



# the truth of you

poetry about love, life,  
joy, and sadness

**iain s. thomas**

Bestselling author of *I Wrote This for You* and *Every Word You Cannot Say*\*

**the truth of you**

## A Moment of Your Time

The truth is you're not tired—it's just something you say.

The truth is there's a part of you that's still in love, that'll always be in love.

The truth is that sometimes you forget every good thing you've ever done.

But the truth of you is complicated and tragic. But always beautiful.

You forget.

So I wrote this to remind you.

—pleasefindthis

# the truth of you

poetry about love, life,  
joy, and sadness

iain s. thomas



**Andrews McMeel**  
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Dear You,

I want you to know that I see you.

I want you to know that even if no one else does, even if you are a ghost in this bookshop, or just the static floating across the screen of your computer, wherever you're reading this, I see you.

I see you in the dark, and I see you in the gray. I see you as a story, as words I have spoken or may yet speak. Maybe only in a memory or a dream.

I want you to know that the space between the letters in this book is a space for you.

So if you have the time and the inclination, you can sit here with me, just for a while.

And perhaps between us, we can see the truth, as it stands in these moments that we share.

—Iain S. Thomas

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Iain S. Thomas', written in a cursive style.



I



In which we fall in love.





### A Falling Bird

They love you like rain loves,  
and in return, you love like a flood loves,  
and just like a flood,  
you are not in control  
because that is the nature of your love,  
and you have never learned to love  
another way.



A Door in Infinite

"Tell them how we met."

"I was knocking on your heart,  
hoping that you were listening."

"And some empty part of me  
heard them knocking  
from the other side of the universe,  
and I answered."



## An Admission

Be honest  
and tell them what hurts.

Because if you don't,  
you will never be happy.



A Book Left Out in the Rain

Love is the wrong word,  
even if it is the only word that makes  
sense.

It is different. It is the kind of love  
that someone puts in a book  
and closes and opens,  
like wings.

And like everything with wings,  
it feels like it could fly away  
at any moment.

And shake the air.

And leave both of us  
breathless and stunned.



A Star Shining On Forever

How long will this last?

If you mean the world,  
or who we are to each other,  
then I do not know.

If you mean how  
long will I be me,  
then my answer is  
forever.



## A Scratch in the Chrome

The heart is not a perfect machine  
that you can make demands of.

It's just a heart.

Just a thing.

And somehow,  
absolutely everything.





## A Broken Watch

Forever is the time  
it takes for you to look at me  
when you laugh in a crowded room.



A Tree Growing Where It Can't

The sunlight says,  
sometimes you fall in love  
like snow falls at night,  
quietly and gently  
covering every part of you,  
and the next day  
the world looks completely different.

And that is how I fall in love.

Like snow.



A Promise on a Bridge

Love me like you love me,  
and I will love you like I love you.

If you let me be the person I am,  
when you are far away  
and you don't know what to do,  
the thought of me will be a home for you.



A Single Beat of a Bird's Heart

Do not say,

"I love you,"

if you mean,

"You make my life easy."

Because love is only ever easy  
in the beginning  
and from then on,  
if it's worth it,  
it needs work.

So don't go into love thinking  
it will be easy.

Go into love thinking  
it will be worth the work.



A Conversation the Next Day

I think I'm going to be hurt by you,  
and if I'm going to be hurt by you,  
I want you to do it accurately.  
I want to understand it.  
I want the hurt to be worth it.



## A Sudden Silence

Maybe your heart  
has heard the same thing  
for so long,  
when it hears a voice  
tell it something else is possible,  
it is afraid.



A Field of Wheat in the Wind

I ask only for forever,  
and every single time  
you answer me in some different way,  
because every part of you  
is the answer  
I am looking for.

Let our lives be a question  
and let us never stop answering it.





## A Soft Light on the Horizon

If the aliens landed and  
wanted to know the most beautiful  
word I knew, I would tell them your name.

I would tell them the name  
of the town you grew up in.

I would tell them how your mother  
whispered stories  
to help you sleep  
when you were a baby,  
and how she would take you outside  
and show you the moon as a way  
to let you know  
that there was an order  
to things,  
and even big things had their place,  
even if that place was in the night sky  
among the stars.

I would explain  
that there is a way  
you can touch me that does not feel  
like anything else on Earth.

Not like water, or stone, or air, or fire.

I would say your name three times,  
and I would say that your name  
is all of these things  
and it is the most beautiful word I know.



A Place We Can Talk

"Is this it?"

"It's my heart."

"Is that all of it?"

"I don't know.

But everything feels different

when you hold me.

The world spins a little faster and

our days feel a little shorter.

The stars leave silvery trails behind them

as they arc across the sky above us.

The sun and the moon chase each other

when you hold me.

I am not myself and you are not you."

"Then who are we?"

"Maybe because we are nothing to no one,  
we are everything to each other.  
And this feeling,  
I swear,  
is my whole heart."



## A Child Collecting Leaves

I asked you what you missed the most  
and you told me you missed the ocean.

So I filled every room in the house  
with seashells until, at night,  
you could hear a thousand waves  
whispering you to sleep.

I asked you what you missed and  
you told me you missed the forest.

So I filled the house with pine needles  
until at night, when you closed your  
eyes, you could smell a giant forest  
all around you.

I asked you what you missed  
and you told me you missed the stars.  
So I took a screwdriver and  
made a thousand holes in the roof.

I asked you what you missed and  
you told me you missed kissing.

And so I kissed you.

And I kissed you.

And I kissed you.

I kissed you in

spring,

summer,

autumn,

winter.

I kissed you by the sea and

in the forest and

under the stars.

Because when I kissed you,

in those moments,

neither of us missed anything at all.



A Lottery Ticket in the Rain

Sometimes all it takes  
to change your life forever  
is a person you didn't know  
you were looking for.





## A Dictionary

To look at you  
is to want to invent a new word for love,  
because the only word for love is love,  
and when I look at you,  
I feel like you deserve better.



## A Challenge

You took my tongue,  
and so  
I wrote about love.



An Infinite Line

I am the start  
of ten thousand  
poems

but you are the end  
of all of them.





II

In which we are sad.

## An Empty Parking Lot

You won't see the good  
in things because  
they won't be perfect.

And you will starve  
because you will have  
no goodness in your life.

Because you are waiting for perfect.

And perfect never comes.



A Factory in the Sky

Your heart was too big.

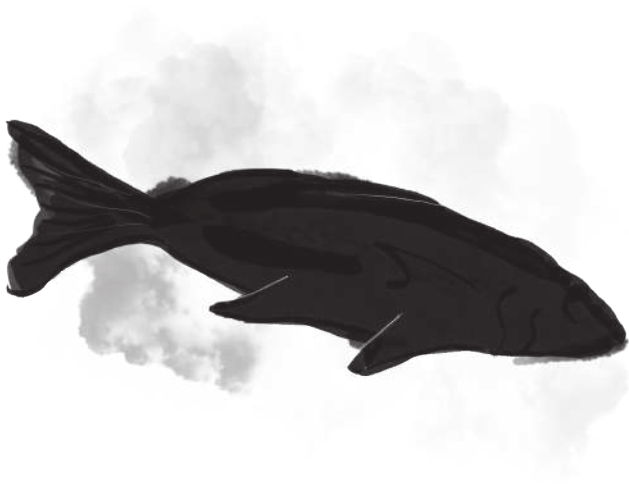
They had to break it  
to fit it inside your body  
before you were sent to Earth.





### A Shadow on the Water

You are carrying all that you are  
like a bucket trying to hold the ocean,  
spilling over and apologizing for it  
because you were told to be small  
and you never learned how to do that.



## A Word That Matters

I will see my reflection  
in the screen  
or I will notice it  
as I pass a window  
and I will remember  
that I am not actually  
who I think I am,  
I'm just a person who too often  
is afraid to go outside.

In words,  
here,  
is the only place  
I've ever felt good enough.



## A Sign of Indifference

We are not the same.

You do not wake up every morning  
unsure of who you're supposed to be.

You've never had to take a moment  
and negotiate your right to exist.

And I understand that  
you do not understand  
these things.

But I cannot be anyone else  
but me.



## A Stranger on the Street

There are people who  
are too sensitive for the world,  
and their brain  
gives them lines to say  
that make no sense,  
and all of the nonsense  
and the fairy tales  
and the strange light  
of everything  
goes into them.

And they are beautiful  
in a way few  
will ever know.



A Road to Somewhere I've Never Been

I don't think there's anyone else out there  
who knows what it feels like to be me.

But maybe if I crumple part of myself  
into a little ball  
and throw it out of the car,  
someone will pick it up one day and say,

"This is mine."



## A Chance to Run Home

To think that you are alone  
in everything you feel  
is to experience a kind of loneliness  
that no one should ever know.





A Bird Looking North

I am looking for all the places I cannot go.

The surface of the sun.

The other side of the moon.

A ship in a glass bottle.

Home.



## A Fire in a Forest

If you make anything sad enough  
or true enough,  
people will call it a poem.

They will see you spinning  
in the afternoon light and celebrate you,  
not knowing that you are a fire  
burning down all around,  
an explosion of sparks and orange leaves  
walking the earth.



## A Reflection in Broken Glass

Sometimes, people lie to you,  
because they just want to  
break something good  
to see what it looks like  
when it shatters.

Sometimes, people are assholes  
for no other reason  
than they want to be assholes.

There is no magic  
or mystery to assholes.



A Noise in the Night

I am picked up by the wind  
and I must believe  
that if it is taking me somewhere,  
it is taking me into the soft light  
of the future,  
to a place where I am not me but still me,  
where I am only the parts of myself  
that accept every other part of me.



## A Clock That Tells Strange Time

Sometimes

I just want someone

to put my heart

in a watchmaker's hands,

as a jumble of silver shards,

and say, "Fix it."



## An Unknown Color

There is a feeling  
I do not have a name for,  
and all my life,  
I have been trying  
to give it one.



A Rising Moon

How long must I wait to feel the way

I've been told I'm supposed to feel?

When am I allowed to feel  
the way I feel?



An Absentee

I'm sorry for saying hello.

But you looked like a way out  
of me.





## A Horse Running

We're just born.

And we think we're not good enough.

So we chase something  
to fill the empty space inside of us  
with some kind of goodness.

Something that will make us well  
enough  
to hold ourselves again.



## A Fish Out of Everything

I have decided  
when I grow up,  
I want to feel normal  
in a crowded room.



## A Broken Television

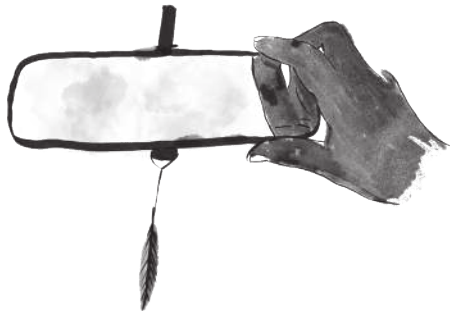
We live in a world  
in which people think  
being angry  
will make them feel better,  
but instead,  
it just makes them angry.



## Taillights in the Distance

I know  
there is a part of the road  
that does not have  
this place in the rearview mirror.

And I will drive  
until I get there.



## A Fading Star

I feel like if I could just take  
one good step,  
I could run forever.



A Dog Running in the Street

They put clothes on you  
that don't fit and say,

"You'll grow into this."

And one day you stop growing  
and the world is still too big for you.



A Brief Spark

Somewhere, a band plays on.

A captain salutes a wave.

A starling arcs across the sky.

And I am the band  
and I am the captain  
and I am the starling,  
arc-ing across the sky.





## A Bike Left Against a Tree

I feel like I've seen enough of the future  
become the past to know  
that what you're haunted by,  
you will always be haunted by.

A circle of salt  
couldn't even keep the wind at bay,  
and a priest will mumble what he mumbles,  
and his blessings will not be worth the  
money you paid for them.

I'm not saying you can't change,  
just that you can't change the things  
that have happened to you.

You must grow around them, and  
if you grow for long enough,  
you can swallow them up,  
like a tree swallows up a sign or bike  
left leaning against it, decades ago.

Or maybe all you can do in the end  
is make friends with your ghosts.

## An Empty Bench

Sometimes I sit on a bench  
and I look at the people sitting around me,  
and wonder if they're wondering who they are  
as hard as I'm wondering who I am,  
or who I'm supposed to be.

I try to think my way out of everything.

Sometimes I feel like  
if I can just think better,  
I can fix me.

But sometimes, I think  
I'm just thinking too much.  
Thinking about thinking.  
Thinking about trying not to think.

And I am chased out of my own mind.



A Spinning Wheel

Don't worry.

This doesn't hurt.

This is just who I am.



### A Bag in a Doorway

Sometimes I forget to put my anxiety down  
when I get home and I just carry it around  
on my back all night  
because it's familiar  
and it feels strange to let it go.



## A Tree House in Winter

I feel like there was a meeting  
before I was born  
that I wasn't invited to.

I feel like there is a secret button  
everyone has  
somewhere on their body  
that they can press  
whenever they want to feel normal,  
and I was never given one  
or told where mine was.



## A Broken Telephone

I still wish I knew  
what I was supposed to sound like.  
But in the quiet at night,  
sometimes I think I can hear me.

Or at least someone who sounds like me.



## A Sense of Fear

I miss the world.

And the biggest room in it  
would feel small right now.



## A Shiver

Some people do  
so much  
to be loved by others,  
and so little  
to love themselves.





### III

In which one of us leaves.



A Shadow in a Flame

I love you.

I love you as much as I have ever loved you.

And some part of me will never, ever stop loving you.

But there is another part of me  
that feels like we're trying to go somewhere  
where we'll both be happy,  
and that we're both always trying to get there,  
and we're always trying really, really, really hard.

But I don't know if we'll ever get there.

I feel like we'll just always be trying.

And I'm tired.

And I need to know if you're tired too.

This doesn't mean I don't love you.

It means I love you enough to tell you

I don't know if I can try anymore.



## An Act of Forgiveness

Maybe,  
they were some great lesson  
that you needed to learn  
and one day,  
you will be able to look back,  
and be glad that you learned it.



## A Ripple

Some part of you already knows  
if you're going to leave  
or not.

It is how you will be hurt and  
how long you will be hurt for  
that you are trying to decide.



A Path Across a Field

I tried to write you out of me.

I tried to cut you out  
the way you cut me out.

And nothing worked.

And now all I can do,  
line  
by  
line,  
is write myself out of me.



## A Sad Goodbye

You left today  
like rivers flowing backward.  
The paths and waterways  
connecting us  
however small and insignificant  
carried pain instead of love.

In the end, the lights go out  
one by one and knowing they were lit  
doesn't dim the dark.





A Long Drive Nowhere

I have driven so far  
only to discover  
you cannot outrun  
a broken heart.



A Door Slammed Off Its Hinges

Maybe you're a sad mess  
and I'm a sad mess too,  
and maybe right now,  
this is just who we are.

Maybe that's all we can be  
and all we can have right now.

And maybe, that can be enough.



An Edge Where the Water Meets the Land

I still put the seashell to my ear  
and pretend that the ocean  
is my friend,  
and she is whispering to me  
about her day.

And sometimes,  
I ask if she can put you on for a while,  
but she never does.



A Broken Road Stretching into the Distance

I'm not saying  
you didn't hurt me.

I'm saying  
there is a part of me  
that's willing to risk  
being hurt again.

Just not by you.

(I don't think that's being strong.

I just think I'm carrying on.)

## Shadows in the Sky

Where is the music in your mouth  
now that every bird has flown away?  
Where is anything that matters anymore?

All gone.

All gone away.



A Childhood Passing You By

And you know now,  
there's a kind of quiet that only the quiet know.

And there's a kind of place  
only the people without a place know.



A Firework That Doesn't Light

I want to know  
how many different ways to feel  
are still written on your arms,  
and am I still one of them?



## A Lonely Corner

You're trying  
not to say something  
because it's easier  
to leave  
than it is to talk.





## A Ticket to Anywhere Else

Some of us need to love deeply and earnestly.

Some of us need to feel like love  
is painful in order to know that it is love.

Some of us just want to be  
in the same room as someone else.

The question is not,  
"Is their love enough for me?"  
the question is,  
"Is your love enough for you?"



## A Key Lost in a Field

Unless you are willing  
to let someone else hold your hand  
in the dark  
and guide you out of yourself,  
you will never be able to truly love  
or be loved by anyone.



A Flashlight in a Forest

I still walk the paths we used to walk,  
hoping I can catch up to us and  
tap us on the shoulder and say,

"Hold on to this,  
because it doesn't last forever."

And my hand  
would brush against yours  
as I left.



## A Nothing

A beautiful bird in a cage eventually  
becomes an empty cage and a dead bird  
and a loss of words  
and one wondering at a funeral  
how many birds must fly away.



## An Overgrown Path

Maybe I was wrong.

You never gave me  
a good enough reason for leaving.

And now all I can do  
is think of all the reasons  
why you could've left me.

And I just want you to know  
that whatever your reason was,  
you hurt me, and despite that,  
I don't want to hurt you back.

You were good for a while.

I thought I was good too.



## A Star Blinking Out

Say the good name you have for me,  
that you hide from me.

Have the kind of fight you want  
before one of us has to ask,  
"Who started this?"

How do you win a fight  
no one started?

And why even have it  
when we've forgotten our  
names.



A Catherine Wheel

"Tell me why you're leaving."

"Because I don't think  
you know why you're staying."



## A Regret

Maybe you only get  
one good thing in your life

and maybe if God  
is feeling cruel that day,  
he makes that thing  
a person.





A Moment of Clarity

Give me a name  
for the scar  
you've given me.

And then tell me  
this doesn't hurt.

Because  
I can't say it back to you.



An Ice Cube at the Bottom of a Glass

Yes it hurts,  
but it hurts because it was good,  
and while I'm sorry it hurts,  
I will not apologize for it being  
good.



## A Sunset in a Foreign Country

I always thought  
that we were meant to change together.  
That somehow our seasons would line up,  
that your spring and your summer  
would become mine,  
that we would share an autumn,  
that I would be with you until the end of winter.

But everything changed.  
And it changed without me.



## An Amber Leaf

Everyone has one love in their life  
that changes them forever.

It shapes something inside them  
and they are different for having loved.  
Maybe you love other people along the way  
and maybe you try to love other people afterward  
but you know it's not the same  
because you have tasted something  
you cannot un-taste.

Maybe you're fourteen when you meet them  
and maybe you're forty.

But you only get one.

That's what I know now.

Because I've tried to love other people,  
and while I still love,  
I do not love the same anymore.



## A Burning Forest

God knows,  
enough terrible things happened  
to both of us when we were together.

Maybe he was punishing us for something.  
Maybe what we had was too good.

Maybe you're not supposed  
to have anything that good  
while you're still alive.



## A Prism

They left because  
someone convinced them  
that happiness  
is a kind of person  
you can find twice.



## A Window Rattling

You smell like apples  
when you think of your childhood.  
You smell like ash and smoke  
when you think of your father.  
You smell like shampoo  
when you think of your mother.

When you looked at me,  
and you were thinking of someone else,  
you smelled like rain.

And I know one day,  
you will be in someone else's arms,  
and they will look at you  
and wonder why you smell  
like a storm is coming.



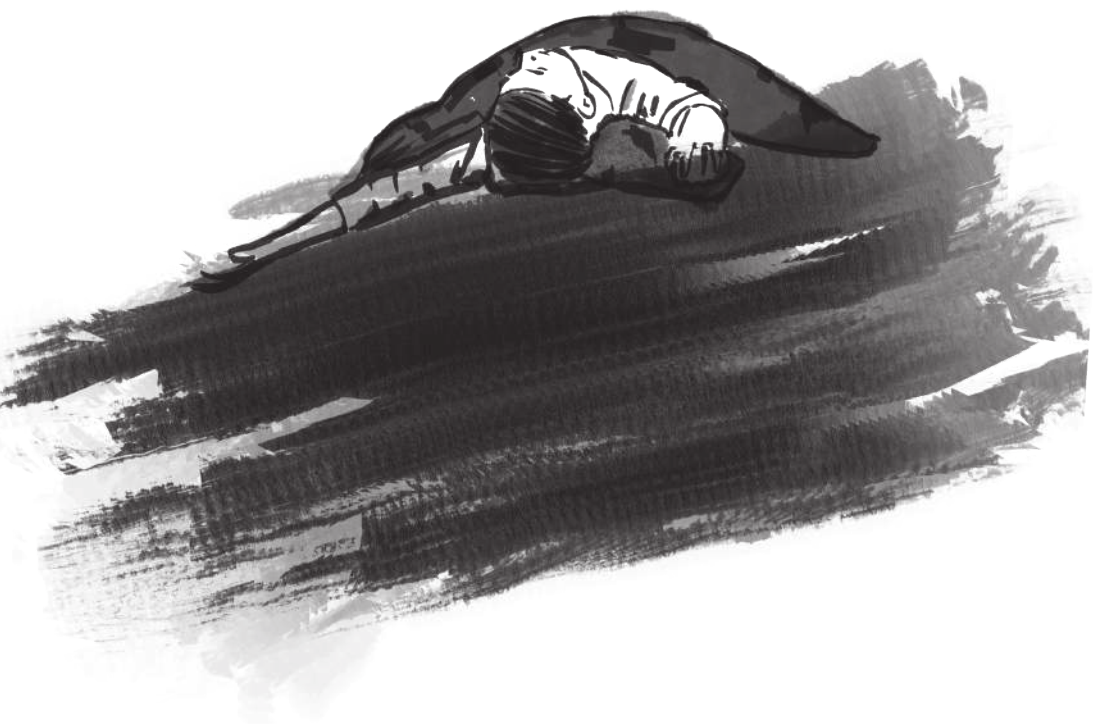


## A Day in Bed

It is the silly conversations.  
It is the unspoken things,  
the glance across a room,  
the subtle nod of a head,  
the touch of their hand  
against yours.

These are the things  
that I miss the most.

Nothing is silly  
or small  
in the end.



## A Campfire

I put up photographs  
across the walls of my room  
in the hope that some of that light  
would shine through,  
but when you capture light, it dies.

You cannot hold on to  
who you want someone to be  
without making them something  
they're not.

It kills them because each of us  
is made of a different kind of light  
and we all shine in different ways.

And we all deserve our light.



IV

In which we  
find each other,  
again.



## A Person Who Matters

You can forget how to love.

You can be alone for so long  
and be so out of practice  
that your heart doesn't know  
how to do what it was built for  
anymore.

And it takes someone special  
to teach you how to love again  
and how to let the light back in.

It takes someone amazing.



A Light in a Window

"After now,  
after we've broken  
everything,  
what do we do?"

We turn off the light  
so we can be only  
what we feel.

We turn off the light  
so we can be who we really are,  
even if it's just until the sun comes up.

And we can be real until then.





## A Sermon

Sometimes you are ready  
for each other,  
sometimes not.

All you can do  
is try to let each other be  
who you each need to be  
in the moments you have  
together.



A Hand Made of Water

We don't know  
if something is meant to be.

All we can do is try  
because if we do not try,  
then that is not life.

And so we must try.



## A State of Being

I will become a plant that only grows in certain parts of the world at certain times. I will become a bird no one's ever seen before and I will be born and die without anyone ever knowing I existed. I will become a secret memory in someone's head, a surprising thought that they do not understand and they won't know where it comes from. I will become rising strings in a song, in the background of your favorite movie when two people kiss. I will become the little scrunched up receipt at the bottom of your bag and I will become the packet of sugar you rip open when you have coffee at your favorite café. I will become the moon and I will become the light shining through the leaves of the tree you climbed when you were young. I will become one beat of your heart, and it will be the best I've ever been.



A Lion Going to Sleep

If you can,  
hold my hand  
and tell me  
how much  
this still matters.



A Cloud of Dust

Even when I am turning away,  
trust me that  
I am turning toward you.

Everything is backward  
because that's the way I was made.

Your sunset is my sunrise  
and in a strange twilight,  
we can always be together.



## An Empty Chair

They come back  
and you are changed  
because now you know  
that you can lose them.

They come back  
and everything is different now  
because the world as it is  
has been given a second chance.

And as much as they come back to you,  
you come back to them.



A Broken Compass

My body's facing south  
so why is my heart and soul  
facing north?



A Cloud Coming Down a Mountain

I wrote this to let you know  
if you ever get better,  
I'll be waiting for you  
on the other side.

I'll wait,  
to show you  
I was right  
and you were strong,  
in the end.





## A Quiet Night

We are chapters apart now in the book,  
and the ending has always been written  
the way it was written then.

But maybe in other books  
that we cannot see or know,  
our stories are different there.



## A Tunnel of Light

Say you'll come with me.

Because I will burn this all down  
for a chance to start again,  
with you.



A Face in the Crowd

I promised myself  
I would never love  
anyone ever again  
and you have made  
me break that promise.

And I have never been happier  
to make a liar of myself.



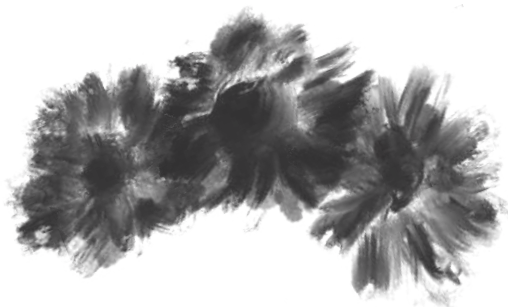
A Breeze in Autumn

And God knows now  
there are very few,  
if any  
perfect things  
in this world,  
but you are one of them.



## A Flower in a Book

There is a softness here  
that I don't know how to climb out of,  
and I am trying to tell the part of me  
that wants to climb out  
to stay, to calm down, that this is real now—  
that two people can find each other  
after they've been hurt  
and heal each other  
just by being with each other.



## A Broken Telescope

Tell me you know me.

Tell me you understand me  
in some fundamental way  
that no one else ever has.

Pull my mask from my face  
and name the stars you see  
on the other side of me.

I have never been able  
to see myself in a mirror  
but maybe you can.



## A Swimming Pool

The space between us is  
just the surface of the water  
and I can blow all the air  
out of my lungs and sometimes  
I pretend I live here for a while  
in the loud quiet at the bottom.

Until my lungs burst  
and my legs kick me back up  
because my body and my mind  
only ever listen to my heart  
up until a point.

And then, like air, they look for you.



A Necklace Your Mother Gave You

The only way  
to truly love someone  
is to love them  
like you've never loved anyone else  
in your life.

Or least, try.

Or just pretend.





A Color You Cannot See

There are trees  
that don't decay  
in Chernobyl  
because of the radiation.

We can pray  
our hearts  
will be the same.



## A Change

I have loved other people.

But none like you.

I have been other people.

But none like I am now.



V

In which we hope.





## A Brief Reminder

There will be a day after.

There will be a day  
when you wake up and your first thought  
isn't about this.

There will be a day  
when you open the door, and you walk out,  
without once worrying about this.

There will be a day  
when the thing you think about the most  
is completely and utterly unrelated to this.

There will be a day after this one  
and the luckiest among us will notice it  
for what it is.



A Bell at the Bottom of a Pond

Somewhere inside of you,  
there's hope and a voice  
waiting to say  
better things.

Waiting to tell  
the truth.



## A Closed Blind

People fuck us up,  
and it is up to us  
to find the way  
back to ourselves.

And you owe it to yourself  
to walk.



A Burst of Light

Here you are,  
alive.

And yet there are people  
who don't believe in miracles.





An Exit

Look at your worry  
and say,

"Thank you for bringing this  
to my attention.

You can go now."



A Distant Grace

Even if some part of you  
thinks you're not good enough,  
when someone says the same,  
do not mistake their cruelty  
for honesty.



### A Forest

Remember all of those  
who said you would never bloom  
when they come to seek shade  
beneath your leaves.



## A Room

We will find our way  
to the other side  
of the dark,  
to the place  
where I am not alone  
in my room,  
anymore  
than you are  
alone  
in yours.



### A Gentleness

Out here,  
far away from everyone,  
I don't feel like I know  
anyone anymore,  
and I feel like  
I'm meeting myself  
for the first time.



### An Infinite Beach

From your greatest grandfather  
to a child you will never meet,  
who will fly through space  
and see up close  
the lights you saw at night,  
he or she will look back and say:

We were all here once.





## A Thing You Cannot Point At

Before your children came,  
they were told that you would love them,  
so whatever you do, however you treat them,  
to them, it is love.

If you are cruel to them,  
they will think it is love.

If you yell at them,  
they will think it is love.

If you neglect them,  
they will think it is love.

If you walk away from them,  
they will think it is love.

And if you are kind to them,  
they will think it is love.

And if you are gentle with them,  
they will think it is love.

And if you listen to them,  
they will think it is love.

And if you hold them tightly,  
they will think it is love.

Because we cannot point  
at anything that exists and say,

"This is love,"

so you will teach your children  
every day they are with you what it is.

And one day, when someone else treats them  
the way you treated them, they will say,

"This is love."

So teach them well.

No matter what you were taught yourself.



A Good Lie (The Only One)

Even if it's not true,  
you hold their hand and  
you look them in the eyes,  
and you say,

"It's all going to be OK."

Because we all need that  
when we're small.



## A Way to Touch the Future

Hug your children.

Because when you hug them, you are hugging everyone they will ever be. You are hugging them on their first day of school and their last. You are hugging them when they get their first promotion, when they get fired, and when they don't know how they'll pay the rent.

You are hugging them when someone says "I love you" on their wedding day and when someone breaks their heart. When you hug your children, you are hugging them when they are in the dark and when they are lost and when they are not sure how they'll get home.

When you hug your children, you are hugging them forever. You are hugging them here, and you are hugging them on the day after they cannot hug you anymore and every day after that one.

So hug them.

Hug them tightly.

And hug them a little bit longer  
than you need to.



## A Chalkboard

I will not teach my children lessons.

The world will teach them all the lessons they need.

It will teach them frustration, worry, and heartache.

It will explain how hunger and anger work.

On billboards,  
it will show them all the things they cannot have.

No one can live in the world and not learn these lessons.

So my job is just to be there each day  
when the lesson is over.

And my job is to help them survive  
the things they feel.

And I will not be cruel for the sake of a lesson.

I will be compassionate, and patient, and kind.

And that is the only lesson I will teach.



A Collection of Hope

We are different.

We are allowed.

We are loving  
and we are loved.

This is what family means.



## A Voice from Your Past

You are your parents' voices,  
ringing in your ears,  
so be careful when you speak to a child,  
your voice will echo for years  
and years.



A Rhyme and a Reason

When you look at me  
and think that I'm not trying,  
that is when  
I'm trying my hardest.





A Moment in Forever

Now.

Here.

This.



A Cloud in a Dark Sky

Be the one  
who flew on.



A Home

This is a house  
of many beginnings  
and second chances.



## A Bag of Stars

Maybe you are not a part of things  
the way other people are a part of things,  
because not everything in the universe  
can be held.



## A Celestial Trade

Love is the essence  
of who we are,  
and so when we love,  
we are both giving  
a part of ourselves away  
forever  
and using something  
that can never run out.



## A Time to Decide

First,  
ask yourself  
if this is who  
you want to be  
and if the thing  
you're about to do  
is moving you closer  
or further away  
from that person.



A Book on a Table

You have decided  
that you cannot get out of bed today,  
and so your outside voice says,

"Look what a terrible person I am!"

And it's loud, so you can't hear  
the soft voice that says,

"This is what I need right now."

Unless you give yourself the quiet  
you need, to hear.



## A Clock Striking Twelve

You are looking for the quiet,  
late at night in secret small places  
that only you can call your own.

You are looking for the place  
that only belongs to you,  
after everyone else has gone to sleep,  
as you fight the nightly battle  
between getting enough sleep  
and getting enough time.

You are looking for yourself  
and I want you to know,  
it doesn't matter if you find you.

It only matters that you look.





A Sound in the Distance

Even when you are living a life  
you did not mean to live,  
who you really are  
is always calling.



A Conversation with the Self

"I forgive you.  
I forgive you  
for needing help.  
I forgive you  
for not always being 100 percent.  
I forgive you  
for not being perfect at everything  
and for not being further along  
than you wanted to be.  
I forgive you for feeling insecure  
about whether or not you ever 'make it'  
—and even if you don't,  
even if your entire life  
sometimes feels like  
one big colossal failure,  
I forgive you for that too.  
  
I forgive you, for being human."



A Moment on the Edge

You're still obsessed  
with what makes you weak,  
instead of all the things  
that make you strong.

You keep looking at a list going:

"Here, this happened to me,  
and that makes me weak,  
and this makes me weak,  
and this makes me weak."

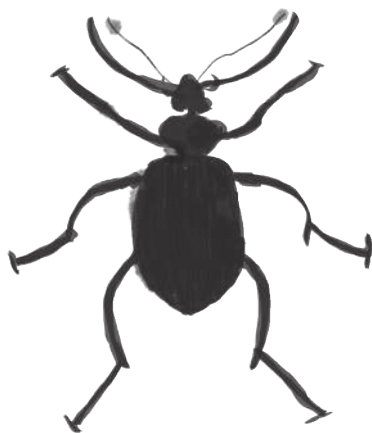
Instead of:

"These are the things  
that I had to beat, and  
because I had to overcome them,  
I am stronger than anyone  
who has not had to overcome  
these same things."



## A Figure Walking Past

As long as you make  
the person you are fighting against  
a demon,  
you will fight demons.



A Bird Circling Up

Because the world can be terrible  
and cruel, we must be kind and gentle.

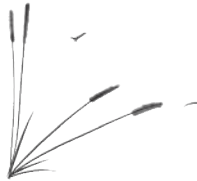
Where it hurts, we must heal.

Where it takes, we must give.

Where it destroys, we must build.

Where it divides, we must join.

Not in spite of these things  
but because of them.



## A Line at a Time

I was writing this poem when the teacher  
told me it was the end of the test and I  
was writing this poem when my mother died.

I was writing the poem when my son was  
born and on the way to the hospital,  
I was underlining the most important bits.

I was writing the poem when the water  
dried up and when the lights went out.

And now, with the army in the streets, I  
am still writing the poem.

Because the poem is my daughter, and  
sunlight and my hands and the blue of the  
ocean.

And when I die, when they bury me and  
when my children's children's children do  
not know my name,  
I will still be writing this poem.



## A Way to Travel

Tell me what matters to you  
so that when you are done  
and dusted, dead and gone,  
you are not gone.

Tell me something  
that means so much to you  
that if I tell it to someone else,  
it is a way for you to travel  
beyond the grave,  
into the hearts of strangers.







A Light

You cannot hurt me.

You cannot burn fire

or drown water.

## A Note Under a Pillow

There's a point in every movie, usually about thirty minutes before the end, when the hero is defeated in some truly spectacular way, beaten into submission and presumed dead. If not dead, then maybe they've given up and there doesn't seem to be any way to convince them to carry on and reach the thing they've been reaching for.

But then, something incredible happens. They look inside themselves and discover something they thought was lost—the strength to carry on. A single spark lights a fire inside them and they return to the fight and this time they win and the credits roll.

We tell ourselves this story again and again because it is what we want—in our darkest hour, we want to believe that something inside of us, some undiscovered or forgotten part, will help us look up from the dirt and rise to fight again.

If you are in the dark right now, remember that this might be the part where you have to get up and fight.

I know it's hard to get up again and again  
and again but this is what life asks of us—  
to get up one more time.

I am asking you, whatever you're struggling  
with right now, to get up and fight. You  
might have to get up and fight again tomorrow  
but that's not important now.

You'll only get there if you get up and fight,  
today.

Go.



## A Bright Forest

We do not plant trees.

We plant seeds.

Give yourself  
the time you need.



## A Twisting Chain

We hold on to these things so tightly that we think that they are a part of us, and if we do not have them in our hands constantly, we might not be us anymore.

We hold onto grudges, past relationships, beliefs about ourselves, and other people. We hold onto hate and frustration and the story we tell about ourselves.

"I am this good and no better; I am only ever allowed to feel this specific way. I am here in the story, and this story will repeat itself because this is who I am."

The truth is this: The more you let go of and give out, the more you will discover.

The person who you could be is waiting for you to let go of the person who you are.



A Dune in the Desert

You forget: We breathe like history breathes,  
in ups and downs.

When you breathe,  
which breath is the bad breath?  
The inhale or the exhale?

The tide comes in, the tide goes out;  
which waves are the bad waves?

In the light and shade of every picture,  
which light is the bad light?

When you live, which day is the bad day?

Everything  
is a part of  
everything else  
and you  
are a part of it too.



## A Moth's Wing

You've spent so long  
pretending you weren't hurt,  
you forgot that you were,  
so now you're wondering why it hurts,  
and then blaming yourself  
for hurting.





## A Puzzle Piece Under a Couch

And just think  
how miserable our lives would be  
if our happiness depended entirely  
on the things that happen to us.

However small,  
there are parts of us  
that we still get to choose.



A Ghost Rising

My life has fit me  
like two left shoes.

And I am alive  
with light  
and defiance.



A Small Thing That Matters

Whatever you had to fight  
to get to today,  
it was worth it  
to have you here.



A Crack in the Ice

Remember:

Even after all this,  
you are beautiful  
and your heart is pure.



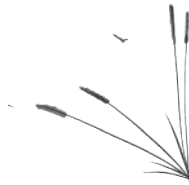
## A Forgotten Song

You give  
and you give  
and you give  
not because  
you have more to give,  
but because  
you have forgotten  
how to stop giving.



## An Old Path

When you get to the top  
and when you look  
down,  
you will not remember  
a single thing that  
hurt you.



A Silver Light

Even if no one else does,  
the moon sees you working.  
She sees you moving in silence  
to some beautiful song only you can hear.





## A Person in the Dark

At any point,  
you can close your eyes  
and make the only real decision that matters—

You can decide to love  
and accept yourself for who you are.

You can decide to love  
and accept yourself for failing.

You can love  
and accept yourself for not being the person  
you think you're supposed to be.

You don't have to buy anything,  
go anywhere, or accomplish anything to do this.

All it requires is that you close your eyes and  
decide that you are enough as you are.

So close your eyes.



A Moment in Infinity

No matter what happened today,  
you grew  
and you grew toward the sun.



## A Supernova

If you are standing in the dark  
then stand  
like you are the only light  
in the  
whole  
fucking  
universe.



## A Vector

Sometimes  
you are sad and yet  
here you are,  
a miracle in your own skin.

A magic trick.

A purpose and direction,  
made flesh.

Look at you.



A Small Ringing Bell

When I work, I ask myself,

"If I died now,  
would what I'm working on be good enough?  
Would I be happy for this  
to be the last thing I make?"

When I eat, I ask,

"How would this taste  
if I knew I would never taste it again?"

When I spend time with my family, I ask myself,

"If something happened to me tonight,  
would they know that I loved them?  
Did I show them I loved them  
by the way I touched them?  
By the way I spoke to them?"

My goal is not to distract myself  
so that I forget that I'm going to die.

My goal is to remember each day that I will.



A Hospital Room in Winter

You think this is  
too much to feel  
but here you are—  
alive and feeling this.



## A Handprint on a Window

There is a kind of secret strength.

It lives in you and no one,  
not even you, knows it's there.

It lives inside of you,  
waiting for the day it's needed,  
waiting for the darkest hour  
of the darkest night.

And then, when you are defeated,  
when your heart is so broken  
you don't know if it can ever  
be put back together again, it whispers,

"Hello. You don't know me. But I am here."





A Bandage Made of Music

We grow into our scars.

Until they disappear  
into our wrinkles.

Until we only know us,  
as us.



An Island

Tell them,

I am still out here,  
writing the song  
I cannot sing.





## A Squall

You see the storm

and think

that you are the boat

but you are the ocean

and you are the storm.

A Photograph of the Sky

You keep asking  
if you're enough  
even though  
the well echoes back  
with every coin  
you throw in:

You are.

You are.

You are.



## A Footprint on a Clean Floor

Here are the rules  
to the only game I play:

Every time I take care of myself,  
I win a point.

Every time I stay true  
to who I believe I really am,  
I win a point.

Every time  
I am kind.

Every time  
I choose love over fear.

Every time  
I am conscious of myself  
in the moments that matter.

At the end of the day, I count my points,  
and since I am the only one playing,  
none of them matter at all  
and I win.



## A Noisy Neighbor

This is what I know now:

If you do not talk about your problems  
in the good times,  
you will yell about your problems  
in the bad times.

A Rock in a Stream

You may try to move me,  
but you will only move  
yourself.

You will move mountains  
before you move me an inch.





## A Songbird

You are angry  
because your heart  
isn't listening.

But your heart wasn't meant  
to listen to you.

You were meant to listen to it.

And the more you listen  
to your heart,  
the more it will speak.



## A Red Alarm Clock

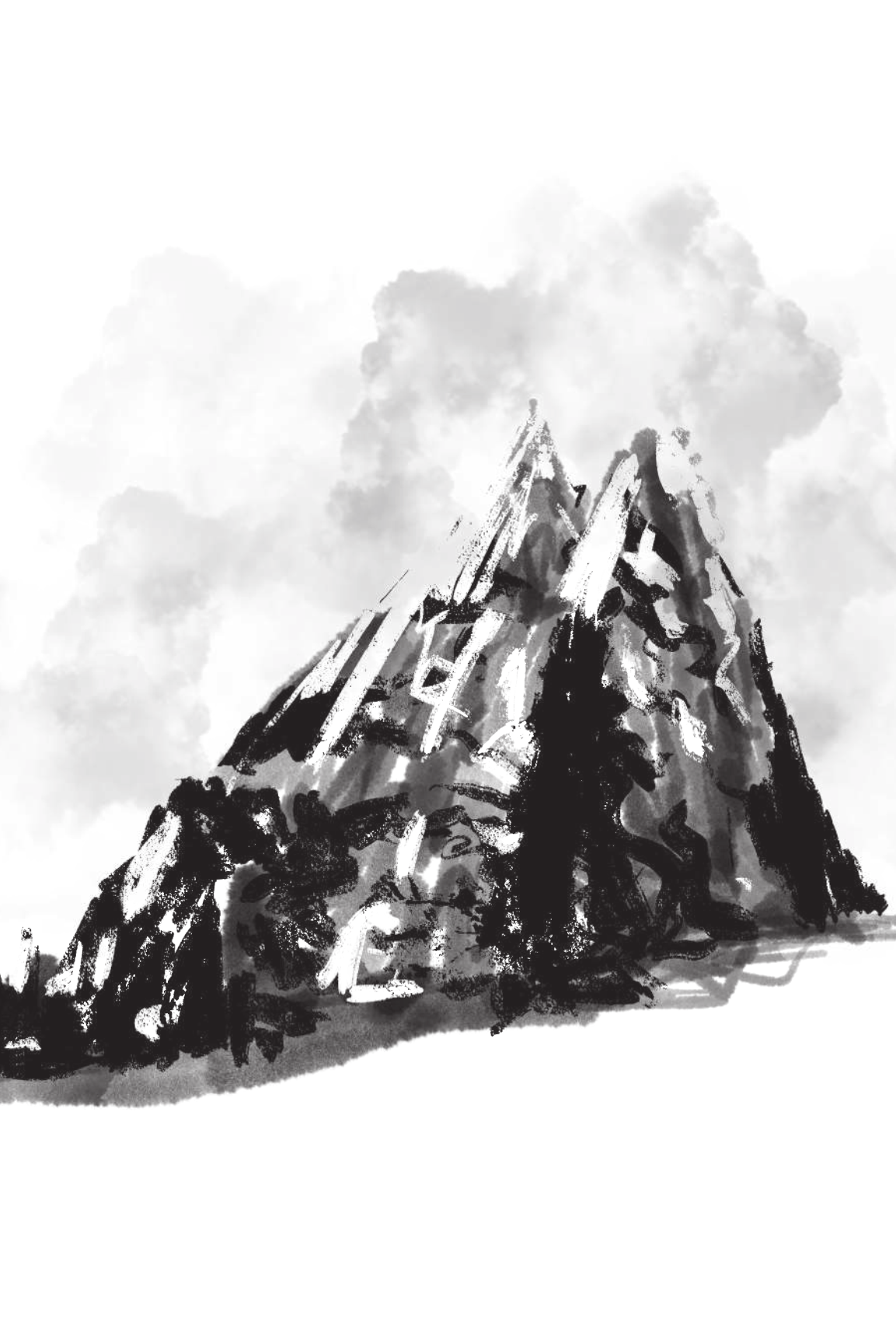
One day you will wake up  
and realize  
that you,  
and no one else,  
get to decide  
what your success looks like.



A Line in the Sand

When you have changed  
the course of a river  
by yelling at it,  
when you have stopped the  
rain from falling  
with your anger,  
when you have bullied a  
mountain  
into moving,  
then you may come  
and try to change me.





## A Crack in the Sidewalk

Do the difficult thing.

Not the easy thing.

The easy thing will let you live but the difficult thing will kill you, unless you kill it first.

Find where the difficult thing hides, in its difficult cave, in the difficult dark.

Then take your knife, and stab it in its stupid, difficult heart.\*

Now paint your face in its difficult blood.

Walk out into the light after the long, difficult night, and show the world what horrible damage you have done.

Let them fear you.

Because you are the difficult killer.

\*Get out of bed. Take care of yourself. Write one sentence. Write the sentence after that. Talk to someone. Go to the thing you said you'd go to. Avoid doing the thing you said you wouldn't. Open the curtains. Go to bed when you planned to. Forgive people who don't deserve to be forgiven and then forget them. Look in between the cracks to find the reasons why you are. Eat. Let go of what you need to let go of. Get on the train. Answer/avoid your emails.

Do just one thing that moves you closer to being the person you want to be.



A Printer's Tray

I feel the sun  
on my back as I walk away  
from the things  
that have hurt me.



A Traffic Light in the Rain

Pain travels  
until it reaches the person  
who can look at it and say,

"No further. What was done to you,  
you did to me. But I will not do it  
to someone else."

And these people  
are the reason  
the world is infinitely better  
than it should be.





A Field in Winter

If you can,  
think of every single thing  
moving in the universe right now  
and then remember  
you are a part of all that.

You turn, as the universe turns.



## A Cloud in Front of the Moon

There's this idea that we are on a journey in our lives, and in that journey there is a star that we must follow.

But you will not follow one star your whole life.

There will always be a part of yourself that says,

"No, we decided on this star, we've invested so much of ourselves! We must follow it wherever it goes!" and another part of you that says,

"This just isn't working anymore. Now that I'm here, I don't know if here is right."

Changing your mind is OK. Changing who you are is OK. Changing where you want to go and who you want to be is a fundamental, important part of life.

A good life is about finding the next star and understanding that each morning, you need to wake up and ask yourself,

"Which star do I need to follow today?"

I hope you persevere when you must but also always find the courage to change course when you need to. In your life you will travel a long distance, and you will follow many stars along the way.

May they all guide you to who you were meant to be.

## A Porcelain Figure

Sometimes, being strong  
just means  
being stronger  
than the moment you're in.



## A Passing Storm

You have a season.

You are part of a something  
that moves in circles.

It comes and goes.

You are part of something,  
and that is hard to remember  
when where you are feels like forever.

This is not forever.

This is only now.

The seasons change.

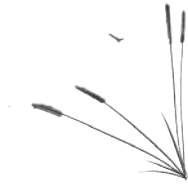
And change again.

You get another chance.

## A Toy Car

Come back  
to the good in you.

It is waiting for you  
to remember it.



## A Star Exploding

Trust yourself.

Even when no one else does.

Even if trusting yourself  
means closing your eyes  
and holding your breath.





A Gray Stone in Winter

You are not strong  
until you have been given something to hold  
that you do not believe you can hold,  
but you hold it anyway.



A Statue Outside a Church

Even when the world  
takes everything else from you,  
even when you are left with nothing.

Keep yourself, for you.



## A Fish Leaping from the Water

In your mind is a river.

The river is beautiful and sunlight glints off the ripples that run across it. Perhaps it's the most beautiful river you've ever seen. As you watch the river, occasionally a fish will rise to the surface. Sometimes it is a beautiful fish, and sometimes it is an ugly fish. Sometimes the fish is large, sometimes it might seem bigger than the river itself. Sometimes there are many small fish that dart in and out of the water as it runs. Some of the fish have names like "Something I Need to Fix," "Exciting New Thing," "The One Thing I Need to Make Me Happy," "Something I Need to Do Later," "Why Doesn't This Person Love Me," or "The Thing That Is Actually Wrong with Me."

It is very easy to look at all these different fish in all their different colors and sizes and get so lost in them. You may get scared or excited by one of the fish and run along the bank of the river to try and keep up with it (or run away from it), you might wade in and try to hold it in your hand and you may even succeed in that for a while. But in no way and at no point have you ever actually been a fish and at no point will you become one.

Yet, many of us get so concerned with these fish that swim past that we think we're them, and they're us. But we're not.

We're sitting on the bank of a river in the sun.

It is hard to remember this.

Watch a child play with a toy car—what sound does the child make? It makes the sound of the engine because in the child's mind, the child IS the car. He (or she) has become the thing he is holding. This is what we do. We think we are our depression. We are our Exciting New Project. We are our If This Person Loves Me Everything Will Be OK.

But we're not.

You and I are just sitting on the edge of a river.

## A Wave

The people who need your help  
are often too tired to ask for it.

Offer it anyway.

Drowning doesn't  
always look  
like drowning.



## A Hundred Years

A true friendship transcends time.

It is one long  
beautiful conversation  
that stops and starts over the years  
and if you are lucky  
it lasts a lifetime.



## A Long Shadow

Stand up.

Not because you are called  
to stand up  
but because others may need  
to see you stand  
before they do.





## A Concentric Circle

You are not just your mind,  
you are your body.  
And you are not just your body,  
you are the space around you.  
And you are not only that space,  
you are your community  
and the people in it.

Cast your heart farther and farther out.

Because you will never feel safer and  
more self-assured than when you fully accept  
that you are not alone, that you are part of some  
fundamentally magical, beautiful, living firework  
that we call everything.

You belong here.

You are meant to be here.



A Bowl of Water

We come into the world  
and think  
we have been taken,  
and so we think,  
we must take.

But this is not true.

We were given.

And so, we must give.



### A Confession

It may not seem like much,  
but I promise you  
in the grand scheme of your life,  
every single hour  
and every seemingly boring,  
mundane thing in it  
will be as precious as jewels one day.



## A Game

I am looking for myself  
and I am trying not to yell  
in case I scare myself away.

I am looking for myself  
and at first I panicked  
and I chased me  
and I heard myself running  
farther and farther away.

I am looking for myself  
in the places I once knew  
in the person I used to be,  
but when I reach out,  
I stretch like shadows stretch.

I am looking for myself  
and I have to believe I will be found  
when I want to be.

So I am waiting  
for me  
to come to me.



## A Way Through

I hope you can find some acceptance  
for something  
in your life today,  
whatever that is,  
and just allow it to be  
whatever it needs to be  
and let it take however long  
it needs to take.

Wherever you're going,  
you will get there.



## A Lullaby

Write it down  
to let it leave your body  
and to keep it forever  
at the same time.



## A River

I write to  
remind you  
of the truth  
because it doesn't last.

It floats away  
like petals in a stream  
and each day we must  
find it again and say,

"This is beautiful.  
This is beautiful."

We forget and,  
each day,  
we must remember.



A Strip of Light Under a Door

It's late at night and  
you are still looking  
for a reason to matter  
more than you already do.

They could hold up a million signs  
and write it in fireworks  
they could tattoo it across  
every inch of your skin  
they could print it in a book  
and they could yell it from tall buildings  
and you still wouldn't believe them.

You need to try.





A Galaxy

Do not ask the universe  
for permission to move.

Tell it,

"I will move."

And it will carry you  
to where you must go.



## A Silver Door

Sometimes,  
you have to write  
like you're trying  
to guide someone  
out of a burning building,  
because sometimes,  
for some people,  
you are.



### A Final Glance

One must wonder at a funeral,  
when someone says,  
"They lived a good life."  
How hard each of those letters  
must have been to write.



An Echo in the Dark

Let me die like I was born.

Memories slowly descending into the dark.

Let me forget the last few hours I won't need.

Let me wake up, surrounded by family.

Let me forget how to talk

and forget how to see;

let me forget all hurt,

and then,

let me be.



## A Bird Flying Home

A book takes a small part of me and it gives it to you and now, there is a land we share between us.

And I thank you for traveling here.

And no matter how absurd the rest of the world is right now, we must try to build a place here, in this shared land, that matters. This book can be a place we can return to when the world gets too much, a place you will always be welcome.

And one day, across a field whose length contains the universe, I will wave at you as you pass, and tell the air between us:

I see the truth of you.

And it is complicated, tragic, and always beautiful.

Always,

—Iain S. Thomas





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Andrews McMeel Publishing  
a division of Andrews McMeel Universal  
1130 Walnut Street, Kansas City, Missouri 64106

[www.andrewsmcmeel.com](http://www.andrewsmcmeel.com)

21 22 23 24 25 BVG 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN: 978-1-5248-6044-8

Library of Congress Control Number: 2020945446

Editor: Allison Adler  
Art Director: Holly Swayne  
Production Editor: Amy Strassner  
Production Manager: Carol Coe

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A Moment of Your Time

The truth is you're not tired—it's just something you say.

The truth is there's a part of you that's still in love, that'll always be in love.

The truth is that sometimes you forget every good thing you've ever done.

But the truth of you is complicated and tragic. But always beautiful.

You forget.

So I wrote this to remind you.

—pleasefindthis

**Iain S. Thomas** is a writer and new media artist. He lives in Cape Town, South Africa.

  
**Andrews McMeel**  
PUBLISHING®  
www.andrewsmcmeel.com

  
audiobook  
available

**\$14.99 U.S.A.** (\$19.99 Canada)

ISBN: 978-1-5248-6044-8

  
9 781524 860448 51499

Printed in the U.S.A.