

Scars Are Memories Bleeding Through



Ariana D. Den Bleyker

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Dedication

I am forever grateful to the staff at Four Winds Hospital in Katonah, NY, for caring for me during my most recent psychotic break and suicide attempt in the winter of 2017. Though I was mostly incoherent and unable to write effectively, a few of the staff told me to hold onto what I'd written and turn it into something better one day, as a further exploration of my experience and emotions.

I am also grateful for the strength and perseverance my husband and children provided to me during my recovery in the weeks and months that followed and for providing the encouragement needed for me to pick up my pen again.

I'd especially like to thank the members of the mental illness community for their support and solidarity in understanding my experiences with Bipolar Disorder and sharing their stories with me.

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Where There's Death, There's God

(A Prologue to Recovery)

Wishes never come true through wishbones—
the pulled & pulling, white bones

slipping through greasy fingers,
God always coming away with the bigger piece.

I do it wrong, offer violence
until it speaks guilty from grief & prayers to raise the dead.

I don't think of wounds, blood turning
to scabs, the finger dragging

along a splinter of crazy—
impulse, urge—to press

up close, kiss the sting away, hands digging
graves, heavens storming,

poltergeists holding roses out to the stars,
diving into the Grand Canyon

(the eternal negative of the most beautiful mountain),
For a moment

ghost's eyes fall dead upon me & I have no place

in my body; suddenly I'm survival,
omen, erring spirit, adaptation.

To Be Sitting Right Next to the Ghost of Yourself, to Love It, but Not Know It at All

I sit against extinguished emotion—
feeling a relative term—void of heart—a punch,
a last word reminiscent of the past,
naked, vulnerable, yet invincible,
riding the world
on a mechanical bull, back tall—
my highest, brightest self tossed perpetually
backwards, spine alive—wingless
& questionable—dreaming
of hearses, ghosts of long gone possibilities,
regret, the warm, full belly of laughter
reminding me of when I was ripe,
the prettiest fruit on the tree, knowing
what's missing inside me is more careless,
though nothing may ever come
of a new face, skin wasted on the strength
of a backhand, the heart
replaced with vicious things, fierce thrusting
escaping & showing how things feel pain
as they do, wounds swelling red to black,
the shock & tremble leaning closer,
boiling inside my body,
taking each moment for how it's done,
already knowing despite recognizing

the impulse, the urge to reach
the furthest edge west of west, press
up close to hear the beauty
surging in then the sweeping
new & desolate that enters again,
the weight of bone heavy inside my palms.

The Grief Filling the Empty Dirty Nests Clutter the Tree Branches Lining My Lack of Understanding

I feel that smile, its tiny hammock—
choosing words I wouldn't have chosen for myself.

I musn't mourn it but remember it's lived
in pieces of me. I take the best of them & breathe deeply.

There's beauty in sickness & dying & rotting—
I know it in my bones as they shiver against each other.

I know. When I look at it today,
its skin a sun that stares, I remember waking up

the night I almost died thrashing, the snow outside falling
thinly, freezing the shoulders of night,

first sweet, then harsh—
ice rising rapidly like shame, the devastation

unveiling in me. Admit it. Admit it, it called to me
in memory. Admit you like things tender,

leaving me without something, my body floating,
mania, my love with shiny plumage rising above voices,

it, now a woman with two wings & quiet hands

in her lap, broken hair in her face—

more than not—not going—the way birds rise
malignant, slit sky for something lasting

in death here on the shore of my death with only time
& photographs between us, grief like laughter,

grief shaking stardust from its head.
& though the world darkens, stars remain

burned into memory, tiny pieces of life glowing
forever inside me.

Bless Small Accidents

The world is silent, not still, faster
but more silent, which is how it will always be.
The end, if it comes, will be quiet
darkness, rain warm as flesh,
gust of wind—a mercy—a forgotten tree
ripe for the imagining,
for understanding simplicity,
small pleasures,
things that come without warning,
moments we want to forget ourselves,
climb trees with tiny familiar hands
& set them on fire,
watch their branches blacken,
bark peeling while we sit inside the shadows, the smoke,
the spitting sparks, no longer able to tell
how hot it is or remember what heat means,
catch falling ashes
until our tongues release
the faint tickle in the back of our throats,
the scent of burned leaves throbbing, needling
itself inside us
until we fall & strike roots, rail & scratch
our faces (the worst part
not being the scratch or scrape or cut itself,

the broken skin, but the pain meant to make us
remember, to make our hearts learn
to fold their hands in prayer).

Together Death & I Watch Hawks Crash

into the blueberry cupola of night sky.
I wanted to write love letters to every-

one around me. He asks for a kiss.
That our eyes mirrored winter, loose

pine needles, broken ornaments. Ancient
spirits moaned, & we could hear

the short breaths rising from our pillows
grow fainter each day. I didn't want

the fire he brought with his hands.
That I love with only three quarters

of my heart. That I had canvas
& sable brushes. That I count empty

vases, my head splitting from the smell
of orchids. That I'm a wounded muskrat

dragged across the yard, mangled limbs
still twitching. That the cornflowers whisper.

I'm holding my breath for the part
where the sun sets fire to the moon,

where I split, swallow moods like thorns.

The Torch Burning between Me & the Moon above the Trees in the Yard across the Street

I take in the bruised moon whole;
its bite washes & grows within my mouth,

rises through my body
giving me form, leaves my blistered tongue

cooling in the night air.
Pain feeds me: its open mouth

allows no distance
between me & the mirror

at my center looking back at itself,
& for the first time I understand

what black is, showing itself only in ghosts,
my brokenness looking

at me as if I should grope
it for pleasure, as if I'd be driven

mad if I didn't. I break the prayerless quiet,

birth emptiness, (unsure if I'll get through
this darkness knowing nothing changes,

though this is different, I'm different

& mistakes are forgiven) & release it

to the wilderness, watch it bolt,
wait until what's left behind is gone,

knowing it'll be growling
in the blackness, ready to push back

onto my lap so I can pull it up to my chin,
close my eyes & see fire.

I Go Crazy in Late October as Depression Cuts the Endless Summer Cold

A finger prick beads blood not so red, not so thick
& I've felt no pain sitting here dreaming

of blood, knives. Or didn't. Or haven't. Or won't.
Everything alludes to my mood. This taste,

for instance, this taste of depression runs blood orange-red
down the hollow of my throat. Its neck tastes

of honey, honey easy on the tongue.
I want to eat up the past, smell its raw meat

gleaning against its bones, against its ribcage. Strange cage,
imprisoning nothing. I'm bones too, lungs with no

hope to breathe. No more than a moment about
to expire. I crave dreams of craving something carnal,

patient beginnings. It comes up to this: I grow new scars,
watch the clouds douse the sun, the birds who'll soon

again sow their winter gliding off against the night,
against the swollen moon with talons full

& so I open the door to my memory
& toss what is blue into the air, watch part of me fly

away. The movement without movement
of my body keeps everything moving.

I hate living only because I've practiced hating
myself. I've always longed for places I shouldn't go:

the cast out blackness of shadow, dark alleys, symbolic
death.

I'm not ready to let go. What it means or could mean

is not yet fixed nor could be. Go on, there's no room
for sadness now. Soon there will be no resting place.

A Beautiful Mind Comes at Its Own Price & I Am None But Beautiful

If I could live forever somehow rectified
as psalm, it really wouldn't matter

my hallucinations have birthed Jesus
or my latest visions etch worry

into my gut. With each step he takes toward me,
my world is not walked into, but fallen, pushed behind—

under me—life cast outward.
I see small apples in his eyes—

ripe bulbs, clusters of sweetness, red promises—
while I salivate as if required to taste the fruit

despite my fullness, despite eating & loving
too much, shaking madly—

broken equilibrium—seeing myself
electric, infinite, welcoming Christ into the graceful
curvature

of my arms, turning in well-worn sheets.
We come together but only to embrace hope.

(I love you, I love you. Isn't that what I'm supposed to
sing?)

Jesus tells me death is not dying

& I can't put my finger on him or what he means.

He is here in my bedroom, smiling

& that's how I know he's not real. He doesn't smile

at me anymore. The moonlight pouring

through the window makes him seem as if he is glowing

& the scene begins to burn, he, we are burning

& the sky blooms with dying heavens.

I've Let My Nails Grow, Scars Later Revealing Themselves after Bathing as if a Developing Photograph

As always, I want to sidestep the pain
& let it take residence until it rots.

[Maybe the pain outside is easier to handle
because we know how to fix it:
cold water for burn, ice pack for bruise,
bandage for cut, cast for broken bone,
kisses for boo-boo—what's inside a little harder.]

Maybe the blossoming of the new year will change me.
No one else will ever want to kill me like I do—

in that place where heartbeat lingers:
somewhere between hospital bed sheets

& newfound aching in the chest
where voices talk to fill a silent void.

When the happiness scabs over, who'll make up
excuses for why I can't return home?

All I've ever known is to be grateful I didn't die,
that I've lived through my crucible & am now free—

Everything I Touched Became a Wound

Mania gave me summer in an envelope;
the red light within my bones

glowing. It shaped my bones into its hunting coat
until blue came without warning

& I felt the failing brightness of my skin sink
deeper into darkness.

(I think some things should be left unsaid.)
Gray is beautiful, cold, the color of deep

regret. I felt wind dawn upon my face
& time hold me by a whisper.

(Put your hand there; you'll feel it too.)
Life's too simple for speech & words no longer come.

Equilibrium came to me quiet as rain
not fallen, afraid of how I might fail myself,

my dress kept open in memory, bearing breast,
sex, smelling worn, of boys, of once long grass, of heart.

It came quiet as bulbs not yet broken out
into sunlight. I tried not to hurt, yet everything

I touched became a wound.

I was afraid that if I found peace,
it would scald my hands.

On Giving Up Alcoholism

I confess I came too late to the bloom.
There isn't a reason, but there is. It must be

a memory, a recognition of the place I left
to wither & hold still. Between the fever

& the bottle, between the stories & the years,
who can say what is remembered? I'm trying

to make sense of what came before, before
I kept on sleeping, sleeping & dreaming inside

my womb, my body curled in on itself,
slippery & warm, slow tongue & bruised

taste buds ripped open into a gritty red.
(They say when you bleed, you become

a woman.) How many days I wished
to have back until I unwished them all,

my airless lungs gasping, mouth popped.
Maybe I just felt it. Maybe I just decided

I was tired, but that red, that red repeating
itself was something I was meant to understand

when my fever subsided & my body returned.

Scars Are Memories Bleeding Through

I ask him his name as if it were a little address,
a door where I could enter him,

stare into his eyes, witness, feel
his fingers skim my body,

tiny teeth grazing, biting his silence
while he speaks a conversation with himself—

I lose the littlest of words, lips too timid to speak
the language of emotion—too proud

to use the syllables of longing,
little tears of the mouth.

Maybe it's too late to recognize things
our bodies forget—the softness of air, smell of quiet.

Depression and I lie: each in our own body. Between us:

someone waiting to make the first move—
to surrender loneliness, love, the sky, possibility of night.

I walk toward him, his silence against my silence.
We keep going, not recognizing

home is a feeling, a quiet sigh. While we still have hands,

we touch the answers of our bodies.
But it's more than hands. I long to touch my scars.
It's more than my lips—I want to kiss my smile.

I Wear the Flesh of an Imperfect Animal

I didn't have to trade my life
in compromises when winter sprang at me,
daring me once again to tease or test
my resolve for just how much I can stand
after going home. I didn't want to go.
I didn't want to trade my life
in compromises for bunched bone
& flesh tucked inside
or hate those who hate scars,
those content with bearing new lives
after plummeting from the pliable blue
belly of sky into a wild world
engraved in the known.
I was born of a different dark, a trick,
a kind of infidelity, the salt of the past's shoulder
on my tongue. I've adjusted to the degrees
of gray, gathered them until light escaped me.
Tonight, I chase shadows into darkness
under a moon that looks nothing like a face.
I'm smiling, and I'm all teeth.



Ariana D. Den Bleyker is a Pittsburgh native currently residing in New York's Hudson Valley, where she is a wife and mother of two. When she's not writing, she's spending time with her family and every once in a while, sleeps. She is the author of numerous chapbooks, including *Strangest Sea* (Porkbelly Press, 2015), *Beautiful Wreckage* (Flutter Press, 2015), *Unsent* (Origami Poems Project, 2015), *Birds Never Sing in Caves* (Dancing Girl Press, 2016), *Cutting Eyes from Ghosts* (Blood Pudding Press, 2017), and *Even the Statue Weeps* (Dancing Girl Press, forthcoming 2019). She hopes you'll fall in love with her words.

Scars Are Memories Bleeding Through is a poetic offering of “things that come without warning,” of mental poltergeists and omens of frenetic negative feelings fused with desires for softness and love and light and fire, so the red energy does not turn black and rot away forever. Ghostly glitches grow into episodes of inward delirium that writhe into inward malignancies, that shiver and shudder on and off, and are camera shuttered into poem lines. These poems capture challenging moments, thoughts, imagery of a body and mind feeling damaged like darkly beautiful dying animals in a morbid circus act that turns “the eternal negative” into “spitting sparks.”

— Juliet Cook, poet and Editor of *Thirteen Myna Birds* and Blood Pudding Press



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