



The Way We *Bare Our Teeth*

A BOOK OF POEMS BY ERICKA CLAY



The Way We Bare Our Teeth

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THE WAY WE BARE OUR TEETH

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1. Me in All My Wrongness

How many "I'd nevers" do we need
to say until we feel better about all
the things we swear we'd never do?
But it's an intense dark in your heart
when the voice that knows you best
is the voice that loves you least.
I lived a mile at a time in the dank
recesses of my brain, hand against
check, head against wall,
reverberations of skull against
the hardness of this world, eyes
closed to the next.
And what that voice dared to say—
my life not worth living, my being
not worth loving—the very essence of all
the wrong bottled up inside my
small, impressionable brain.
But who other than someone living
forty days in the desert—same voice,
same dark, and the uncanny ability
to find the exit out of any lie—could
find me in all my wrongness and lay
it bare at the foot of His cross so I
could finally know the truth?

2. Always Trembled to Even Try

The satan is out to eat every good thing,
so why am I surprised by the wicked
beat of my heart when things dip
and turn towards its unsatisfied mouth?
Eons of valley and hard rocks
beneath my head and one little sliver
of hope God has given, a rope let
down like Rapunzel unraveling her hair.
And the satan, teeth and tongue
glistening wet, and me looking at it
with a wave of doubt, of unsurity in
my gut until Your heel thrusts out
and does the deed my feet have
always trembled to even try.

3. All the Words I Never Said

I guess I'm not so sad anymore
which makes me a little bit sadder
because of all the dreams I never let
die finally passed away.
They were beautiful, soft, and warm
in my hand and loved without
realizing conditions are the currency
with which the world
invests.
But they had no use for cheap
thrills, and short-lived wins,
and instead found me to be worth
more than anything the world
could provide.
And what beautiful, soft, and warm
glimpses of You in the every day
small things, even down
to their deaths
and the way their eyes
penetrated something much deeper
than all the words I never said.

4. The Redundant Loop of Lost Memory

I keep playing it
as I often do,
the same old song,
this time backwards,
forwards, then repeat.
And it always gives me
the same bitter stab of
satisfaction knowing
that maybe there's another
song You've sung for me,
but how can I learn it
when I don't even know the words?
Maybe there's something
to releasing the tune of
every old melody, back bent,
chest forward, arms wide
as you sway me with Your
gentle sound until nothing else
breaks through, not even
the redundant loop of lost
memory.

5. The Softness of My Soul

This state of flux

is forever to and fro,
like I'm waiting for a choice
to be made but one never
comes.

It's in that moment that Your
authority hits like bricks,
a starburst through the lining
of my gut, and I know Your
intention was never for me
to sit and wait forever,
but just to sit and wait
for right now.

And then you nod ever
so slightly, giving me
my inheritance—that same
authority rapping against
the gates of hell
and putting into place
all those pieces once
devised to slice
the softness
of my soul.

6. What Was Always to be Written

It's all a little undefined
because I've never let
You define it before.
Instead, pen cushioned
in callouses, I'd write away
the beginning and middle
until it smacked
of a satisfying end.
But all good writers know
their characters are loose
cannons, hog wild, cheap
in their loyalty, and off
they go working out
an ending that looks
good on paper
but bad on self.
And what do you do at the point
when all your life you've called
the shots, only for your toes
to rest on death, realizing
this was what was always
to be written in the first place?

7. Nowhere to Go

"Lay back" like it's all a game
that I can play with my eyes shut
and my mind shut to the fact
that control is only a four
letter word when you lose it.
But the less I hold the less
I feel, the burden now
on Your shoulders that I've never
seen but held in the darkest
nights, my feet shaded,
foot lamp dimmed,
feet printed within the prints
You've made with Your own.
And after all these years
when my feet were "free"
to dance all along this wayward
world, and if only I kept a bird-eye
view of where I've been and who I was,
I could see the complete, replete pattern
of a person loitering around,
all dressed up,
with nowhere to go.

8. The Only One Staring Back

By all means, go seek
the sound
of all things holy
but have a heart
that fingers and pulls
at its own righteousness,
removing layer by layer
the terrain of privilege,
and bad religion,
and following the crowd,
and laughing a little
too hard at the wrong
jokes just to fit in,
and the time you
considered a world
without you in it
so that you can see
the woman in front
of you, tears in her
eyes, pleading
with Jesus, especially
when you're
the only one
staring back.

9. What It's Like to Dance Unhinged

I've been lost,
found,
and left out to simmer,
thinking only in terms of winning
the heart you already gave.
I talked to God and realized
my enough was enough,
more like a poor foundation,
overtly cruel in its crumbling
because it always promised
to hold.
Here and there my feet
went flailing and all my heart
knew was the sneer of someone
who doesn't know what it's like
to dance unhinged.
But never ever have you never
given me your hand, reminding
me maybe it's easier to talk
to God when I listen.

10. All the Missed Marks

I think I've missed the mark
again, and isn't that what You
tell me sin is? Festering here
in a little sizzling pot
of my insecurities, a dash
of who I thought I was
supposed to be,
and the tiniest hint
of all the lost loves
who forgot that love
was the point?
I was angrier than all
the feminists because
even though I didn't know
You, I also did—a little Catholic
girl who had said her prayers
at night and saw the sadness
of Your face as you hung
from the nails in Your flesh,
and the wall of my church.
But then girls grow up
and get drunk to any sense
of virtue because virtue
is a bit exhausting
when the whole world
is after the way you
smile and bow your head.
But here we are again,
full circle,
where I realize the world

has never had its flesh
rammed with nails,
torn to shreds,
or scarred with love
it's bled out and over
all the missed marks
of someone like me.

11. The Only Way to Be

I remember one time feeling
like a girl and that meant
losing all touch with the way
things were in favor
of the way I was.
But over the years, I ran
miles to burn the fat
off my wild imagination
and colored the strands
of my wayward need
to read and write all
the words and plucked
away any bits of autonomy
only for guilt to grow in
fuller and darker than I could
even bear.
After this mess I made
of myself came that short
end of the stick, the hopeless
art of never measuring up,
only for You to tip my chin,
and reveal your upside-down
world where the way I am
is the only way to be.

12. Everything They're Not

How overwhelmed I am
by the way You love
someone who longed
for love but never even
knew how to spell it.
My love was lost in knights
in rusted armor, women
who beat the system
and shattered ceilings
with the hate in their hearts
and their regret kept under wraps,
and a loose interpretation of what
beauty meant—less a soul thing
and more of a physical sacrifice
to the god-demons of poor
sense of self.
But how could I even know who I was,
if I didn't know you, El Roi, the one
who sees even little things who
pretend to be everything they're not.

13. The Frailty of My Hopeless Heart

And in that lost pile of ill-fitting possibilities, there grew a tumor in my soul that took away all semblance of youth, all traces of beauty, and I was left with nothing but the stark reality of what happens when a human dares to grow and age beyond the socially acceptable rules of engagement.

So here I sit, unengaged, making enemies of everyone young and beautiful, not because my heart is any heavier, but because for the first time I can carry it completely in my age-spotted hands.

And if only they knew how it's not me at all but You, lifting up the frailty of my hopeless heart, giving it more hope than one could ever have in the shine of her hair, the curve of her hips.

14. Something a Little More Worthy

I've lived with a low
capacity for trust,
so when you tell me
there's nothing to fear,
I fly in the face of a truth
whose roots were born
in the belly of another human.
I think I could just quickly
run my finger through
the long line of men
whose history precedes them,
dusting off my feminist ideals
and pressing them against each
lobe just to see the way the light
shines off them.
But then it always comes back
to what He did, bloodied and broken
and giving over everything He
had for nothing more than a slap
in the face.
So who am I to fear man's
low standards or distrust
your moves before you've
even made them? Maybe
it would behoove me
to take a page out of His
story, my very soul rumbling
through time and material,
giving all I have in a vulnerable
wink to serve something a little

more worthy than the dark-tinged
voice whispering close to the sparkle
of my lobes.

15. The Way We Bare Our Teeth

I think maybe we were told
we never needed nobody
because that's the dirt
and grit that made
our bodies breathe.
But dirt can't think
and grit can't tame,
so Who claimed
the bow and its arrow,
seeking its mark
and scoping our hearts,
letting loose into our
very DNA?
They tell us no one
and nobody, but
maybe that's because
hurt gives birth to hurt,
and maybe it's better
to not think of the Hand
that loves us, only
the hands that take
everything as even
the animals are shamed
by the way we bare our teeth.

16. A Tiny Bit of New

I get a tiny bit of new in me,
and it takes root like a mustard seed,
or the opposite of everything
You've taught me.
And when its flicker turns to fade,
And the world is colored jade,
I'm aware of sin's thin skin
and the vessels pulse beneath me.
If You could prod them rough,
Till my heart was dull and scuffed,
I knew You wouldn't even try
because of who You are
and were
and will be.
So now I sit, the new scrubbed dull,
And blink against my burning skull
And walk back to where You are
And where my feet could
and would
and should be.

17. The Yesterday Girl

Struck down and unloved,
And how can I say anything
They say is wrong and vulgar
And dripping in sin when I dip
My toes from time to time
Only to find the water warm
And waiting?
It's an act of face against
The water's glass,
Looking at my reflection
But looking deeper
Into all the yesterdays who made
Me what I am.
But Your hand unplucking
The seams and redressing
The hem,
Until my edges are smooth
And I no longer know me
As the yesterday girl who lives
Toe-deep in this mystery
You have called my life.

18. All My Nothings

These people scare me most
When I remember I used to be
Them. Prideful, unaware
Of what respecting others
Looks like, and yearning
For the chaos of my sin
Rather than the calm
Within Your Kingdom.
I wanted to “love” others
So angrily they’d know
I was a force to be reckoned
With. Take them down
With my false tolerance
And a need to justify
The me victimized
By the passing
Of my years.
But when I sat and muddled
Through my lovely hate
And gathered all my nothings,
I looked to those who
Favored Your humbled heart
And wondered with doubtful
Certainty
How anyone can exude
Such love when love
Was all I lacked.

19. I Run Wild

I run wild and disobedient

Although obedience is all

I seem to taste.

I want to move mountains

So others see the mountains

Moved, but my back is bearing

What I've laid to waste.

And Your heart is after me

Although I ran and spit

In Your face.

And there's nothing more dismal

Than knowing you had it all

Without even having to chase.

20. The Things I Never Created

I think all the time how fleeting
every inch of every second
I constructed in my heart is.
I created life but wasn't it
God who really did all the things
I could barely think to do?
And here it is, all around me,
the things I never created-
an exact hierarchy of what I'm not,
my humility on display,
and the frankness
of my gratefulness,
playing full-fledged
in my heart.

21. If Nobody Knew You at All

Do you ever think if the pain
Went away that maybe
You wouldn't know Him
Like maybe you do now?
And what it would be like
To sit and wait for somebody
Else to know the weight
of being forsaken?
And how lonely would it be
If nobody knew you at all?

22. Looking Into You

Was your marriage like holding
Hands and then looking up
And not recognizing who walked
Beside you?
Or maybe it was more
Like loving or loving's
Drunk cousin, infatuation,
Or even worse,
His cruel stepmother
Obsession who took
To the brink of knowing
Another person but never
Really knowing them at all.
And what about that time
When your girl was big-eyed
Looking into you and him
And you wondered if she
Could see the truth and what
It would be like to unzip
Her skull so finally you
Could see it too?

23. Like Touching Stardust

I read a book the other
Day about a mother
Who loved her daughter
But you'd never really
Know it.
And how human is it,
To watch that buried love
Hobble along each generation,
Falling down, twisting an ankle
And never truly making it
To its final destination.
I've heard that word all my life,
Repentance,
And never knew it was worth
More than a million bucks,
A lifelong marriage,
Two and a half kids
And a Caddy in the garage.
It's like touching stardust
Or looking into the eyes of God,
Or finally breaking bone
And unburying that buried love,
Offering it as a gift even if
Your own hands were never
Even offered it at all.

24. Once Upon a Time

I heard once upon a time
About how our hearts sync
When we're all together,
Singing towards something
We can't even see.
How indescribably beautiful,
Something like that,
Our hearts with their eyes closed
To the million ways each of us
Has stabbed a back, tarnished
A name, gossiped the pain
Of somebody who sits alone
In it unless they're standing
Next to a body, breathing
And singing, forgetting
The cruel inhumanity of man
When God is all they see.

25. All Spins Inward

I guess all I can tell you is the way
I've seen a grown man cry
Then his face go dry when he up
And leaves his family.
And then the way her heart
Gave way when the only love
She ever knew grew so tired
He slept in another's bed.
And all the children who grow
Old and out of touch and can
No longer feel that wonder
God planted beneath the earthy
Beat of their hearts.
And how an angry soul
Loses it all and out it comes
On the only one who ever
Thinks to call anymore.
But then He pauses,
Pushes reverse,
And all spins inward
Like thread on its spool—
The man dies, but the family heals,
The love leaves, but the woman thrives,
The children grow but their hearts still beat
And the angry soul takes it all back
While the only one who ever thought to call
Still never misses the chance to dial.
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I've seen a grown man cry
Then his face go dry when he up

And leaves his family.
And then the way her heart
Gave way when the only love
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The man dies, but the family heals,
The love leaves, but the woman thrives,
The children grow but their hearts still beat
And the angry soul takes it all back
While the only one who ever thought to call
Still never misses the chance to dial.

26. The Unholy Thought of Losing You

Ever inside of me is the unholy
Thought of losing you.
It travels, a lone bird,
Until it meets the others,
And as I'm returning clothes
That don't fit,
Or food I didn't order,
The flight of them thrash
Hard against my inner self,
Until my ribs are sore
And so are my memories.
There you are, such a little
Girl with your big force
Of a laugh and determination
To oppose everything
Meant for your good.
"Strong-willed," a term
Some armchair psychologist
Made up while not having
To pry their child off the ceiling.
But I enjoyed it—no—I only
Enjoy it now because you've
Grown full force, and full flower,
Petals shining and shimmering
So, my eyes can barely even see
All the bad that's hurt my heart.
And it's only the knowing that God
Himself, His angel army,
A force that has no wings
But braves everything

For their commander
Can I get my head around
This life, the suffering in losing,
You, but knowing You'll never
Be lost when you're found
By Him.

27. No Wilderness to Tame

For a long while, I went screaming,
Helen Keller-style against
all the Annie Sullivans
Attempting to put me
in my proper place.
But this wild soul was no
wilderness to tame.
No barren land
For any hand to conquer.
And what a giggle it gives me,
Sitting weary old-lady-like
in the life I never thought
I'd live.
And what pleasure it thrills me,
To bow my head to the only One
Who could break a wild soul
For the sake of breaking
What was His.

28. The Privilege of Breathing

They say a good man can never
Stay down, but what about a man
Who's not so good but keeps clinging
To the hem of Your robe?
What then for us who seek You
While the others seek us,
Thirsty for blood and the meat
Of our hearts, blind to the curdled
Stench of their own blood,
Slowed and stagnant
In their clotted veins?
You stand before and behind
And take measure of all
The big evil inside all
These small men, and laugh
At the mockers who claim
Their own breath when You're
The one whose given them
The privilege of breathing.

29. Dust into Light

You take broken things and move
Them into the most beautiful sights
An eye could ever see, but all
I have is the dust that comes
From age and paranoia
And a deep-seated expectation
That I'm not like the rest
In the worst way.
It's like tiptoeing too close
To that beautiful edge, listening
To the calming sound of the water,
And as my body leans forward,
All I can feel is the backwards
Sense of You loving me,
Taking me into Your arms,
And pulling me into the depths
Of the Only Someone
Who turns dust
Into light.

30. A Tree Freed from Its Stump

I know I've told you all the sins
God's witnessed as I've made them.
And if my heart could sin again,
I'd make sure to beat and tame it.
But what the cost, a worthless heart,
When God just wants to redeem it?
And even Jesus spoke of removing
my eye
Just so I won't lose it.
But He knew the absurdity of my hand
The weakness that thrives within it
And has never made me feel less than
Just because I claim it.
Instead, He is the only one
Who can thoroughly remove it,
A tree freed from its stump
So He can feed, and water, and bloom it.

31. As the World Groans in Recognition

I'm always surprised
by other people's surprise,
especially while the world
is crumbling.
Maybe we're addicted
to watching the chaos
and letting our blood
go boiling.
But if they hated Him first,
They'll hate us next,
And no hope in man
will keep our hearts
From breaking.
So as the world groans
He'll heal these hearts
He's always thought
worth saving.

32. A Lone Conduit

Can you fault me for all
the wrong I set aside
like coins I seek to bury?
You give me all the life
in all the world
And expect me to raise
it like the others,
With their minds on motherhood
And making a good impression.
And I'm over here lost in coins
And hopeless thoughts,
Not understanding what You've
Always understood from the start.
That I am but a vessel for Your
Love, a lone conduit, a feckless
Motor that can only pour
Outward when I'm focused
inward on You.

I don't know how to write
Poems about goodness
Because goodness
Has always seemed
Gone.
But I do know a bit
About

33. I Dance in Your River of Mercy

I taste the fruit
to taste it bitter
and cloying
on the tip
of my tongue.
But what am I to say
to bad fruit, poor manners,
harsh words, and hypocritical
behavior when the one who acts
Is the one who's self-satisfied?
I remember what breaks my heart,
An act of obedience that hurts
Like nails in the hand and spear
To ribs. To forgive what seems unforgivable
Because I was once unforgivable too.
But now I dance in Your river of mercy,
so who am I to impede its stream?

34. Bringing Myself Back to Life

My kind of heart-
ache
is the cyclical sort
Where no words
can be mandated
Or directions
prescribed.
For all along,
I was a lifeless
doll,
bringing myself back
to life,
And what kind
of dedication
That takes
to keep from dulling
The anxious nerve,
The wayward "zap"
That electrifies bone
And revs the flesh.
And all I can think
of is someone like
Ezekiel given his stubborn
streak and who wept
bitterly and angrily
Because he didn't want
to go.
And whose face
was harder than granite
But whose heart was soft

like mine, revved and zapped
with no directions or mandates
except for the mighty word
of the Lion of this universe,
And why can't that ever be
Enough?

35. The Only Intoxicant

I never understood the old
women who longed
for heaven until
I became
an old woman
myself.

The streets needn't
be paved in gold
But straight vodka
With a sweet
chaser to chase
Away the demons
In my head.
But demons make
their bed
with false idols
Even the ones
You can imbibe.
Even the ones
That burn
the truth
all the way down.
And as you age
You believe
far less in fairytales
Like the parable
of the woman
who drunk herself
sad, and instead,

Believe in the beautiful
Truth of a place
Where God
Is the only intoxicant
And how I'll never
Get enough.

36. Watching the Whole World Crumble

If you want to know the truth
About the all the lies
I told myself,
It really just boils
down to this:

The thought of losing
Everything, watching
Control slink
through my fingers,
And nodding and smiling
Like a child easily entertained
Was the same as a slow death.

I took little paranoid sips,
Watching my whole world
Crumble and break
As you grinned and won
This life that I had to lay down.

But now in the folds
of my "better" brain,
I'm coccooned in reality—
How loud it must
have been when your heart
broke, but not as loud
As the quiet when
I didn't even think
to say "I'm sorry."

37. All the Places My Hands Can't Touch

Oh,
here you go.
It's nothing more
Than my failure
On a platter
With a side
of my
Heart.

They say all
women know
how to mother
but where
Are the ones
who keep doing it
Wrong, not for the lack
of trying
But for the want
Of trying too hard?

It's when You remind me
This little race isn't
Mine to be won,
But to be nurtured
And prayed for
As her little soul
Is sent deep
Within ocean and wave
And all the places
My hands can't touch

But Yours have made.

38. Denying the Aftermath

They gave you
Like a little bird
in my hand
And made me
Promise
Not to close
and crush.
I'm poor
on promises
But right flush
With good intentions
To the point
That they scatter
And flutter behind
Me,
Birds with no
wings.
And every time
I peek beneath
My fingers
I remember,
A little
But not all
Of it.
"Close"
then
"Crush,"
Denying the aftermath
Or even the "right now"
Reality that's often

Known
Of our
Kind.

39. The Very Art of Physics

What if it's

So much simpler
Than we're told it
is?

What if it's more like
a cool hand against
a warm head, or
a soft kiss when nobody
loves you or the way
Your mother should
look at you even if
she never does
And that feeling
That all things
are aligned and right,
right now,
Because He's set
His ink to paper,
Mapping out your
promise, filling up
Your hope,
And laughing
At all the humans
Who live a lifetime
Telling you otherwise
In their small little bodies,
Their small little minds
They mistakenly
Think are bigger
Because their heads

Are warm, their lips
Are bare, and their mothers
Don't love them
Like the very art
of physics tells
them
They should?

40. The Only Jesus They Ever Taught

I just want to sit here
inside your sadness
And be the Jesus
They never taught
You about.
How much greater
A heart,
Now broken,
than a heart
Never allowed
to break,
Sitting stale
And minutely
Shattered,
The pain
Softly cobwebbed
like something
Nobody speaks
About?
But what if instead,
As I sit and listen,
You tell the truth
For once in your life
Not for the lack of
Wanting
But for the lack
Of trusting
Because the only
Jesus they ever taught
Didn't know

How to just
let
you
cry.

41. Beneath a Righteous Man's Breast

They say they know You
but don't understand
That your love isn't
Second best, Cain's
crops set to wither
And die on a makeshift
Altar.
But why even pretend
to know you
to love you
To make the great sacrifice
Of shampooing, and showering,
And blowing out one's hair
When not one Word
You've ever said
Has ever reached their hearts?
And in their cars, weakly dressed
In their Sunday best,
Nose wrinkled
at the wrong drivers,
The wrong president,
The wrong people
who live in this country,
And don't know what it's like
To follow God like they do.
And when they enter, do they
Really think You're there?
Waiting in their vacuous buildings,
Bone-cold foyers,
Right next to the empty offering

Baskets because Disney
Has gotten more expensive this year?
Or maybe You're out into everything
You've ever touched, most
Notably the Spirit-breathed space
Beneath a righteous man's breast,
Closely nestled against his heart.

42. The Only Person He Made Me to Be

I crawl

borrow
beg
for something,
anything real,
pretending all
the time that good
skin and nails
and a waist slimmer
than yours
will get me to that place,
A place whose name
I don't even know.
I smile
cry
lie
into the camera
for all the people
who have to have
an every day
view of my
imperfectly
"perfect"
life.
Am I the problem
or them
With their sick,
Twisted need
To "like" what
Happiness

Would look like
Half-drunk
And overdosed
On its own bloated
desire?
I laugh
smile
hope
as all His words
Are written
Inside my head
My heart,
And give away
any and all
semblance
Of the person
I used to be,
the person they
Crave,
And instead,
Become
The only person
He made me
To be.

43. To Seek Your Face

You're here and there
And everywhere
My head
Runs away to.
But my heart always
Stops my course,
Repents my steps,
And turns me
Around again
to seek Your face,
The warmth
Within it,
Knowing full
Well there's never
Anywhere I
Can go
That you will
Never be.

44. A God of Flesh and Bone

They call you the "Universal" Christ,
A deeper understanding of a mystery
Wrapped in Shiva, in Buddha,
in all the gods our little hearts strive
to understand.
But how can that be when You
Were the only one to lay your life
Down for the very ones who killed
You, something I've never seen
Shiva, or Buddha, or all the other
gods who lay claim to a world
You built before the foundation
of time ever do.
Maybe You're not universal
But personal, a God of flesh
And bone and heart and Spirit
And the only reason I can breathe,
In and out,
And deny all others
Who claim glory
That's only ever been Yours.

45. The Fleeting Nature of Paper and Ink

In my heart

There is the faintest of songs,
A picture of words,
Detailing the "what I thought we were"
And the "who we've always been."
It's the false picture I carry,
Holding it relatively still
So the frame doesn't break,
The photo doesn't bend,
And I can keep pretending
What I always thought
Always was.
But this is the season
I've taken down all those photos
Bared them naked on the bed
Touched the fleeting nature
Of paper and ink
And stolen only slight
Glimpses of reality,
Knowing full well
We'll hit it head on,
straining to hear a different
Song,
His "Peace, be still,"
Even in this storm
Of never knowing
The "what"
of who
we
are.

46. The Gift of His Hand

Two sisters,

The whores, Oholah and Oholibah,

Who caused You great pain,

One not as bad as the other

But both as bad

As one needs to be.

I wonder if they ever fought over

Who was worst—a point of pride—

Or if either took to soaking

Their pillow at night,

knowing full well

They stooped too low

and coerced the other

to see life from a pit,

A vantage point

From which not even

The jewel in God's own heart

Can climb from without

The gift of His hand.

47. From Here to Forever

You are soft and still
And beautiful and warm
And watch the world unfold,
Serene and just, like the Lion
I always wanted at the foot
of my bed.
But how many times
Do I strain my neck
Over to the other lane,
Watching the cars crash
And burn and careen
Through their own journeys,
Wondering if mine is even
Measuring up?
But for all my waning trust,
Is the tough grain of faith
You gave me deep in my soul.
And how it sprouts, digs roots,
And ribbons within all parts
Of me, letting me know
No matter the who or the what
Of all that confuses me, is the You
Who abides deep within me
As we walk from here to forever.

48. As Women Often Do

Where were we

When God fingered
Through our history, all women,
All the same with our hurts
And sharp-edged hang-ups
That will take a slice of skin,
if you're not careful?
Maybe we were hanging out in some
Sort of vortex of unremembering,
Staring into something, into each other,
not even knowing our history, hurting
And harping on all those things
That never matter when it's time
To unremember for good.
Or perhaps all lay dormant
Until He breathed fire into
Our veins, our cells and synapses
All alight and sparkling with the life
He breathed into Eve, her Adam,
and all who came after, adding
to the communal pain
Of what it means to be human
As one attempts to manage it,
backwards and in heels.
Or maybe it was as simple as being born
Me to her and you to me,
And us loving each other so hard
We didn't have the heart to name it,
And instead barked our fear
And screamed those hurts

As women often do.

49. What We Never Had in the First Place

Seek first the Kingdom,
But which one?
Mine or Yours?
I go for the former
Too often than I'd like
to admit, taking bits
And crumbs
From other people's plates,
Pretending it's a meal.
But how hungry I am,
Sitting and watching
As my bones go brittle,
My heart goes weak,
And my skin wears
Like an old musty coat—
checked in but never checked out.
And it's only as I choke
On its dust that I remember
That we are different but the same,
Made by another maker, worn
Down by the hand of man,
The sweat of lost promises,
And loosened at our seams,
Waiting for the everything
That could be ours
If we gave up
What we never
had in the first place.

50. The Only One Whose Heart Bleeds Too

Jesus loves me, this I know

For my heart bleeds His shade
Of suffering, and I no longer
Hold my future in my hands.
How little we know of happiness
And yet tout it as the only way
Of knowing Him, but how happy
Can one be, staring down the barrel
Of a friend's disloyalty,
Holding the noose tied by all
Who claim you ignorant,
Or feeling the blade set against
Your skin by those who shared
the same womb?
He cried out to the only One
Who ever understood,
And isn't that what we do too?
Abba, Father, have you forsaken us?
Or maybe you just walk slightly ahead
With a gentle tenderness that needs
No sound.
So, no, maybe happiness has nothing
To do with it. But maybe it's more
Like knowing the only One
Whose heart bleeds too.

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