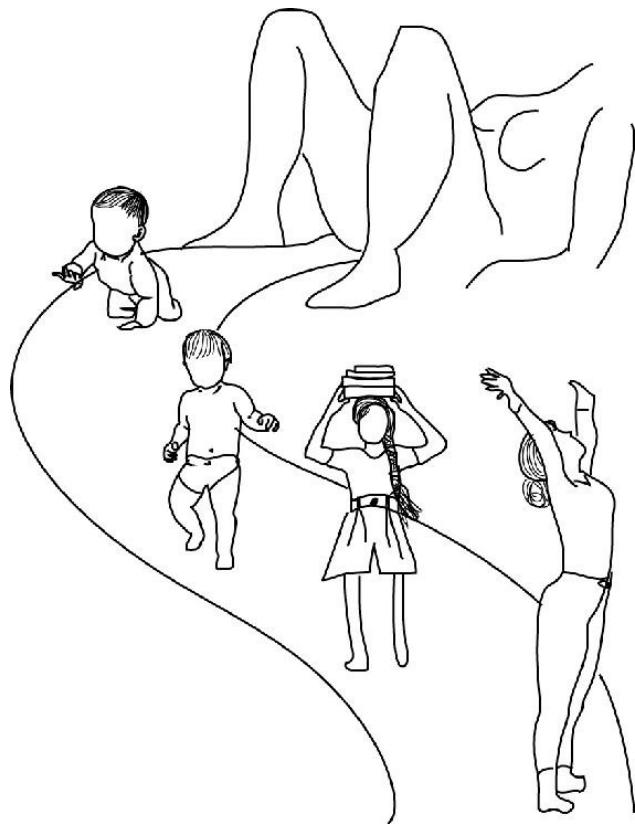
- *timeless*

to heal  
you have to  
get to the root  
of the wound  
and kiss it all the way up



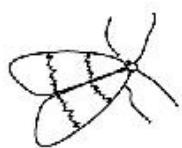
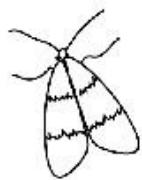
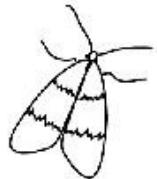
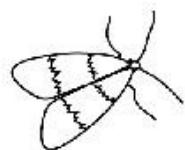
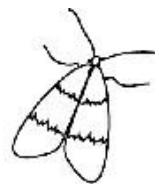
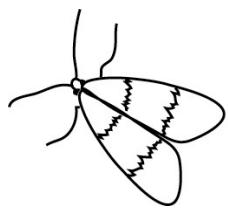
they threw us in a pit to end each other so they wouldn't have to starved us of space so long we had to eat each other up to stay alive look up look up look up to catch them looking down at us how can we compete with each other when the real monster is too big to take down alone

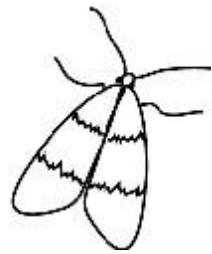
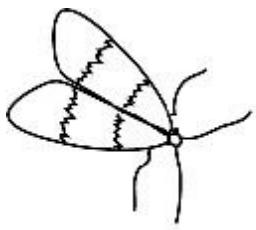
when my daughter is living in my belly i will speak to her like she's already  
changed the world she will walk out of me on a red carpet fully equipped with  
the knowledge that she's capable of  
anything she sets her mind to



(ode to raymond douillet's *a short tour and farewell*)

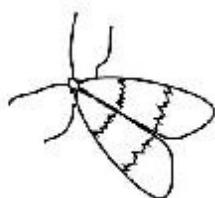
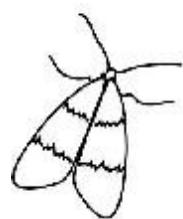
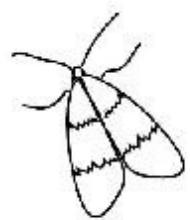
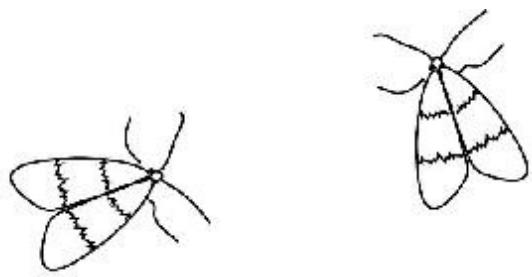
now  
is not the time  
to be quiet  
or make room for you  
when we have had no room at all  
now  
is our time  
to be mouthy  
get as loud as we need  
to be heard





representation  
is vital  
otherwise the butterfly  
surrounded by a group of moths  
unable to see itself  
will keep trying to become the moth

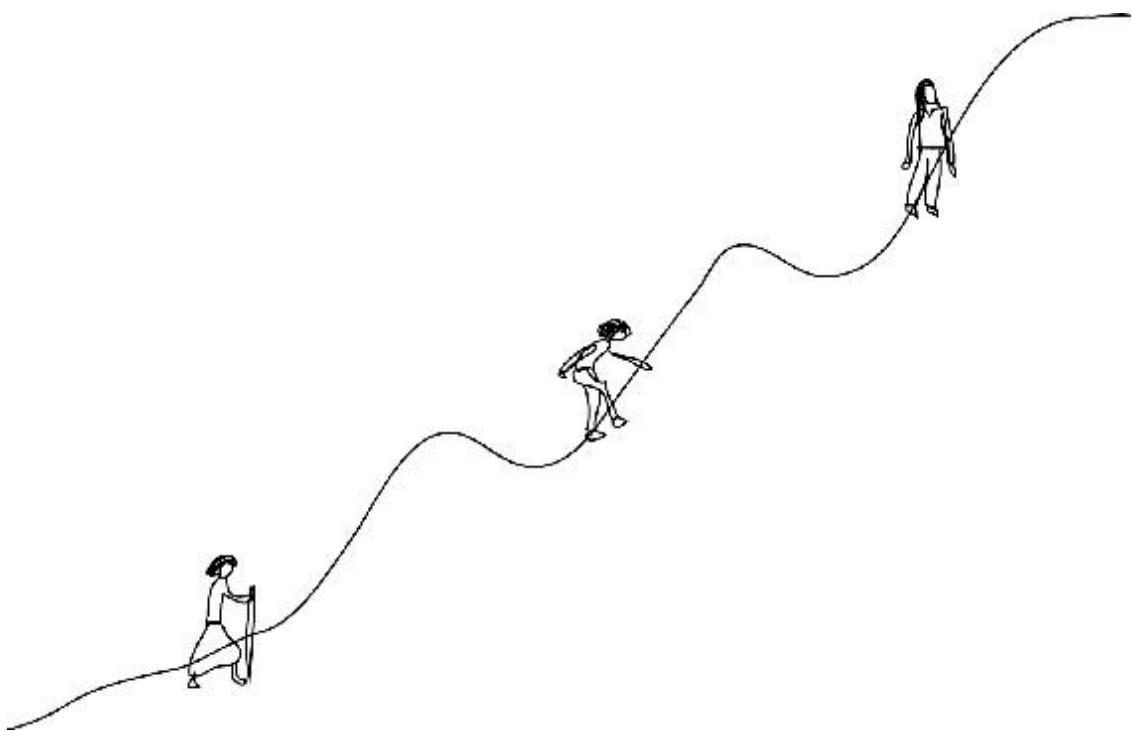
*- representation*



take the compliment  
do not shy away from  
another thing that belongs to you

our work should equip  
the next generation of women  
to outdo us in every field  
this is the legacy we'll leave behind

- *progress*

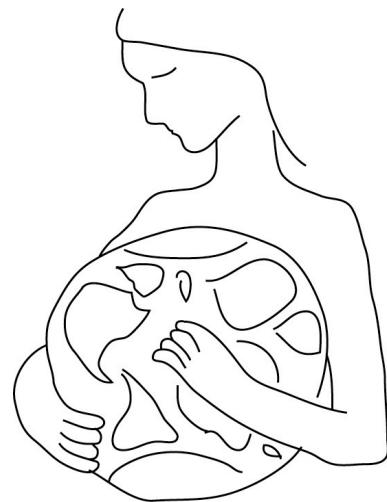


the road to changing the world  
is never-ending

*- pace yourself*

the necessity to protect you overcame me i love you too much  
to remain quiet as you weep watch me rise to kiss the poison out of you i will  
resist the temptation of my tired feet

and keep marching  
with tomorrow in one hand and a fist in the other i will carry you to freedom -  
*love letter to the world*



have your eyes ever fallen upon a beast like me i have the spine of a mulberry  
tree the neck of a sunflower sometimes i am the desert at times the rain forest but  
always the wild

my belly brims over the waistband of my pants each strand of hair frizzing out  
like a lifeline it took a long time to become such a sweet rebellion

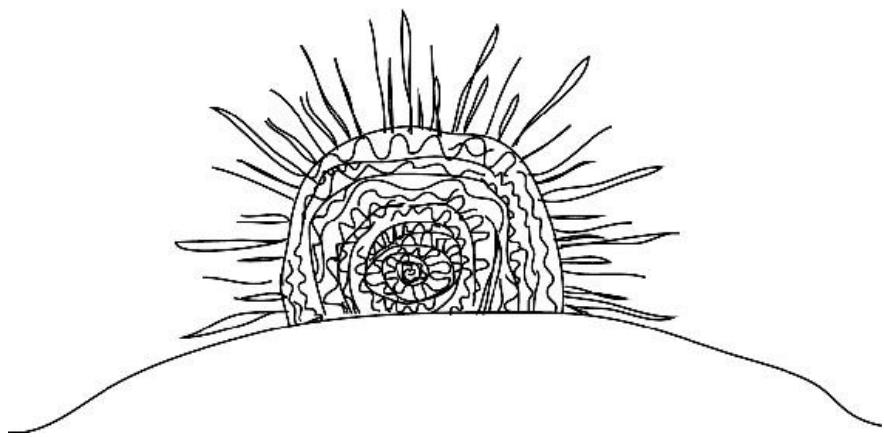
back then i refused to water my roots till i realized

if i am the only one

who can be the wilderness then let me be the wilderness the tree trunk cannot  
become the branch the jungle cannot become the garden so why should i

*- it is so full here in myself*

many try  
but cannot tell the difference  
between a marigold and my skin  
both of them are an orange sun  
blinding the ones who have not learned to love the light



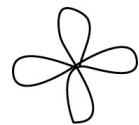
if you have never  
stood with the oppressed  
there is still time

- *lift them*

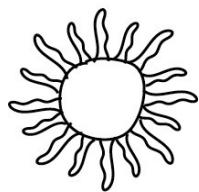
the year is done. i spread the past three hundred  
sixty-five days before me on the living room carpet.

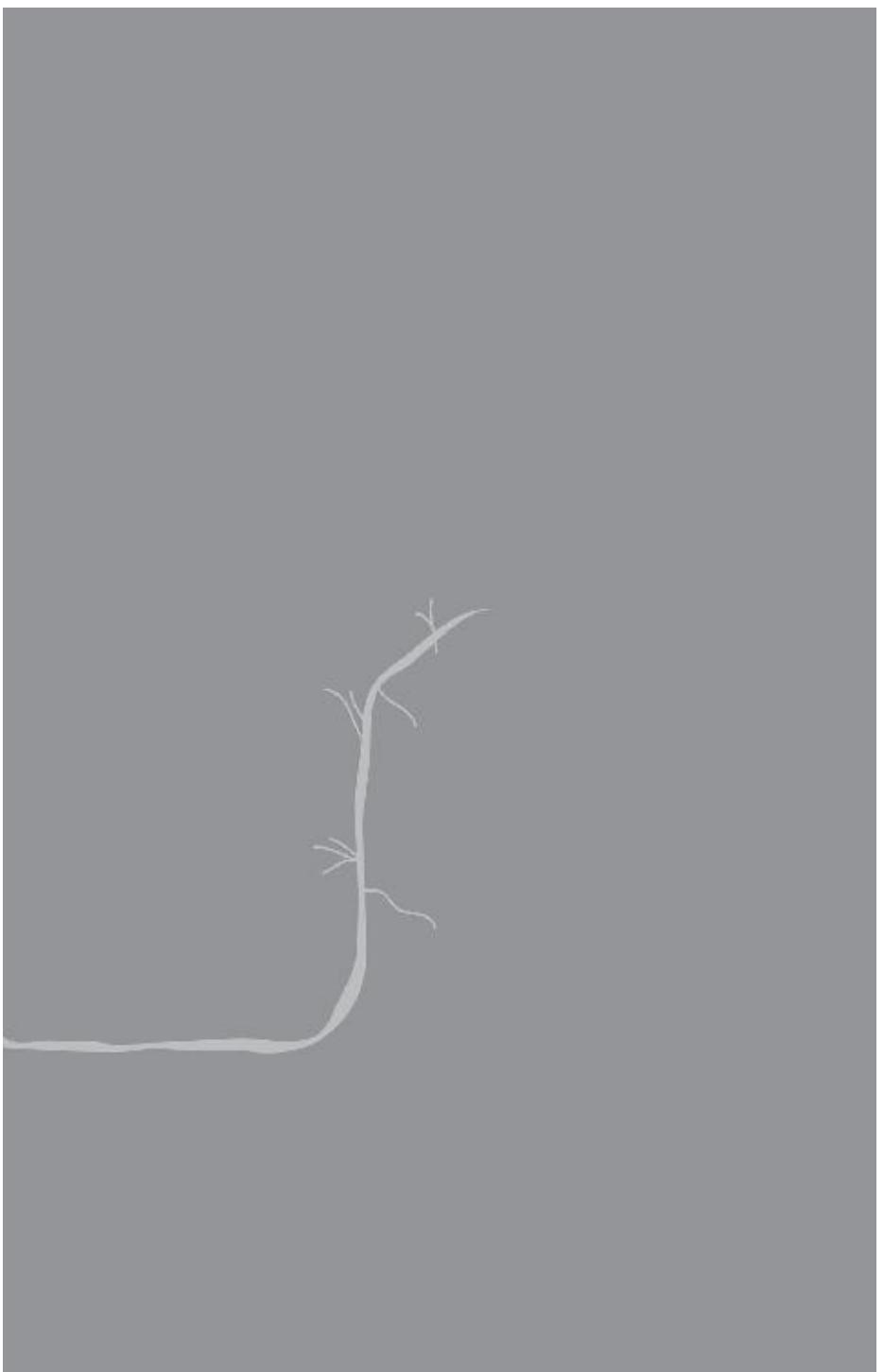
here is the month i decided to shed everything not deeply committed to my dreams. the day i refused to be a victim to the self-pity. here is the week i slept in the garden. the spring i wrung the self-doubt by its neck. hung your kindness up. took down the calendar. the week i danced so hard my heart learned to float above water again. the summer i unscrewed all the mirrors from their walls. no longer needed to see myself to feel seen. combed the weight out of my hair.

i fold the good days up and place them in my back pocket for safekeeping. draw the match. cremate the unnecessary. the light of the fire warms my toes. i pour myself a glass of warm water to cleanse myself for january. here i go. stronger and wiser into the new.



there is  
nothing left  
to worry about  
the sun and her flowers are here.



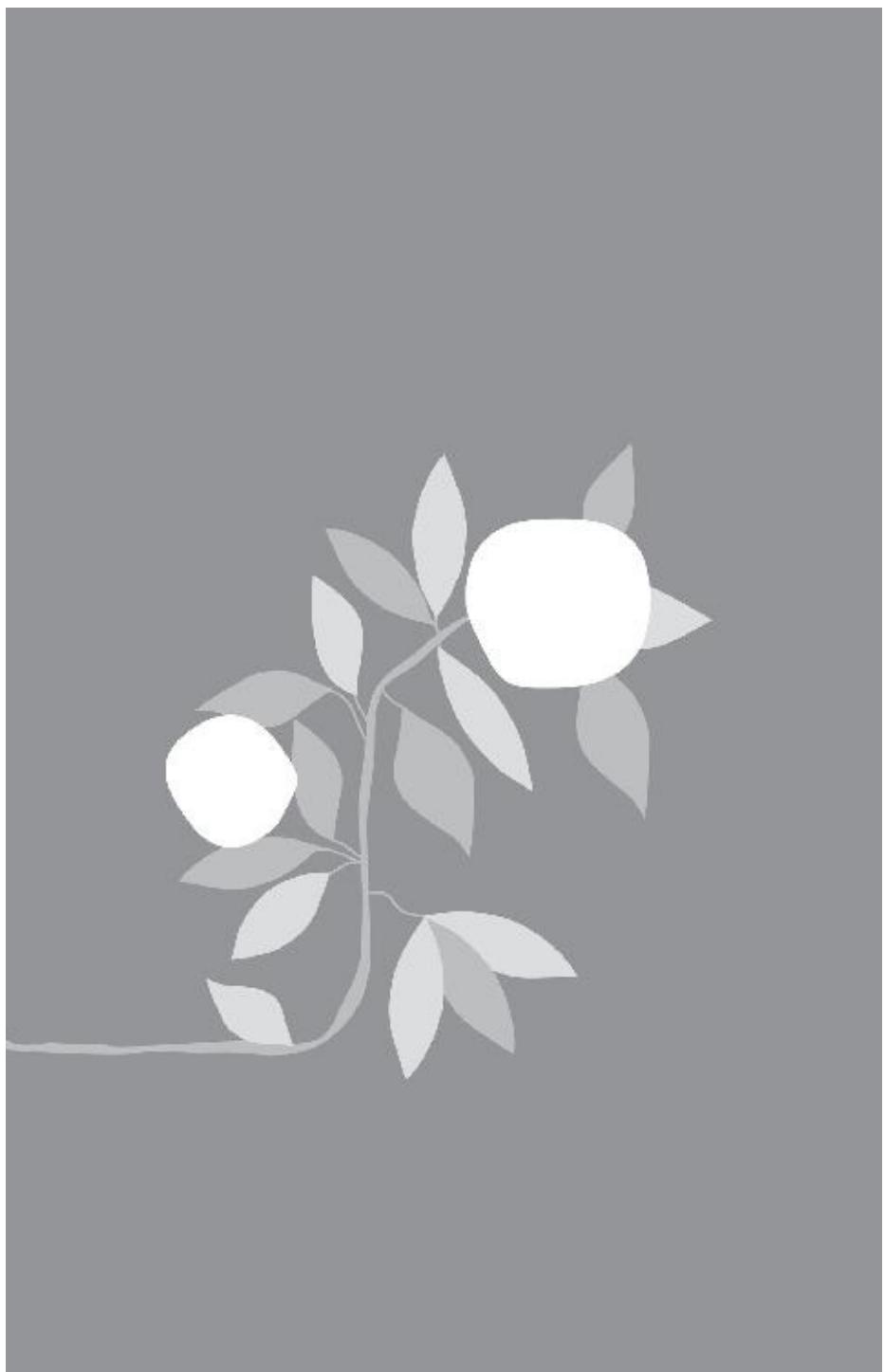


and then there are days when the simple act of breathing leaves you exhausted. it seems easier to give up on this life. the thought of disappearing brings you peace. for so long i was lost in a place where there was no sun. where there grew no flowers. but every once in a while out of the darkness something i loved would emerge and bring me to life again. witnessing a starry sky. the lightness of laughing with old friends. a reader who told me the poems had saved their life. yet there i was struggling to save my own. my darlings. living is difficult. it is difficult for everybody. and it is at that moment when living feels like crawling through a pin-sized hole. that we must resist the urge of succumbing to bad memories. refuse to bow before bad months or bad years. cause our eyes are starving to feast on this world. there are so many turquoise bodies of water left for us to dive in. there is family. blood or chosen. the possibility of falling in love. with people and places. hills high as the moon. valleys that roll into new worlds. and road trips. i find it deeply important to accept that we are not the masters of this place. we are her visitors. and like guests let's enjoy this place like a garden. let us treat it with a gentle hand. so the ones after us can experience it too. let's find our own sun. grow our own flowers. the universe delivered us with the light and the seeds. we might not hear it at times but the music is always on. it just needs to be turned louder. for as long as there is breath in our lungs—we must keep dancing.



rupi kaur is a #1 *new york times* bestselling author and illustrator of two collections of poetry. she started drawing at the age of five when her mother handed her a paintbrush and said—draw your heart out. rupi views her life as an exploration of that artistic journey. after completing her degree in rhetoric studies she published her first collection of poems *milk and honey* in 2014. the internationally acclaimed collection sold well over a million copies gracing the *new york times* bestseller list every week for over a year. it has since been translated into over thirty languages. her long-awaited second collection *the sun and her flowers* was published in 2017. through this collection she continues to explore a variety of themes ranging from love. loss. trauma. healing. femininity. migration. revolution. rupi has performed her poetry across the world. her photography and art direction are warmly embraced and she hopes to continue this expression for years to come.

- *about the author*



*the sun and her flowers* is a collection of poetry about grief self-abandonment honoring one's roots love and empowering oneself it is split into five chapters wilting. falling. rooting. rising. and blooming.

- *about the book*

