

The Place Between  
Asleep and Awake  
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Final Chapbook Project

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## Why I Wrote What I Wrote and Why It Matters: An Introduction by The Author

I named this chapbook *'The Place Between Asleep and Awake'* because so many of the thoughts and ideas that are written here occurred to me while I was lying awake and trying desperately to go to sleep. I struggle a lot with depression and anxiety which often interferes with my sleep patterns. I have found that the ideas that come to you when you are exhausted but your mind won't shut down can be some inspiring stuff for poetry.

In the middle of the quarter I was in a very tumultuous place emotionally, but instead of dealing with it in my normal fashion (which is to not deal with it at all), I decided to try to write it out. This was a new experience for me because I have always seen my anxiety disorder as a weakness and it makes me very uncomfortable to make myself vulnerable, particularly to total strangers. However, one of the things I have taken away from this class this quarter is that the best poetry comes from that kind of honest vulnerability. So I decided to give it a shot. If I was lucky (or unlucky, depending on your point of view) I would remember some of my sleepy thoughts from the night before and I would write them down. I then went back to the "raw data" and edited it into more poetic forms. I feel that some of my more successful poems in this chapbook came from that experiment.

The workshop feedback was both good and bad. The most constructive workshopping I got was on my *'Magical Dictionary'* poem modeled after Rita Wong, which was an in-class workshop. It was nice to be able to take to people in person about it, and I feel that my group was really into reading my work and helping me make it as good as it could be. I was able to just sit down with all my printed copies that they wrote notes on and revise it in my own time. I also really enjoyed the online workshops, though I actually tossed one of my online workshop poems out the window for this project. It wasn't because the feedback I got on it wasn't great, but because I just hated the

poem in general. I liked having time to craft responses to the others in my groups, and I found that the feedback from those workshops was more complete than the in-class workshops. The professor feedback was very helpful as well, particularly with *'100 Notes on Being Fat—'* I think the poem is much stronger for strategically placed breaks.

I found after compiling all of these works together that I was most inspired by the work Anastacia Renee. I learned a lot from reading her book (*v.*), particularly when it comes to line breaks. I always felt before that poetry lines must complete an idea in one line, but now I see that line breaks are a great tool for creating different meanings. I think this idea comes out most in my own writing in the poems *'A Night at the Theater'* and *'Thoughts I Can't Say Aloud.'* I was also inspired by Rita Wong to play with the placement of lines on a page, particularly in ways that make a poem readable in different ways.

I also didn't really realize it until almost the end of the class, but I was very much affected by Bhanu Kapil's work *Schizophrenie*. This work was dense and difficult to understand as the first book of the course, but as the quarter went on it helped me to become more comfortable with my own anxiety (if that makes any sense), and just myself as a person. It helped to inspire me to really dig into the feelings I was having and find out why I was feeling them instead of sweeping them under the rug which is what I usually do. It also gave me the courage to bring up some of the more violent things that have happened in my past (*'What do you do when your husband points a gun in your face?'*). I found through this process that just sharing my experiences and writing them down is incredibly freeing. Sharing them takes some of the weight off of me. And it doesn't necessarily make it all better, but it does help me deal with my past experiences in a more positive light. This take on things has really helped to elevate my writing in ways that I never expected.

So really I wrote this collection of poems for me, but also all the people out there who are like me. To the people who have anxiety and depression, these poems are for you. To people who don't fit into whatever standard of beauty is being shoved down our throats today, these poems are for you. To people who are having a hard time in their relationship, these poems are for you. And to everyone everywhere who are just doing the best they can, trying to make it work, and still reaching for their dreams, these poems are for you!

## Sale

The fluorescent lights shine  
bright above my head,  
exaggerating dark circles under my eyes,  
standing in faded panties,  
bloated with anxiety.

I look at the crisp lines of denim  
unassumingly hanging from cheap plastic clips,  
wildly intimidating,  
a sale tag proclaiming the price of my dignity—  
half off apparently.

An insignificant number,  
the higher it is the lower my value,  
praying this will be the last time  
I see it—knowing it isn't.

I can feel my heart rate rising,  
slide inside, button and zip...  
damn muffin top,  
not the right fit.

*Sigh...*

*Miss, can I get this the next size up?*

## Equation for Sleeplessness

The cat is meowing outside the door.

Stop it, you'll wake him up.

Does he need more food?

Did I do the flea meds this month?

At least I cleaned

the litter box.

*Plus*

I can't believe I'm paying this much

to go back to school.

How will I ever pay it all back?

Fuck, did I do my homework?

Oh yeah, I did

it earlier.

*Plus*

It's getting hot under this blanket

but if I toss it off I'll get cold.

Maybe I should grab another one?

I like the weight.

It feels like

a hug.

*Plus*

You're thirty years old.

No job, no savings, no house,

No husband, no kids, no hope...

Everyone seems like they've got

their life together.

You suck.

*Plus*

One failed marriage already.  
That's probably why  
he won't marry you.  
Four years and counting,  
the biological clock  
ticking away.

*Multiplied by*

What is wrong with you?  
What is wrong with you?  
What is wrong with you?  
What is wrong with you?  
What is wrong  
with you?

*Plus*

Chest feels like it's caving in.  
Don't cry, don't cry, don't cry  
You'll get the pillow wet.  
You're just not good enough.  
You'll probably  
die alone.

*Plus*

What are you making for dinner tomorrow?  
You need to go grocery shopping.  
Hopefully there won't be  
a ton of people there.  
Or the weird guy at the  
check stand.

*Plus*

What time is it?  
Shit, it's three in the morning.  
The perfect time to quickly remember  
every mistake and awkward  
moment of your  
whole life.

*Equals*

Never having  
a moments peace  
or a good night's sleep  
ever  
ever  
again.

## A Night at The Theater

skipping the boards fantasizing  
a new preceding, now following  
the ancient educator toils to

hear the sound of a  
sensation so high it brings  
down the chandelier. alternative

worlds brought into  
existence—how could something so  
wicked not bring a tear

to our eye? like minds inspire  
a carousel of anticipation  
giddy with delight and

when the world has  
dimmed our hearts  
beat as one. collected we

soar on the edge of the world  
unknown, yet longed for strains  
resonate through our soul.

## 100 Notes on Being Fat—

You're not *really* hungry

Don't eat that!

Hungry for self-acceptance?

Count them out

54 Goldfish crackers

Maybe you can have more

If you run 100 miles

Or skip lunch *for-e-ver*

Wanting to look like everyone else

Skinny is pretty

It won't cost a fortune to clothe yourself

And people will like you

Half of you

It fit last Spring

Now it won't even zip

How can that be?

Humiliation my *constant* state

More to love?

More like more to hate

Staring into a funhouse mirror

*Dying* to fit in

Shame tips the scales

And all you want is a pizza

## Elegy of Innocence

The feathers torn off

A toy mouse skinned

*Do not* pass GO—

*Do not* collect two-hundred dollars.

Broken mirrors

Shards of a fractured personality

Sorry!

You get me, I'll get you back.

Throw a dart

Perhaps you'll hit the mark

Damn.

You sunk my Battleship!

Inconvenient happenstance

A book blinks its lazy eye

It was Colonel Mustard

In the library, with the candlestick...

I knew it all along

## A Magical Dictionary from Obsession to Silence

- ardor : undeniable feelings for another  
: an enemy that must be roused  
with your less than formidable strength  
: false valentine
- hope : the sound of optimism beating in my chest  
: light that makes fear scurry  
: danger that goes unacknowledged
- combine : to force two to become one  
: a compromise?  
: a cop-out
- obsession : how to deal with electromagnetic desire  
: intense scrutiny of the self
- hurt : burning in the core seeping out to every nerve  
: waves that turn to ashes
- tear : rending the expectations of creation  
: the drops of a confused passion
- alone : to recharge a depleted happiness  
: deepest fear personified
- empty :  
: how far can you throw a coin down a wishing well

: echoes heard in a childless womb—can anybody hear me?

silence : the deafening roar of my failures

: the place where optimism dies

## Nag

Don't forget your lunch!

Did you call your sister? It's her birthday...

Could you help me get those tacks out of the ceiling?

Oh, and please put your dirty clothes in the hamper.

I love you so much!

Don't forget to apply for your passport!

Call me when you get there, okay?

Could you please take out the recycling?

Oh, and please put your dirty clothes in the hamper.

I love you!

Don't forget to pick up your prescriptions!

Text me when you're on your way home please.

Could you make dinner tomorrow night?

Oh, and please put your dirty clothes in the hamper.

love you

You forgot your lunch—again.

Looks like I'll be going to Mexico without you.

I can't see the porch for all the cardboard boxes.

**PUT YOUR DIRTY FUCKING CLOTHES IN THE FUCKING HAMPER!!!**

... still love you

## Of Lost Things...

By the pricking of my thumbs,  
I look through a glass, darkly  
pondering the path ahead.

Like a dragonfly in amber  
I am trapped in the fox's lair—  
I can't see the way out of my own mess.

In this untimely resurrection there are no  
useful occupations or deceptions to distract myself,  
and even my best laid schemes are futile.

And when the battle is joined  
I will surrender my faith to you...  
Is it enough to ransom a man's soul?

Straddling both sides now  
there is freedom and whiskey,  
though both burn with a sweet ache.

I am not ready  
nonetheless I weep alone,  
and all debts are paid.

## What do you do when your husband points a gun in your face?

Scenario: It's three in the morning and you've been arguing for hours. He's been screaming at you nonstop for an hour straight like it's a goddamned filibuster and you're so tired you say fuck it, I'm going to bed. You're lying there when he comes in and points his father's .22 at your face and you're so tired you say fuck it, just do it already. When he lowers the gun and walks out, do you feel relieved or disappointed?

## Thoughts I Can't Say Aloud

### I.

do you ever think of atlas  
holding up the sky?  
and here i am  
crushed by  
the weight of  
your expectations.

### II.

you don't even notice the chip  
in your windshield  
spidering out in supplication  
until there is a  
giant crack  
spanning the entire window.

### III.

she existed as a racoon  
rummaging through the refuse  
subsisting off the scraps.  
affection like an overripe melon rind  
one man's trash  
is another racoons treasure.

### IV.

she loved  
reading romance novels—  
they are the best  
kind of fantasy  
because everyone knows  
love isn't real.

## To Prove Oneself Worthy

I buy the makeup and cake it on to cover my big ass pores hoping that you will see I am pretty

*and maybe you will want me.*

I sing in the car at the top of my lungs hoping that you will see I am talented

*and maybe you will want me.*

I work my fingers to the bone hoping that you will see I am dedicated

*and maybe you will want me.*

I count every single calorie that goes in my mouth and go to the gym for hours at a time so that you will see I am disciplined

*and maybe you will want me.*

I cook and clean and do the laundry so you will see I am a good homemaker

*and maybe you will want me.*

I go to school hoping that you will see I am smart

*and maybe you will want me.*

I say thank you over and over hoping you will see I am grateful

*and maybe you will want me.*

I open the door and leave hoping you will see I am independent

*and maybe you will want me.*

And I never saw you again.

## Tears Fall Up

Rain on my pillow

Drops like fire

Passing lash and brow

*Who would care*

*If I decided to go away?*

I had a chance

It was a fucking disaster

Must be one per customer

Universal comeuppance

Should have tried harder

No use to anyone

Can't sleep

*Who would care*

*If I decided to go away?*

Two cats, perhaps

Well, one cat

The other one is a jerk

Here lies \_\_\_\_\_

She was loved by one cat

How sad, to have no dreams

A life gone fallow

*Who would care*

*If I decided to go away?*

## sorry (a danez poem)

you don't have to say you're sorry  
i already know that you are

it's in the way you smile at me  
the way you hold me tight at home

the baleful look you give me when  
you think i'm not looking your way

but i am looking and i see  
the work you put into our life

i don't take for granted the gift  
which is the love we have for each other

how rare to find this much respect  
a partnership of hearts and minds

to talk without fear of judgement  
to hold you till my heart's content

but I cannot say I'm sorry  
for wanting a life full of you

## Authors Notes

*'Equation for Sleeplessness'* was inspired by an offhand comment made by Professor Grimmer during midterm presentations about working at home past a certain point in the night affecting her sleep. I took that phrase and ran with it.

*'A Night at The Theater'* contains direct references to *'The Phantom of the Opera,' 'Wicked,'* and *'Carousel.'*

*'100 Notes on Being Fat—'* was directly modeled off *'100 Notes on Violence'* by Julie Carr. This was a class assignment and it is exactly 100 words long (excluding the title).

*'Elegy of Innocence'* is utter nonsense and I love it. Everyone needs a little nonsense in their lives. It also contains direct references to popular board games Monopoly™, Sorry!™, Battleship™, and Clue™.

*'A Magical Dictionary from Obsession to Silence'* was directly modeled off *'A Magical Dictionary from Bitumen to Sunlight'* by Rita Wong for a class assignment.

*'Of Lost Things...'* is mostly comprised of episode titles from the TV series 'Outlander.'

The final poem, *'sorry (a danez poem)'* is the final assigned poem for this class. It is comprised of 8 couplets ending in a volta and each line is 8 syllables long modeled after forms used by Danez Smith.