

A BOOK OF POEMS

*Wildier Than the
Heart Within Us*



BY ERICKA CLAY

Wilder Than the Heart Within Us

Ericka Clay

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WILDER THAN THE HEART WITHIN US

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Too Soon to Cry

I hate this New World
that's the exact same
as the old one.
Everyone has a part to play,
and they hold onto their parts
because what else is there
to hold onto?
Your hair falls out.
Your teeth fall out.
But how pretty you'll be
when you glue them back
in.
It's a sin, all of it,
struggling inside on a cellular
level, but yet they laugh
because
it's too soon
to cry.

Never Getting the Point

You will die,
and I will too,
an unsaid thing
when we curse
in traffic, or watch
the love we have
grow cold, or push
another “like” button
and read the comments
of everyone else who
will die too but never really
seem to know it.
How He broke through
the depths of our distraction,
our unwanted chains
to the stone of our reality,
and still closed eyes, closed ears,
open mouths, always chatting
about the next thing that will
change our lives for the low,
low price of never getting
the point.

The Blood of Our Hearts

You want to be mad
and you are because
the white picket
fence is tinged yellow
with this ever-present
age. Did you really think
that we'd all come
together, evolved
as we are with noise
plugged in our ears
and shades on our eyes?
We can't see or hear one
another, animals dulled
in cages, throats raw
with the sound of ourselves.
The dust of us floats
from the pages when
we finger through the Word
and find the past, the present,
our future stained with ink.
But who needs written truth
with these bold erasures, wiping
clean our minds but staining
our hands with the blood
of our hearts?

Spring

Here I am, stilled in my December
waiting for the stirrings of a life
I already know is true. Have I lost
You? No, I've just placed You away
for the sick sadness of my mind's
eye. Always weeping and never
keeping focused on what a body
grows in the ground, how the soil
shakes until the signs of new life,
break forth like fingers reaching mid-air.

Horrible

Can you play it again?
That old, horrible tune?
The one where there's
nothing more terrible
than knowing everything
you've ever loved has rotted
away? But what's worse,
the knowing that God
will right out your wrongs,
even make you smile a bit,
and it's that smile that haunts
your heart because what you
loved most will never
have the chance
to see it.

Aflame

The good You've given
is sweet water, cold
and cutting at all
the things I've done
and didn't mean to do.
But deeply within me
is the spark that lights
my sin aflame, and knees
now buckled, waist deep,
I descend, Your good
soaking through the wick.

The Fruit of My Lips

The fruit of my lips
is belly deep,
roots grown
into my toes
from the source,
ripe and bursting
from my middle.
You are sky and all the universe,
the Hand that planted
these stars,
and I am but a sapling
blown cold in earth's
strong wind.
But still, you caress
each of my flowers
like words bursting
through air.

All My Little Somethings

How often I dreamed
of something
made from nothing,
waxed poetically
about the “one day”
that sat so far forward
in my future.
But now “one day”
is this day,
and gathered round,
all my little somethings
I never made at all,
but He did,
graciously bestowing
upon me things
my hands were
never fit to build.

My Heart Turned Stone

Could You love me
with me head bent down
and my heart turned stone
and knife set in my hand
and point digging my chest
and blood leaving my body
and all thoughts making a mockery
of the thing You always wanted me
to be but set now to a life I only
want to destroy?

Of Everything You Are

How foolish to sit back
with my new label
and let my bones go
cold as long as it's
shiny and new.
If I truly understood
You then I truly
understand discomfort,
and thorned crowns,
and heaps of abuse,
or maybe even still,
the quiet moments
of losing myself
to the greater good
of everything You are.
I understand being saved
isn't nearly as nice
as the thought of being
in You.

But Then My Heart Remembers

I've only wanted to walk
with You, but my walking's
no good.

How I trip, stumble,
fall, bite the lip between
my teeth.

I'm a red-faced toddler,
wobbling my way
around and over
hardened earth.

But then my heart
remembers something
my brain can never handle:
the soft, warm feel of
Your loving hand.

Wilder Than the Heart Within Us

How You give us

a little piece of ourselves
that we hold, so small
and warm in pretty blankets.

But as the time wears
and our hair weakens
and breath goes stale
from the sure weight of our bones,
these little pieces now overgrown
and more than we can handle.

Have they always been so sour
and rotten to the touch?
And that's when Your reminder
pierces our heavy bones,
and submission is no longer
a game we sometimes play
but the only way we can tame
this little piece of ourselves
that's wilder than the heart
within us.

All That Digging

We make it all beautiful
and glittery,
lipstick on a dead corpse
because some of us
have the stirring within
our bones but some of us
refuse to answer.
Why, I sometimes think,
but I was like them once, too,
a heart so grieved and chest
so heavy from all that digging
just so I could lie in my own
pile of dirt.

Dancing in Ink

There's no primitive
jungle to evangelize
in my kitchen sink,
but to talk to all
the others, you'd think
I'm cashing in truth
for dishes. But then You
remind me that as much
as I'm not them, they're not me,
given to bouts of dancing in ink
and staining paper with Your
love that gave me paper
and dishes in the first place.

Respect for My Tears

They say sometimes

You don't answer
and stay silent.

But when have You never
answered me, sitting
there in my quietly dark
moments and refraining
from saying a word
out of respect for
my tears?

Weeping as He Works

Do you think He
sits and watches
and laughs
as your heart
is sheared,
or is He
working
through
the pain
and pieces
and parts
of yourself
you've only
begun to know,
weeping as He
works, and thinking,
"Ah yes, this part,"
remembering what
it was like to write
your sorrow with
His ink-stained hands?

Float

How sick of me

are we?

Duplicitous,

a dichotomy

tearing my heart

in two.

I sometimes think

You can understand

it, but your feet

walked sinless

on the dirt, the earth.

This ground.

You take it all in,

though,

that breath held

in your lungs

until you finished

it.

And I suppose I hope

for a single millisecond,

You could see me here,

head pressed neatly against

wood,

red marked into my forehead,

the fingers of my soul

attempting to loosen

the knot and watch

it all float

away.

Here in My House

Here I play
inside my house
the dreams I wish
were true. And I
snap so hard,
fingers pressed,
buttons submitting
to a will that knows
only filters brushed
with colors I
never knew existed.
Here in my house
I play like dreams
are what built
my home and
the chips of my soul
I suck on when it's hot.
Dream-driven
is what I'll hashtag
it as my chin crooks
upward in the air.
I am okay
and so are you
and so is everything
outside the windows
I've painted black
so the Lord can't see
what pretty colors
I've allowed to be
that He would never

dare sweep away.

Things Above

If I were to be
born
to myself,
all the earthly
things would prize
up before my eyes
and stack high,
a beautiful pile
that tastes of earth.
and all the routes toward
the inner core
of this world,
mapped on my tongue,
a constant reminder
that me, I am in control,
one foot in front of the other.
But here's the part
that sparks
as I walk sure-footed
down the lane
I never built with my own two hands:
the earth cracks and then rips
and dips down into the fiery
middle, the lair where
my own truth meets me
face-to-face.
I was not born to me
but born to You
and crafted in such a way
that beauty was

the thing inside me
but far too quickly
rotten away like
a naked core
that has been bitten
clean by dirty teeth
and all who never
really loved me.
My head, bowed now,
eyes down and in the dirt,
the dirt that I didn't make
with my own two hands,
I understand it, much clearer
than when I had ever heard it before.
Here is death's door, how You died
and overcame it,
and here is me,
the maker of nothing
but my own misery.
You sweep through
like wind and Spirit
to shut it slowly, that sound,
a creek that cracks right through
my middle, and I'm delivered
reborn to the outer edge
of heaven,
the taste in my mouth,
washed and watered
clean,
my eyes set on things
above.

Three Days' Time

Sometimes,

death is a too-close
whisper.

It buds like a beaten
drum, soft in the beginning
until it whirls deep beneath
skin and pore.

And all the love lost to it,
memory stinging the wound
of those still breathing, faces
shoved against the night's
windowpane, eyes searching
for puffs of breath from those
we used to know.

But in three days' time,
you removed that vacant
loss beneath breast and bone
and quieted the relentless
beating in our brains.

You who loved Lazarus
with an intensity
and all the tears
we were born
to weep.

You braved the deep,
the underbelly,
the breeding ground
of sin,
and rose up
against it,

pulling life
from a deathly
grip and conquering
our hearts
in the process.

Me Plus Elohim

There's a whisper
beneath my skull
but above
the brain,
and it harbors
every little
pin of pain,
pricking in
and sticking
out.

I used to think
all love
songs
were the end
of it.

That everything
would tie up
bow tight,
because
I belonged
to Elohim,
and He
to me
but then
the dark
comes.

Sometimes.
And the shadow
calls.
Sometimes.

But every time,
that whisper
above brain,
below bone,
and I know,
I am
forever
and always
His.

Prisms

Where are the rainbows
in Scripture other
than the one that broke
sky high after the water
took away all
the people?

Dichotomy

I am righteous of a kind
of self
that could set my feet,
one foot to hell,
the other aimed at heaven.
A heavy heart ripped
In two.

Almost but Not Quite

She comes
at me
with white eyes
and I almost
see through them
until the scriptural
ink
seeps
my heart.

Like Bees

Here we give

two

hands

to the

world but

we've filled

them full

with screaming

children

and dirty floors

and sticky mirrors

and fresh cut grass

and holding other

hands old

enough to know

better.

I'll go and

talk about Jesus

to someone

who's sitting

back against

the flag pole

once I find

the pacifier

to replace

the one

I clumsily

dropped

on the

floor.

Herdsman

Can you take a person
inside your hands
and break him open,
rib by rib
and know everything
by eyeballing
the bulging mass
beneath his sternum?
Can you know the lust
turned “love” but always
cloaked and hiding,
shadowlike, not
something to be eaten
without testing, first?
Can you say you lead
God’s people without
even knowing God’s
people and how their evil
leaves them pore by pore,
ever searching your own?
Remove the blinders,
your fear,
your love of money,
your diminishing god,
and keep eyes open
to Jehovah who’s
always thumbing
the organ
you try to hide
with your hands.

Can You Eat the Ashes?

Pigs and pearls
and little girl dreams
and the nothing
more than what I'm not.
And you,
a
sharp-mouthed
word
birthed by an
empty
belly.
Your flint tongue
set the
grass on fire,
but can you
eat the
ashes?

You Hope for Light

But darkness

is the cat that

ate it,

and God is

the spirit

who sent

the cat.

God is never

surprised, not

even when your

eyes boil with

hot tears and your

mind roughly thumbs

through all you've

set on fire.

Smashed Like Jars

Drunk and bloated
on their own confidence
and fighting against
the beat of their own hearts.
Smashed like jars,
rivers of wine-
colored blood.
Souls dispersed
and nevermore.
Past meets present,
and I watch it at my feet.

Run Against Horses

Your own mind
is the time bomb
that releases you
from His peace.
It's not Him
but your own
hands that have you
running against
people, not horses,
stuck to the dirt
and grit and galloping
like a lost lunatic
in a world that's
wrecked your name.

Lost the Urge to Drink

There you were,
deeply rooted
in whatever
lie shrunk your heart,
branches clawing
at a sky who
wouldn't save
you.
And do you know how
many times
I look in the mirror,
feel the skin,
dig deep
nail by nail,
to find where
my own roots
have knotted
and lost the
urge to
drink?

Wash the Evil from Your Hearts

The death silence
is the one thing
you'd remember
if you were there.
But you are not.
Your long hair,
unwashed
and the party
clothes stored away.
Because nobody
is left to celebrate
the day evil
eats the heart.

The Disaster is Coming

My mouth
is spoken
but hollow
and torn
demonic
with evil
things
and thoughts
and peeled
inside, the
tongue and
tissue,
flaked away
like skin dying
in the sun.
Sin is sometimes
the only thing
I eat, less
calories, slim waist,
and I take
that quick image
with my eyes
like it's the only
picture worth
seeing.
Grant me
freedom,
dead serpents,
clean air,
a fiery heart.

Because no
good deed goes
unpunished.
Let me know
the punishment,
like I know
the hard parts
of the dark.

And All the People Say Amen

Who am I to you
and you to me
that I'm no longer
dripped in sweet
red wine
or the vice that stings
or the voice that
cords around
my long white
neck but drip
dry of everything
I've ever loved
to only fill that void
with
someone
like
You?

Who Lacks Bread

Forever

no bread
and a heart
like stone
and two hands
like a mother's
but a mouth
devoid
of love.

All these things
make up
my face
and hair
and hands.

And all
these things
can eat the
edges and innards
of a weary soul
unless that soul
seeks
You.

Evil Teeth

They are so white
and so pretty
and fit perfectly
within two sets
of gums.
They're rooted
just so,
and when the people
see them, they rejoice.
But here our little hearts
weep and wail
because truth
is a bitter sword
between our own
teeth.
Not evil,
but not pretty either,
biting down on
cold steel
and tasting
the blood of
our martyred
hearts.

The Night Man

I had a dream
about the other
you,
the good one,
the one that loves
to hear me breathe
and asks me how my day
was.
I can't help it, though,
to think
of the half-shadow
of the sometimes man,
of his arms wrapping
me up into himself
until everything stings
of midnight.
It's the darkness
that comes calling,
that will devour us all,
but in the other side of
you,
the not so bright one,
I hold my breath
as if drowning
because it sometimes
feels like I am.
But when my eyes open,
that's the best part of it
all.
To see the starburst surge

against black felt.

To desire utter nothingness

only to be introduced

to light.

Bad Adam

What is it for man
to tear apart
the flesh
from the core
until all there
is left is an undesirable
longing to once again
be ruby red
and glossed all over,
more lost than loss
at the power of your own
hand than
his?

Nero's Candle

I couldn't be
brighter
if Nero dipped
me in wax
and lit me
in the green
of his garden,
a human torch
aglow,
hair and skin
and heart
melting and sparking
meant to snuff
me out,
but only
steering eyes
to the force
of my
fire.

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