

# Poems to Breathe by



Words //  
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Art //  
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I wrote the following poem at some point on the long road to motherhood. After I wrote it—fairly spontaneously, like all the poems here—the title dropped in just as quickly. It was clearly a love note. Truly lifetimes of longing and...would she ever come?

*Maybe* turned out to be Emery, who will be five in the fall, and who is the grand master of my ever-evolving education on humility and love.

We created this book—a collection of simple poems I've written over the past several years paired with images Emery created during the coronavirus quarantine—as a small offering to you and to the world at this painful, transformative time.

May it bring you comfort. May you be healthy and safe. May every *maybe* in your heart make itself real.

### **Letter to Maybe**

To be honest  
I'm not sure  
that I'm the kind of mom  
you might want.

I'm not the kind  
to make cupcakes  
shaped like kittens  
or speak Spanish over dinner  
even though we're really white.

I like things tidy  
and might not hang  
your bad art on the wall  
and I'm silly, only sometimes  
and I really like to sleep.

But, I do have this.

I have loved you for lifetimes  
even though I'm afraid  
and what I don't know  
we'll discover together.

I like rocks and dogs  
and listening  
and going for walks  
to count pretty things.

I want to help you wear fear  
strong like courage  
to know kindness  
and how to dance  
with your pain.

I want to understand  
that you are not mine  
but merely part of me.

I don't know you  
but I do  
and already  
I see forever  
in your face.



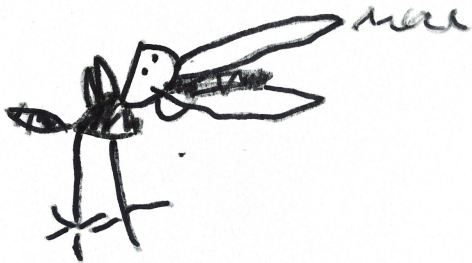
## Nine geese

Today before light  
crept into the still dawn sky  
nine geese flew overhead  
east, to the beginning  
toward hope  
they flew to fetch the sun.

I could appreciate them more  
for this, for the pioneering thrust  
of wing on cold air  
incessantly forward  
all instinct of body  
and wind.

I could thank them  
for the ease of black bodies  
on charcoal clouds.

I, too, could be ruthless  
in my soaring, unthinking  
and indescribably free.



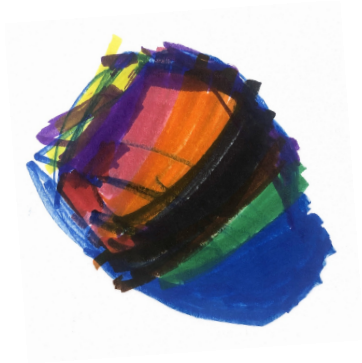


## **Any sun**

Don't be a saturated flower  
drunk, and sunken beauty  
in the shadow of another.

Make a source of the sun, any sun  
just something that fills you  
with the heat of yourself.

Burn every smallness  
and false ending  
become the ashes  
from which you arise.

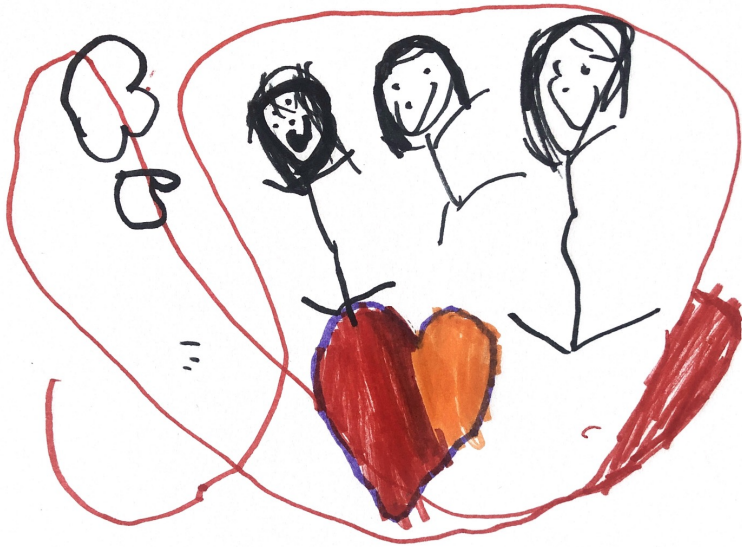


## Hunger

Last night I drank  
a whole moon.

I didn't even want to  
she just poured herself smooth  
and full of everything  
into my lonely dreams.

Today I am unanchored  
with beginning and sky  
still hungry for the weight  
of her answers.



## **Village**

Sometimes  
it takes a village  
not so much to do  
but to remember  
the whole of you.

## For winter

My fingers can be violent  
in the way they work the earth  
desperate claws, seeking order  
a stop to so much decay.

But today was different.

Today, I knelt  
in the cool wet of morning  
wanting only to know  
what was there.

My fingers combed grasses  
gently, easing the brittle  
and broken parts free.

They tucked worms, away  
in safe holes  
and plucked dead weight  
from blossoms to breathe.

They worked steady, and slow  
in rhythm with the laws of leaves  
while the rest of me bowed down  
humble, and in love  
with all this evidence of life  
with all that had died  
in the still, dark soil  
of winter.



WORM





## **This life**

This life is a maze.

One way in, one way out  
so many ways to walk  
with yourself  
through the center.

## Holding

This morning  
I dusted my shoulders free  
of resentment.

It worked, until it didn't.

So then I splashed  
my face clean  
sending heavy lines  
of holding  
fast, and easy  
down the drain.

Later, something else.

Some days are like this—  
a hundred little letting go's.



## Life of Pi

Of course we are all living  
the life of Pi  
alone, on open sea  
our un-tamed tiger, too close  
the wrath and love  
of our nameless gods  
all around.



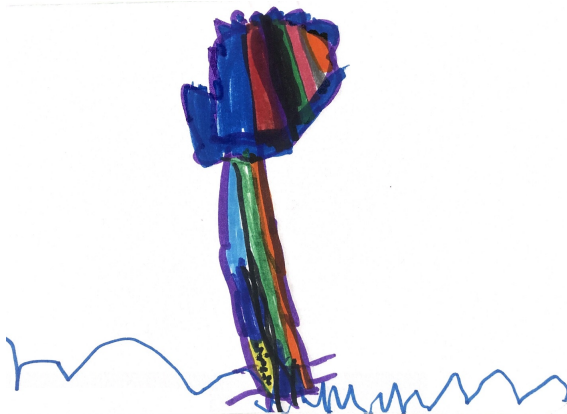
## Free

Maybe just this morning  
you noticed yourself growing  
like a vine, wrapped  
around a weakened tree.

There is nothing life-giving  
for you here.

Make a small stake  
of something dignified, and new  
just deep enough to hold  
in gritty soil.

Place yourself close  
to the violets  
or the towering oak  
befriend every solid  
or pretty, fleeting thing  
that reminds you  
to be free.



## Home

What if the breath of you  
isn't really, or only  
yours at all, but a shared  
and sacred thing  
a sacrament moving  
making life, between us  
all possibility, inward  
grace, out  
injustice, in  
humility, out  
and so on like that  
an alchemy of lung  
and love.

How might you allow  
your own rhythms to heal you  
and what would you send back  
to the world, from inside?

What if we allowed  
ourselves to be  
one wing, beating  
carrying each grief  
and every longing  
through gray, and shattered  
back home.





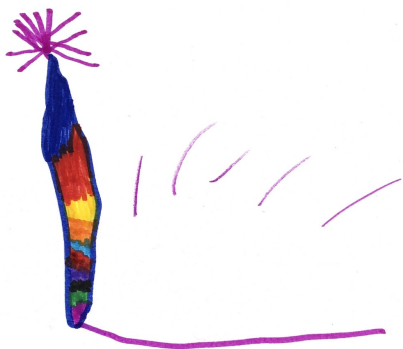
## More

I want to sleep for a week  
and wake up new.

Not so much different  
but more of me  
and less of them  
and that  
and those other things  
I used to be  
before the soft, gauzy moon  
held me close  
and sang to me  
my name.

## Big

How about we throw  
an elephant party  
all the ladies  
trumpeting our joy  
at sunrise  
pouring our wrinkles  
in the dust  
risking it all  
to save our babies  
every sorrow  
sacred ground  
being as big  
and loud  
and beautiful  
as we can be.



## Tulip

I love them all  
but the hidden ones  
most of all, bulbs  
like bright ideas, buried  
until the gray sheet of sky  
breaks, to blue  
sending whispers warm  
and light, to damp earth  
one day waking  
that beautiful thing  
a promise, surrendered  
now returned.





## Full

There's been so much shouting  
I lost my words  
for simple things.

Like how the clouds  
with their steady refusal to stay  
or be any one thing  
can give a sense of the world, moving  
and for a moment it feels okay.

Or how a seagull  
flying alone  
against all odds  
in a windstorm  
is not a human thing  
not struggling or lonely or sad  
but free.

Or how you can love someone  
for so long, one way  
until you imagine them, erased  
and your love has no choice  
but to change.

There are a thousand little things  
to notice every day.

Feed them  
to your grasping eyes  
to your blazing heart  
to your fear.

Allow yourself  
the easy comfort  
of stone and leaves.

Be nourished, and full  
for the long march  
for the work  
for the life  
you have signed up  
to lead.





