Seeds

*poems*

by

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## For Sasha

## &

## all fellow seekers

## A Note on the Collection

I began reading poetry in 2017 (with Mary Oliver’s *Wild Geese* as my gateway drug) but didn’t seriously start writing my own until early 2020. This was spurred in part by curiosity, though mostly it was desire: a desire to slow time in its tracks, and to give better attention to the daily minutia.

Once, I was in the MRI room of the hospital (where I work) waiting to start a child’s scan. The main operator – a friend of mine – walked in a few minutes later, plopped his things down, and settled himself into his chair. He seemed tired and somewhat disgruntled, and I asked him about it. “Nothing out of the ordinary,” he said. “Just another day! It isn’t Rome, that’s for sure (referring to our lab trip).”

I agreed, it was just another day, though comments like this tend to put me off. They suggest that what one has in front of them is insufficient; that life, unless experienced in ideal circumstances, is best resigned to the hand of time, to the false certainties of the future, while the ground beneath you is left fertile. Once the scanner was running, the technician drew out his phone, chuckled, and whispered to himself “Time to collect that time off again.”

It wasn’t long before COVID-19 began ravaging the world, leaving us without nothing more than slowed time, broken promises, and the minutia in its wake. What followed were weeks spent wandering. Daily I walked the same route on the same path by the lake, not really sure what to make of it all. So much of our thoughts hinge on the prospect of the future in the winter of our struggles, but that was no longer an option.

Writing poetry, then, became an act of survival and defiance against circumstance. It was the untarnished thread that pulled me through the despondence and existential loneliness that inevitably came to accompany my days. Often pulling the line on the other side was my dear Ukrainian penpal, Sasha. We connected online early in the pandemic via the first four lines of William Blake’s *Auguries of Innocence:*

To see a World in a Grain of Sand

And a heaven in a Wild Flower

Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand

And Eternity in an hour

I sent these lines not knowing how well they would capture the nature of our correspondence and the development of our companionship. We wrote and sent poems to each other daily, even hourly early on. Poems were our lifeline in the midst of the surrounding upheaval, our shared bed of infinities and eternities on which sand grains crystallized and wild flowers bloomed. It was because of her that I gave more attention and soul to my poems. Writing poetry then, too, was an act of love.

The result is this handpicked collection of 20 poems. Chosen are the ones I enjoyed writing most. They are the result of a continual attempt to make sense of and find meaning in 2020. They are also my way of cashing in on life without leaning on time collected and the precarious promise of the future.

– P

## BLUE

I walked to the lake

  to skip

   stones

    the way people do

with their thoughts

  when they at last notice

   that their pockets

    are full.

Then you honked at me

  in your hurried voice

   Good morning - Good morning!

    and invited me to linger

as your webbed feet waltzed

  toe by toe

   across the sand

    into the wild open blue

while loneliness waited

  by the rocks

    and I,

      I drowned in delight.

## REFUGE

Find refuge in my Harbor

the water Here is clear,

The Storm is over now

Rest easy now, my Dear.

Let your Anchor reach

the depths of my Sea,

Let it Sink with Time

while you set yourself Free.

Strip the worn Sails

and cast them to new Hands,

Let them–Taste–again

the Salt of warm Sands.

Turn the Whites into Doves

that soar the open sky,

Turn the Kites into Loves

who Fly you through Night.

## LADY IN RED

While the yellow-jackets mingle with

the Azaleas and the sunflowers,

and the people with each other,

you were there in the sky

on a young branch navigating

the heights of which

far too few have seen,

crawling toward the sun.

You weaved through the leaves

and fought against the voice of Mother,

and finally, finally,

you reached the peak.

Then, just like the robins,

just like the timid sparrows

singing without the need for recognition,

you opened the crimson shell

housing your weightless wings

and flew to the only place you knew

was home.

## KNOWLEDGE

She sits in her lab

with a handful of instruments

and a head full of clues.

Surrounding her are guesses,

and things she already knew.

If only she could see it,

if only she could understand

how it all fits together

in the grand master plan.

The past always resolves the future,

so she’s learned,

in the present of her time,

but still, she feels,

there is still so much left to find,

there is still so much to know.

## TO THE SKY

There I threw my sorrows

in hopes that they would stay.

Instead you returned tomorrow

with the weight of yesterday.

Forgive me for asking twice,

I've already begged in prayer–

He returned a palm full of ice,

a reminder that life isn’t fair.

The crows made their sighs

and the sunflowers bowed,

I screamed shouted and cried

while you stood tall and proud.

The grass gleamed with dew

as I endured the cold pain,

while the earth smiled, renewed,

and thanked me for the rain.

## DWELL

What rooms of the soul

have been left unchecked

Forgotten and locked away

With the key nowhere to be found?

Don't worry.

The door is still open.

Climb the creaking stairs

Open the dust-covered drawers and look in

Run your fingers along the wooden shelves

now draped in darkness,

somewhere in the attic of your mind.

Once there you may rediscover

the very thing

You have been searching for

Your entire life.

Prepare yourself:

The ghosts will cry and beckon.

But don't run.

Sit and stay awhile.

Get to know yourself.

Offer light

and accept the forgiveness

that soon follows.

## EXHALATION

Before there was you

Before there was you and your billowing laugh

Your callused hands and crooked smile

waiting for me at the end of the night

like temptation drunk on cherry wine

Before there was the oak that introduced us

Before there were the stars we claimed as ours

Before love and wonder were forces we would never tame

Before time had entered the fray

Before there was the story of everything, waiting to unfold,

Nothing was the only thing

And that was enough for a universe.

## VULNERABILITY

You opened up

like a lotus in the night

and allowed me

to feel the shy rhythm

of your untouched

heartbeat

with my callused fingers.

They traced the surface

of your little life

as you guided me

over the eight scars

dotting your body

like flower petals

on the surface

of a boundless lake.

## TRAPEZE

The only way this works

is if we catch each other.

We’re experienced, yes, but your hand

is never guaranteed, even after all these years.

The nets below don’t carry

the weight of our selfish love,

nor does the crowd.

They wonder how we do what we do,

why we take the risks we take,

but we’re just doing our job,

putting on a performance

for an audience of one.

Sometimes we fall

but that’s a part of the deal –

We’re acrobats of the dark, she said,

two loose cannons

shooting for the stars,

two trapeze artists vaulting

over loneliness,

two unhinged orbits

ready to collide.

## WAITING

The news came over you

the way winter

does, like a wave crawling

up your spine,

every goosebump a sign

that the story

you lived by would soon

come to its

end. The fire warming

your heart makes

way for the embers

and ashes,

for all that’s left, black

scars and burn

marks, a house without

a roof, memories

forever frozen

in place. You’ll

Know he’s gone when

the silence

settles like

dust.

## KINTSUGI,

## the Japanese Art of repairing broken pottery

I. Summer of COVID-19

This time around

the antagonist is a consequence

of randomness

and stupidity;

Not the usual trail of mosquito bites

lining my ankles after a night by the lake–

Not the flakey crust of sunburned shoulders

and sun-spoiled cider roiling in the drunk sand–

Not the hurried kiss of a summer love

meant to be a memory–

No instead I am accompanied by an unfounded certainty,

a future I cannot yet begin to imagine

without compromising the numerous stitches

already upholding the architecture

of a life once mine.

II. In the Dark

Oscillating between

despair and

restlessness;

newsfeeds

and skin–

poems and

music;

pasts and

a reality

running from reach.

III. Falling

Your face in the bathroom mirror

again staring back at someone

something unknowable

wondering how long

it takes for regret

to leave

the

body

IV. How

To move forward?

To get over myself?

To save myself

when I myself

lack myself

the smiling

confidence

of an untouched life?

V. Kintsugi

Begin with love

and generous fingertips,

yours. Lace the roiled sand

between the cracks

and piece together

the moments

one by one.

Hold them still

as if your life

depended on

it–it does–

and wait.

Growth requires

time. Meaning

demands patience.

## A PRAYER

I.

In the riptide

    of

    this moment

may I act out of   goodwill,

may I rediscover

the goodness   of others

    made obfuscate

by timelines     and party lines

    and tighten the loosened thread

that ties us all

  together.

II.

The gift is knowing

what ails you

the privilege is holding     that truth

without turning   away–

what I fear most is not that you will hurt me

because in many ways you already have

but that I may never understand   why

III.

    What I fear

most is not that   my side is losing

but that we

      are lost.

IV.

May I summon   the courage to speak

    not out of   hate   or righteousness

not out of the pain   I’ve held for so long

both for myself   and for others,

but with the soft palpitations of a heart

    in search of redemption,

  with the hushed voice of a nation

    dying for reconciliation.

V.

May our differences

sharpen our similarities.

May I be bold enough

to witness your suffering

and subsequently illuminate

the shape of my own.

May we surf the edges with evermore grace

so that we can rise above the inevitable tide,

swim ashore and dance

to the drumming of a fragile anthem

celebrating

the birth of a nation.

## WAITING

Will you start the day now?

Time can only cradle you

for so long, your body so

heavy with duty and obligation.

The questions tugging at your soul

can wait; she will be there

at the end of the day, and if not

perhaps tomorrow – well at least

you have yourself.

And if not that, well,

time will be waiting,

poised like the sliver of a grin,

ready to swing your life away.

## POSSIBILITIES (with apologies to Szymborska)

I prefer chocolate.

I prefer music.

I prefer facts dancing with feelings.

I prefer Dandelion to Cherry Wine.

I prefer trees dressed in autumn.

I prefer keeping a notebook and pen on hand, just in case.

I prefer the quiet of silence

to the silence of absence.

I prefer the color green.

I prefer rebels.

I prefer not to maintain

that convenience is always convenient.

I prefer to wake early.

I prefer to sleep late when it’s wrong.

I prefer talking to therapists about something else.

I prefer used books.

I prefer the absurdity of kids

to the absurdity of adults.

I prefer, where love’s concerned, nonspecific anniversaries

that can be celebrated every moment.

I prefer friends

who promise me nothing.

I prefer bittersweet compassion to everyday kindness.

I prefer surprises.

I prefer the earth in hand-me-downs.

I prefer bordering countries to bordered ones.

I prefer the hell of questions to the hell of answers.

I prefer cats.

I prefer dogs unleashed.

I prefer the creased line of a Szymborska

to the headline of a newspaper.

I prefer the thrill of knowing to the thrill of believing.

I prefer light eyes, since mine are dark.

I prefer laughter.

I prefer joy to happiness.

I prefer things I’ve forgotten to say

to things I’ve left unsaid.

I prefer the time of seasons to the time of stars.

I prefer to have faith.

I prefer ideas to movements.

I prefer keeping in mind even the possibility

that existence has its own raison d'être.

## 27 YEARS

older

and still no closer

to heaven. But please,

leave me–

Leave me here where

my prayers are answered

in the rhyme of a Dickinson

or the riff of a Sultana–

Leave me here on the breast

of the earth where angels

kiss sinners like me

over tea and late night memories

on Sunday mornings–

Leave me here where the blessing

of caressing hands is enough

to bend a celibate to his knees

over the pulpit of her body

as they mouth Hallelujah–

Leave me here alone

in the bedroom of midnight

so I may wake drenched

in the sweat of stars

and surrendered dreams–

Leave me here where salvation

can be found on a coastline

under hails of light bursting

through the winged cathedral

of a redwood canopy–

Leave me here where the mind

is wider than the sky

and contains so much

more

than I–

Leave me here

and heaven forbid

the day I arrive

at the holy promenade

without my return ticket–

Leave me here

to dwell in possibility–

–in the only promise

guaranteed.

## INGREDIENTS

One pinch of fun, well enough for two.

Two cups of trust – three for the adventurous.

Four cloves of love, more for good measure.

Five pounds of respect for a firm foundation.

Six licks to taste, just in case things turn sour.

Eight hints of promises, so seven can be broken

and forgiven. Nine gallons of luck

because life always gets messy.

Ten drops of honey, to top things off.

## MY LIGHT

When someone dies

are they really gone?

The apples in the garden

miss your callused touch,

and the Earth, it seems,

can't weep enough.

Forever feels

more real

than the rain does.

You're gone

but the story

lives on

in a bed

of neurons

you once said,

electrical impulses

with enough power

to light

entire universes.

I wish you were here

but you are there

where stars like you

are meant to burn

like diamonds studded

in the sky,

your bright

presence

forever my light.

## WHILE THE WORLD SLEEPS

While the world sleeps

I wake

into the soft unfolding

of morning.

Between stanzas I’ve suddenly

forgotten (forgive me Szymborska)

is clasped

a single thread

of auburn.

It’s been months since

I last found you

rising

and falling

like a fawn yet nuzzled

by the cold breath

of winter

and demands

beside me

beneath familiar sheets.

My poems miss

your eyes,

my fingers

your scars,

my world

your gravity.

The strand still lingers

and dresses herself daily

in the same sunlight

and the same unturned pages

I still can't remember,

still waits for her sisters

to come again, loosen up

and curl themselves

around words, lines, and stories

that have yet to be read

by more than my eyes

alone.

## PAPA

Hunched over in your garden

like a daylily on the boardwalk watching

the world spin faster

and faster on its slant axis,

you still water the plants we bought for you

three summers ago, as if

you were still showering us

with your wordless love,

with your thankless devotion,

praying one day that

we will eventually grow

back in your direction.

## EVANESCENT

so many years left

by the measure of things

though memory and circumstance

don’t seem to agree with me.

they only see

the distance

between who we were then

and who we are now.

i can’t tell if you’re smiling

or if that’s the wrinkle

in your eye

reminding me

of where we’ve been

and where we’re still going.

there’s not much

of that for us anymore,

we’ve had our fair share

of looking ahead,

but you’re still surprised

when you find my fingers

in the thicket of your silver threads,

grazing on skin

now deliciously peppered

with time.