

dear rachel ◦

today , researching in the archives of art & libraries of mental illness  
for my next book , i trip over your words

"i wanna write what it feels like to write what it feels like to be crazy" .

weaving thru your fingers , bursting from your chest , drizzling down  
your tongue , here i am  
erykah badu bertha rogers nayyirah waheed audre lorde angel nafis nikki  
giovanni mery yolanda sanchez aracelis girmay mary oliver akwaeke emezi  
sade lizzo ella amaya kade cahe tarfia faizulla zaha judah asmi \_\_\_\_\_  
the latest in a line of poets  
, here is you & we write

"poetry as therapy" .

a week ago i learned how my noradrenaline serotonin dopamine get  
collected , cut , re-stitched , lost threads of someones nanas 43-year  
old underwear  
how my deep cerebrum & brainstem get  
diagrammed on college classroom chalkboards  
how psychologists get  
busy solving my sparkle with nuclear equations & classifying my  
butterflies by common oxidation states  
if you meant to measure my acceptability amiability agreeability either  
turn your barometer sideways or open the "drafts" folder  
& read , re-read

"#1. letter from my heart to my brain" .

what does knowing change ? i want for them & want for me & want for us  
, i agree &  
repulse & melt entirely when your students say

"i want to be a normal person in this poem i want to be a normal person i want to be  
a person" .

F&\*D%#G^@)#! cuz my teachers say it too  
we warm planets jumping crashing  
us tangled unity spiritually bound  
, at home  
in our

"cathedral of deadbolts" .

volcanic valley nestled in landscape of skin & stars  
birthmarks stretchmarks wrinkles logos undeniably stamp themselves  
, i was born with infinite languages  
for naming the moments & nonmoments of trauma , assault

my blood type is ptsd  
rule-enforcers & gatekeepers dispense diagnose demand to erase then  
antifix with conditional IV drip op-eds self-help books hotlines  
& we convinces ourselves

"there is no prayer or pill for this" .

no  
yes  
but  
both  
and  
neither  
also  
there is & always  
will be a poem  
from ancestors licking clean the furry creatures who become your joy  
while learning to stargaze  
a free  
you daring to

"write something that you know but have never told" .

inhale your child's fluent memories of ancient clarity  
rather than exhale common sense , skip press pause delete erase  
i refuse  
both and neither ask permission  
drenching myself in perspiration

"to exist beyond their illness" .

i swallow my heartbeat & call it pill  
host riots in my spiritsoil & call them prayer

with permission to love me ,  
\_\_\_\_\_

\*Note: quotes from Rachel McKibbens , TedTalk : "Poetry as Therapy" .

1.

i did not expect to be a coldblooded snake

2.

i did not expect the swelling & shedding of skin to lead me to  
my birthplace

3.

i did not expect to travel sideways in time  
from muggy southern towns through rugged arctic wilds ,  
where spring skitters across clean snow & peepers cry

3.

i did not expect fungus spores born from cattail reeds to  
swell so strong in the loving summer sun , or their smell  
to haunt my every tongue

5.

i did not expect this many single socks  
abandoned like lip smudged glasses left with bare sips of water  
or stacks of orange buckets with too many cracks ,  
ordinary & tragic as kittens & cat elders disappearing  
on humid nights

4.

i did not expect eating to become a labor  
no fresh mozzarella dripping  
with oil , only  
takeout cardboard box mall food court concrete tummy groaning

4.

i did not expect insomnia to be so much like soybeans  
blanket of three hundred thick savory hands  
months transform fidgety toxins into warm miso wakings ,  
let it ferment

1.

i did not expect the underside of illness to be embrace

○ *dear chronic pain*

dear ex- ○

what's different today is the sticky rice . more nutmeg , less sugar . same stringy mango brighter & oranger than the third eye of a sunset lying on darkening seas .

what's different today is our goddessbaby peed in a bucket on the porch . clear stream through very tiny spider's brand new web , splashing cheerfully onto the bright green grass turf below bare feet , droplets landing on baby's left thigh & smallest finger . "PEE!" they yelled , pointing . victory .

what's different today is i went to california this morning with someone's mother . there , vivid & uncomfortable in pre-dawn dreams , we glided a surprisingly grassy green valley . there , she led us , me & my entire blood family , into a freshwater pond . home to hundreds of eels . your mother minded the eels as much as a 7-year old in a home with fully functioning electricity minds how many minutes of tv they watch beyond their daily allotment . it was not safe but we alloyed . allowed . followed .

what's different today is i completely forgot to complain .

what's different today is one of my whiskers fell out while i was sleeping so i now boast 58 , not 59 , proud whiskers on my chin courtesy of my grandmother .

what's different today is i stumbled upon a resentment in the hallway , next to a crumpled red laundry bag & old silver boots . i was not ready to devour a cynicism casserole . enticingly layered with traumas , triggers & frustrations on top of victim games , self pity parties & heaps of blame . plus whatever else was ripe for harvesting . then frozen , for safekeeping . what was not different today was my reaction . stomped off in the opposite direction . of course carried the casserole with me , of course did not look or read , or want to look or want to read , the fine print package instructions for thawing & reheating . you know the ones - microwave , stovetop , oven . plus whatever else was ripe for radiating .

what's different today is the quiet of the forest . two barred owls had their last spring fuck yesterday so all they could do was not look at each other , across the highest needles of an exquisite evergreen tree .

what's different today is your smell , sour . i remember you sweeter . floral kick , earthy undertones , saccharine sweat . just right balance between sturdy & gooey .

what's different today is our goddessbaby saved me . child , do you know where i was when you started to cry ? suffocating . hypothalamus shouting orders to adrenals - cortisol ! adrenaline ! - gruff & urgent as an exhausted polish warrior on the front lines of 1943 . more & more of my body parts joined the fight , even though i (whoever i am) technically never declared war . my heart , my lungs , my liver , my toes , my left knee , my too many molars , my thick saliva , & both curved eyebrows took up arms against an imaginary enemy ...the rest of me retreats . surrenders to the trauma platoon , who will win through sheer strength , not because their reasoning is at all right , not because the other side deserves to die . exhausted , my body & mind will go as limp as december's birthday balloons in february , clumps of pastel rubber abandoned in a very dirty dirt , damp & defeated . but . today . you scream .

your scream saves me from my doomed conceding . glands & joints drop weapons , every single atom inside me links together so i can run across the room to you . cuz you need me to hold heavenly you in my arms til our heartbeats merge & breaths synchronize & each of my exhales warms your soft cheek & each of your heavy sleepy exhales moistens my gorgeous neck & we gulp water like desert dogs & close our eyes , cuz we know , here & now , that we're gonna be okey .

today  
i held soapy dishes  
pushed a resistant  
broom  
across  
a filthy floor

called upon every  
muscle  
in my arms  
to carry  
pails of water uphill  
to hydrate  
a herd of sheep

screwdrivers & shovels  
found their way  
into my  
small calloused hands

my fingers even  
tapped  
on a computer keyboard for more  
than an hour

you were there

climbing up the  
hill  
leaning against the barn  
wall

listening to my heavy breath

watching my funny face  
frustrated  
& sometimes  
smiling

but not once  
did i hold  
you

not once did i  
free my fingers  
from plates &  
cups & broom  
& keyboard & screwdrivers  
& bucket handle

long enough to watch you bloom

long enough  
to close my eyes  
& feel you

scraping  
flowers from the fertile  
seeds  
under my tongue  
i wish i treated you

like a job worth keeping

○ *dear poem*

lechuga mente  
soy una palma glimmering  
under still pool water  
water ? waters ?  
todavía , el sol  
todavía , the rain  
come  
& still , my scars wrinkle  
& still , my skin is not  
black  
or white  
if my skin was made of  
glass ? what would that change ?  
soy una hoja who has served my purpose  
reflecting the greens of the sky  
the reds of the sun  
the blues  
of the earth  
todavía , el tiempo  
todavía , the spirit  
come  
& still , my scars wrinkle  
& still , my skin is not  
black  
or white  
or is it exactly  
the right color for loving  
loving  
    listening  
todavía , el jardín  
todavía , the fruit  
come  
& still , my skin

○ *dear race box*