

The Early Years



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Author's Note

These are a collection of poems for my summer 2022 friends, and the golden months we spent together. Many I have lost in one sense or another. I wrote these poems to remember warm memories and to mourn what is no longer. Grief and love come hand in hand, and I will love these friends and this moment of my life just as I will grieve them. These poems are also a reminder – a hope – that they are simply the early years of our lives, and there is still plenty to come.

*I'm drunk on the ecstasy of living
On the cocktail of fortune and no guarantee
My fingers are now on the woodwork
And still there is more I will do*

*The etching has just begun
For the early years is all this is
But to go on I must depart
From hangars gold in times of old*

Wine

There is communion in transcendence
In the abstract
In the gentle curation and
Becoming of god

He who lives beyond the
Border of the canvas
Suffers through the harshest of winters

The wine is sweet and warm
Inside the shelter of escape

Teacup Honey

And when the summer settles there is no ocean's pounding to
disguise the wrenching of your heart.

You have to watch the green tree leaves catch the 7pm summer sun.

With that light, the trees truly become alive. All know trees are
living. But to see it. To truly know it. It's when the leaf cups
inward, holding the golden threads, becoming a spoon of honey
and tea crafted to sooth.

Sooth it does

For it is quiet

And a summer of planes rushing by and blasted songs from old car
stereos plunges into a whisper.

The world is so beautiful and your heart aches from it.

You couldn't hold it all

And now it is out of reach.

The waves lap against the shore.

It's Been 61° and Cloudy in Mid July

Today the aisles of the grocery store became tinted with blue

Like the rest of the summer days

(Like summer always is)

I had reached for a mango, wanting more of its sweet juice

That can only be found in these quiet lonely months

In squeezing it gently with my fingers, holding it softly in my palms

I remembered you

You like mangoes the same way I do

Not firm and colored with pale winter morning light

But quiet and soft and golden

Like summer

Like summer without you

Collin's Geese

In reading Billy Collin's poem about
A small lakeside cottage
I say small, but it may as well have been a mansion
Of a cottage, he didn't put detail to pen –
If he even used pen – instead he described the geese
That flew right to left, right to left
And my brain had to erase and reprint the image
That had painted, framed, and hung itself inside my mind
There is a beach in my hometown, one of the only left with little people, my coastal childhood was
there, where geese would fly home and fly back in formations that always for a moment, made you
wonder about the naval base a mile away
The geese, always in my head, in my memory, flew from left to right
It must be a matter of region, like how the Australians have Christmas in summer, or like how the
British had a tradition of horror stories on Christmas Eve,
No it's different where I'm from, I wanted to say to the book on my kitchen table
Back home the geese fly right

Omen

There were seven crows on the telephone wire
It meant the sky would redden and the willow tree would sway
My mother was a person once
And in her humanity, in that ragged breath of time,
Youths had eyes that budded bright
That scoured the tree lines, green and fresh,
Tongues wagging, lips curving with the gleeful ruckus
And there they went
Startled into frightened flight
Gold tinged black against the blooming dawn
And the kids cried out counts, fingers sharp and high
Uno, dos, tres, cuatro, cinco, seis, siete
Siete!
They cheered and babbled of what they'd see, who would love, what the day held for their hearts
But I do not live in that breath
Humanity has burned and my mother is dead
There are screams in the street
Wheels burn and streak in smoke
But the crows stay still, perched aloft staring at no other
Their eyes are not dead, they are not soulless
The crow's stare, full and black,
Holds all that you will never know
They know the meaning of the crushed crimson leaves,
of the dust that burns the sky
They know the second your blood will cool
And the fungi that will cover your bones
They see you, fourteen lingering eyes
and I still see them beyond the bleeding sky
Neck upturned for an eternal contest
Feet and body dangling as the willow tree sways

304

The smell of cut grass reminds me of October Saturdays on the Fremont soccer field
When the heat of the fall had a thick dryness that still crusts my lips and burns my tongue
There is a thick and damp foliage to those memories
It is not like those flat plains of knees run ragged and scratched raw
I sink into that mush, vines dragging me down into the sweet earth of memories
Too sweet, the scent from fruits with paper thin skin, oozing with your touch, corrosively sweet
A time when I had it all
Wind under me, hands outstretched, the world battered away with my catch, a knee slowly eroding
with each solid kick
I was a damn good goalie
The words taste foul in my mouth
Thick and ugly with sincerity, with the smile that sings of youth and longing and never again
The sky is still that crystal blue, stretching above that picket fence
But nothing else remains as true
The foliage is just damp earth, a forest privy only with sharp scented grass
There is no good end
Only dirt stained fingers pleading to go past the vines, to be crushed mercilessly with the past

I Think it's September

It's cold already

Summer has not yet even cast its end

But we know

The auburn tinges on the sycamore trees

The cold the cuts across the dawn and dusk light

You and I

We know what's done

It would be foolish to cling

But isn't all love foolish

Isn't love and grief more tightly intertwined than summer and
memories of home and hope and youth

Don't you see

My fingers are frostbitten the ocean is still and the season goes on

I have not yet said goodbye to those sweet golden nights

The memories keep me warm but the blanket thins and you still
have a piece of me

A part of home belongs to you

How Many Times Before?

I am 18 years old

But it feels like I have both been here hundreds of times before and like I've never done this at all

I once wrote: I understand why I would choose this world again and again

I do understand

I would

But the weight of the world rest so heavily upon my shoulders

Of humanity, of every breath, root, and star

I think I am the universe, all the infinite galaxies and exploding cosmos experiencing itself

Feeling, living, breathing, crying

And some days the universe wants to feel so badly

My heart cracks open with its blowing light

Every sense that has ever been falls into my chest

And it is so much

It is too much

I can't do it

I need someone to batter a crowbar endlessly against my ribs until they turn to dust

Until my chest caves in and the cosmos burst out

While its freezing blood spills from my lips

So that I can lay still and finally rest

Until I choose it all again

Go On.

The beauty of the world is in the heart of Sorrows.
 The beauty of the world is in the communion of the common.
 It is when the slant of the light is divine
 And when an open palm holds it all.
 The world is never quiet
 Not when every holy heartbeat rages with hope.
 Go on.
 Go on.
 Persist. Embrace. Love and cry.
 Scream with the world. Swallow the sun. Clutch at the concrete.
 And reach up for the sky, fingers outstretched to the night.
 Kiss every star. You are kissing your face.
 You are kissing your wrist .
 You are kissing your heart.
 You are holding every heart, gently.

Hope and Sorrow

Hope is the sparrow's mealworm
 And sorrow is its sweet simple song.

The rich earth soaks up both
 for the tangled mangrove of
 green tree roots.

In the August sun, when rays
 Become violin cords through the leaves,
 Humanity's cocktail can be
 Drunk like nectar.

Willow Banks

Who will give me the hopes of the sun
When all that is left is the benevolence of the gods
Which is next to none
And always has been?
Who will listen to the singing by the banks of the
willow trees
That drink up the sun and wait for their lover
The blessed moon to cool them into rest?
What is oblivion to the universe?
What is time without us:
Uncorrected unquenched
A beauty never to be held

I (You) Will

I will teach you how to hope
Why, you ask
Because everyone deserves to live in its light

One old day I say
I cannot have faith any longer, it is too painful
I will have hope for the both of us, you say
Why, I ask
Because you taught me how to hope, and I will hold us both in its
light until the waves crash through

This Year

Oh August, sweet gentle friend,
Welcome home,
Your nectar rich sunsets have been missed,
Those which are the gold of fields of reeds and wheat,
Swaying softly in the midwest plains.
Mornings smell distinctly of your scent,
Followed by the slow burning of your embrace
In the afternoon sun.
Tell me, o' dear one,
Do winds sharp or warm stretch through you?
Will you kiss the green leaves goodbye?
Can you love me kindly again this year?

Rest

Let me sleep in the
Meadows of the promised sun.

There is a raw wound inside of me,
Sucking the marrow from my ribs
And aching with each heartbeat.

I want to rest.

It is exhausting – to hope endlessly.

The wind sways the grass
In soft caress. I am so
Tired.

It would be lovely to be
Nothing but the breeze
And the warm light.

I Left my Window Open in Early August

The crows know that it is August
One called out the announcement
In the early hours of the morning
I'm an insomniac you see
And so the secrets of the night and early
dawn have always been sweet in my heart
I should have been asleep still
Rest had barely called upon me a few hours prior
But the crow called
And I could imagine it in the
Mangled tree near the street
Ebony against the life of the August sky
The crow knows that the morning breath is sharper
With the spiked scent that foretells mahogany
Leaves and the final burst of summer
That shrill call into the light –
It meant the slow life
Would no longer be so
The world would start again
And I would spin with it

Quite a strong declaration
For the so little rest I had
So I fell back to sleep
Because August came by every year
And I had gotten this far already

More than Bearable

The beauty of the world erupts
From patches of soft sun.
The grass, green as it is eternal,
As it is cool against the bareness of your feet,
Was embroidered to hold the warmth's embrace.
Each blade, threaded intricately, carefully,
With a silver needle held by steady hands,
Bent and arced uniquely to carry small creatures
And flecks of sweet smelling earth.
Is this not reason enough?
Perhaps my palms were molded to simply
Lie flat on these fields.
Perhaps my cheeks were etched
To sleep on the murmurs of the swaying
Emerald reeds.
Perhaps I do not need to fight the world,
Loving the stray sunlight can be enough.

Gravedigger

Sunday is a day for prayer
To face up palms to rising stars

The edge of the universe
Is the face of god

But still I ask from you

“Push me down into the root of the earth
Blanket me with the clay of your tears
The spindling roots, damp and earnest,
Tendrils of soil, will hold me soft.
A femur doesn't always heal
It can rot within itself
Let me be the sparrows mealworm
Who drinks in sorrow sweetly.”

Will you take me? Walls and all? Is
A heart too full to ask

I know that a pierced liver bleeds
Black blood, and that silence conveys
What the heart cannot

To ask you to love me, that I
Do not know
The sun eats away at fog minted frost
And all you hear are those incessant
Drums of war

That push out of my throat from
The beatings of my heart

The ground is soft and the

Shovel yours

My heart grows oranges for you
Palm or branch, now or always

Fingers offer Sunday's gold
In peeled sweetness born anew.

The Sense of September

I didn't say goodbye to summer.
The days passed me by and September 22
Didn't say a word.
I sat that chilly evening and received the news
With silent mourning, phone fully falling
From my grasp, gaze shifting to the window's
Open breeze.
The crimson speckled leaves,
The period at the end of a proclamation –
The world has ended – that's what autumn meant,
That was true for every year
With the beginning of everything,
But understand, listen to me,
The world ended with summer.
Do you understand what this summer was?
What is summer to an 18 year old at the edge
Of everything, both cliff and clouds.
Time marches doggedly through June and July
Farther and farther from
Cold 8 am's warmed with overcrowded classrooms
And stupid smiles.
That's left behind but not entirely,
Instead it morphs into late mornings, swim shorts,
Sand speckled skin, and stomach filling spam
Into ocean waves too cold to bare,
Numbing the bones up to the spine but going
On anyway. It's chin dripping Frostys and
Cup after cup of coke slushies, movies
On repeat, memorizing line after line,
New nicknames filled with past years,
It's love again and again,
It's summer,
It's what summer is supposed to be before
The waves still and the roaring planes silence

And the slushie machine breaks. Before
Planes take off and gas tanks are emptied
And refilled and emptied again.
Before futures unknown have their
Plastic lamentations ripped off, spines are cracked,
The book is open and off it goes,
Worlds collided back in orbit,
Each in their own spin of the sun,
Unknown of when the next eclipse will
Break the cosmos once again, crackling crimson
Leaves the only clue.
Summer passed.
The world ended – and I went about my day
Unknowing, I should have felt it
In my bones. They should have numbed
Like on those ocean days,
I should have smelled the sea mist, the
Golden sun should have whispered to me,
My heart should have swelled like the tide,
My ribs should have protruded from my chest,
Lungs and heart exposed, I should have
Collapsed, fallen to my knees, clutching
At thick swaddling clothes.
The world ended – and I didn't know.
Now it's mended and still spinning,
As it does every year.
But I know
I know that winter will freeze me.

Sheets

I awoke from the
tragedy of a dream

into the dim paradigm
of the lightless day

only to find no embrace
around my thin shoulders

no fingers stretching fabric
on the canvas of your back

There was no one to accept the
spilling apologies of my honey
raw tongue

no one but the empty
air

and the morning slants of
February sun

Which as we all know,
is as unforgiving
as the Pacific's
icy summer waves

and the curtains on Hamlet's
lonely tragedy

Consumed

There is a sorrow within my heart
Which I cannot erase.

It was swallowed down in mishap,
Gulped without a trace.

There is an apple core within me,
Who asked not to stay.

A dear friend of silence,
Who sings her tunes all day.

Did you know that Grief,
And lovely Lonely too,

Are sparrows in that core,
Quiet, but in view.

I. The Chairs

I do not know how to ask you to love me. I do not know
 how to love you, or how to say that I would choose you
 over the stars without a thought. But I can say that there is
 a porch out there, in distance and time, that holds two chairs.
 The chairs may be old, one may creak in its disbalance.
 They may not even match, one from the thrift and the other from
 a wheat colored yard. It does not matter. There will be two.
 They will sit, regardless of the landscape, and connect two hearts
 that love the world very much. It is not much,
 but by God I hope it is enough.

II. A Love Poem

You love me in a way I find unimaginable
 I love you in a way I do not understand
 My blood boils because of you, for you
 And there is nothing I can do
 But bite into the raw flesh of my heart
 And suck the marrow from my bones
 The true condition of the human heart is unknown
 She lives in the comforts of our chest
 And in the crevices of mine
 No light, natural or not, should touch her naked veins
 There is a quantum reality to her existence

Alive in a state we do not understand
 I think it is only there, in that warm darkness,
 Digging with blind eyes and open palms,
 Devoured into myself, in which I can understand
 The lonely manner by which I love you

The Wasps' Nest

There was a painting at one of those museums of modern art
titled "The Wasps' Nest." It had no frame,
and sat in a ragged corner. I swear the walls beneath it
were not even of a solid white, but I could not sway from that spot,
where the dull colors of the framed room the length of my arm
held me solid in the chair beside the girl
who looked out that cracked window. In that afternoon light,
her hair was a copper mountain brown streaked with gold,
and for a moment, all I could see
was the layers of sleekness that fell in a single wave
to her purple clothed shoulders – her shoulder drooping,
her arm resting on that cedar table, fingers caressing
a white pen spilling black ink, notes half forgotten
by none but her. A man sits in front of her, his arms are
wide – an eagle's strike. He gestures to where I seemingly sit,
asking me something that I can never understand and
never hope to answer. And for a moment,
I sink in both pity and wonder for this girl.
What is he saying to her? To the youths crushed around her
in that ever shrinking room? Her mind must be cracked
and threaded all at once by his words,
words he sings from ancient pages that must,
they must, he says, be remembered. But all I see
is that she is not listening. He is the drone of the real autumn rain
outside these walls. He is the prophet forgotten and forlorn,
and at last I understand why her hair is my vision.
I see the title of the piece, a fragment
on the building opposite the open window, and I know,
I know she fears it. Its finite colossal terror.
Its complete stability and distance.
Like we all fear that which we cannot see.
Like we all fear the wasps' nest outside our window.

I. Grief (Oct 3 2023)

Its fascinating truly
The way which grief chokes us all
Holding a knife to our throat, our head under the water
Holding the burning coals to our face
Tailored, sewed sweetly just for us
My mother, she is cruel and brusque
No room for hope, not time for mincing words
My father is ordinary, as if grief has him not
By the scruff of his neck
Yet he is common in the way all fathers are
When they have seen the weight of bodies cold
And believe the only prescription to be a heart of lead
My brother, he is my brother
Sweet and the sun of my lightless sky
He is the rose in the battlefield's blood
And cries his tears just as easily
As that crimson flower drips its red
My grandmother is relentless, as she always is,
A woman who killed a field of crops
With poisoned fingers, easily done,
Simply because she disliked the heat on her head
And her fathers words hanging from her neck.
She says not much, yet has never ceased her search.
And I, I am so exhausted
39I am too tired for grief, and more importantly
I am too busy
There is work to be done, pages to be read,
Arguments to be written
There is no time to spend in grief's lingering company
I will ignore his boots at the door
The imprint of his heavy limbs on my sheets
His kind smile will remain at the peripheral of my sight
Until at last, as always, his presence becomes too
Burdensome to cast away

The wooden floor will catch my weight
 And his hands will press against my ribs
 He will lift my chin to his, and there will be no mistaking
 The sight in his gentle eyes: utter ease
 He will overcome me, as he always does
 He knows that my rooms are his, even when he is tidier
 Than some October nights
 When his shadow lingers over doorknobs and kitchen tables
 His fingers cool my trembling skin
 Relief of resignation escapes my lips and flows to his
 I let grief engulf me, knowing his tides were never far
 Knowing my life was always his

II. The Cricket's Sirens (Oct 5 2023)

The cricket's sirens sing today,
 On a day that is most unholy.
 It is only when the air is beyond warm
 That they whisper their blessing
 Ceaselessly, like the unhampered grief
 That billows through the unremarkable golden street
 Into the hearts of men, who, like me
 Know far too well what the dirt tastes like
 And what the gravel feels like under fingernails.
 The soft and silent melody
 Is a comfort to such wavering men,
 Seems a prayer, to un-remit as they un-remit
 As the decadence brings forth an illusion far from true,
 Of a warmer time and place, where the sun
 Was bearable on the skin
 And the light was a marvel to be drunk.
 But it may just as be
 That the crickets are in collusion with the heat,
 To blow far the barriers we hold,
 And melt us into the fresh arms of Grief.

If You will Kill Me

If you will kill me, abandon your sword
And pull out your knife.
If you will kill me, do so closely,
Mere inches from my trembling heart.
Let your bloodied hands hit my skin
Let me, with wide eyes, hold the gaze of my last lover;
The one who last pierced my skin
And captured the blood of my guts.
If you will kill me, do so truly, and leave cowardice
To the dogs and carrion birds.

My Feet Dangled

My feet dangled, ever so slightly,
 On the train to the airport.
 To touch the glittering floor
 I had to stretch my toes down
 As far as they could arch so that
 The edge of my shoe would graze
 that makeshift earth.

My feet dangled, ever so slightly,
 And suddenly I was twelve years old
 On a swing set that needed a leap
 And a pull from my bony fingers
 On that rusting chain, to simply
 begin the expedition of flight.

My feet dangled ever so slightly,
 So that the world once again felt
 Like it was digesting sepulcher white
 Mold ridden bones, alongside my
 Struggling corpse.

My feet dangled ever so slightly
 And all I could feel was the crackling
 Of my chest and a desperate nauseous urge
 43To scrape my fingernails against the wood
 To cling, to cling, god to hold on

My feet dangled ever so slightly
 And with that swaying I could no
 Longer hold who I was. Or perhaps
 I could feel the core of myself again
 With such raw viscosity
 That to swallow that untapered truth
 Was to bleach the remains of my heart

Forgive me?

I forgive you, words that I couldn't bear.

You shouldn't, I scraped from my tongue.

So?

I don't deserve it.

It does not matter, as neither does the bird's wing

to the moon, it's not your choice but mine.

But – scrambling on tile.

There is nothing else to say. I forgive you. You have to learn how to live with forgiveness.

The warmth of the sun, the warmth of steel biting into my skin.

Both blood both heat. Ice is safer. *And if I can't.*

I'll forgive you for that too.

I Don't Know

You never would have had them.

I know that there are moments, days, in which the heart requires a slowness. I know that to lift your chin is to bare your throat to kisses and knives alike without knowing which is which. *I know.* I say as much.

Then why?

Why does skin crawl? Worms brood? Blood warm?

I had to. I had to fight, it was all I could do.

You could have grieved.

But you know how grief is – it means you live while something else does not.

No, I couldn't have.

And to the unasked question of why:

I don't know.