

Bitthika Mohanty

Reverie



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Stories Matter
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Preface

Hi.

I am Bithika, and I like stories. Always have. The real ones, the half-true ones, the ones that only exist in someone's voice when they say "I'm fine" a little too quickly. I also like the ones my brain invents while doing very normal things, like breathing or walking past a stranger who looked like they were keeping a secret.

That's how Reverie happened.

Not planned. Just... written.

It started with one poem. Then another. Then an unhealthy attachment to a man who brought flowers for no reason. Then a murder. Then a really good breakfast.

This is not a serious poetry book. But it's not unserious either, mostly it is.

It's somewhere between crying during a work meeting and realizing your neighbor's marriage might be a crime documentary in progress.

None of it is real. Most of it is me trying to imagine what would happen if I watched life too closely. And some of it is just emotional improv held together by metaphors and carbs.

I won't lie - this book contains eggs, trauma, romance, a weird obsession with sound, and one very poetic breakdown that happened in a cooking class. So, you know... the usual.

Also, did you know octopuses have three hearts, and two of them stop beating when they swim? Yeah. I read that once while procrastinating a panic attack. You're welcome.

Anyway - if you're here, I hope this book feels like a worn-out hoodie, the smell of adrak wali chai, and the kind of silence that doesn't ask anything of you. I hope it makes you laugh out loud in a café. And if you cry while reading this which you won't - just pretend it's allergies. That's what I do.

Stay happy and hydrated.

And if the plot doesn't make sense yet - keep reading. Life rarely does at first.

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1. The Archive of Almost

I live in a room full of "not quite yet,"
With shelves of regrets like unopened debts.
The mirror is kind till I ask it to stay,
Then it flickers and fades like it's walking away.

There's a notebook that says "change starts here,"
I wrote it in ink, then I disappeared.
The pages are blank but they smell like hope -
The kind you forget when you're trying to cope.

My laptop's a shrine to the lives I've skipped -
Tabs on tabs like a manic script.
One's titled "Career," the next is "Desire,"
Both untouched while I scroll through a dumpster
fire.

I buy candles like they're spells for my fate,
Then light them and cry while I show up late.
I call it intentions, but really, it's fear -
Wrapped in a filter and twelve wasted years.

I draft love notes like I'm bleeding gold,
Then delete them all before they're told.
Because what if I try, and it's not enough?
What if I show up and they call my bluff?

So, I flirt with disaster and binge on delay,
Tell everyone I'm fine in a "healing" way.
I romanticize chaos, I caption my dread,
I screenshot advice and scroll past instead.

There's a dress I bought for a version of me
Who wakes up early and drinks mint tea.
She journals in cursive; she goes for a run -
I left her on read after week one.

They say "just begin," but beginning is war -
With the voice in your head that says "do even more."
And the girl in the glass who's wearing your face
But edits her life like it's out of place.

I don't fear failure - I fear the reveal
That I'm ordinary, just dressed to conceal.
That I'll give it my all and it still won't land,
That applause won't arrive, and I won't understand.

So, I hoard my brilliance, call it a storm,
Stay unmade so I don't underperform.
My potential is pretty, pristine, intact -
Because nothing gets ruined when nothing gets
cracked.

And maybe that's tragic, and maybe it's art -
To be so almost and still fall apart.
But I know tomorrow will knock on my door,
And I'll say, "Not now. Come back when I'm more."



2. Check In, Check Out

I moved here with a suitcase full of reinvention,
A self-care spreadsheet and curated intentions.
The city looked golden through my phone at night,
But in real life, even the pigeons have more fight.

Everyone's glowing, like it's their full-time job.
Even the guy on the corner who's yelling is hot.
The air smells like ambition with a touch of espresso,
And I smell like stress and yesterday's deodorant
echo.

My neighbor jogs at five. For fun.
She waves like we're friends. I try not to run.
Her playlist sounds like inner peace in motion,
While mine loops breakup songs and ocean devotion.

There's a girl on the train who reads Camus with
style,
And I mirror her pose like I've been seen in a while.
I cross my legs the way she does, all ease and grace -
But I spill my drink and cry through my face.

My office has glass walls and bright open space,
And I stare at the printer like it knows its place.
It hums with confidence. Its light never dies.
Meanwhile, I glitch when someone meets my eyes.

The projector projects. It knows what to do.
Rotating colors more vibrant than my mood.
It beams like joy. It beams with pride.
And I sit in the back pretending to hide.

The barista remembers my name, my order, my pace,
I mirror her smile, but not her grace.
Her nails are perfect. Her laugh is loud.
She looks like someone who isn't afraid of a crowd.

Even the lobby smells like goals and worth.
The walls are marble. The plants give birth.
I mirror the plants. I sit in sun.
But I wilt, while they're just having fun.

The stop sign glows like it's flirting at dusk.
The trash bins look minimalist and quietly just.
There's a pigeon with eyeliner and runway wings.
And I? I forget how to do basic things.

Everyone here is the main character vibe.
Even the mannequins know how to thrive.
They stand in glass like they're made to be seen,
And I stare back like I've never been clean.

I tried to become someone worth becoming.
I bought new sheets. I went grocery running.
The cashier smiled like she knew my type -
A girl who's pretending her soul isn't wiped.

The mirror in my room says, "Start again."
So I pose like a version I saw back then -
A girl in a movie, with hair that sways.
I strike the pose, but I'm just a phase.

Everywhere I go, I catch a reflection -
Of who I could be, with just one correction.
But I'm stuck in a glitch, a bootleg repeat,
Looping through strangers I fail to complete.

I shop for calm in the home section aisle,
Buy mugs that say "breathe" and pillows with style.
Then I scroll through apartments I can't afford,
With bathtubs that promise to heal what's ignored.

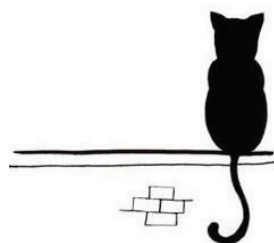
I text "I'm thriving" and add a spark,
Then cry at my desk after staying till dark.
The city is gorgeous. The lights are divine.
But even the street signs seem better aligned.

I keep checking in like I'm part of the scene,
But my heart checks out where the silence leans.
I have a zip code. I have a view.
I have a voice that still sounds untrue.

It all feels right, in a wrong kind of way,
Like laughing too hard at what you meant to say.
So I mirror the world till it blurs and bends,
And dream of a self that finally ends.

Until then, I ghost my potential with flair,
Pretend to be present, breathe curated air.
And when someone asks "How's your fresh start
out?"

I smile and say,
"I checked in. I'm still figuring the checkout."



3. Coffee for one

I took myself out on a date today -
Just me and my courage and this café.
It felt cinematic in theory, at least,
But the moment I walked in, I forgot how to breathe.

I stood in line rehearsing my order,
Like it was an audition and I was out of water.
“An oat iced vanilla thing, but, like, less sweet?”
The barista blinked, and I smiled with defeat.

She said, “Enjoy your drink,” with a chirp and a grin,
I panicked, said “You too,” and dissolved within.
That alone should be illegal - why must we speak?
Why must we pretend we’re not awkward and weak?

I picked the corner seat, tried to seem chill,
Took out my book but just stared until
My straw betrayed me and missed my mouth,
And I pretended it didn’t while dying inside-out.

There was a couple beside me, clearly in love,
She laughed like she’d never known pain, or a shove

Into self-help TikToks and spirals of doom.
Meanwhile, I sat there, the third wheel of the room.

I tried to journal, to be that girl who writes,
But my pen didn't work, and the lighting was spite.
I took a deep breath like I'd seen online,
Then choked on my sip and coughed out a rhyme.

My phone stayed out so I wouldn't seem lost,
Like I wasn't one heart-eye emoji from being tossed
Back into his DMs with fake casual flair -
"Oops, meant to send that to someone else, swear."

I tried to look busy. I tried to look wise.
Crossed my ankles. Tilted my eyes.
Took selfies that screamed "effortless beauty,"
Then cropped out the table and half my anxiety.

A child dropped her cookie right near my shoe,
Her mom stared at me like I knew what to do.
I froze in the moment, smiled too wide -
Then kicked the cookie. I genuinely died.

The playlist was jazz. Or ambient rain?
Either way, it dripped straight into my brain.

I nodded like I got it - cool, calm, elite -
Then spilled some foam on my fitted seat.

The girl two tables down had flawless brows
And a laptop with stickers that screamed "I'm
allowed"

To take up space, to think out loud,
To live without wondering if she's too proud.

I mirrored her posture, her hair tucked behind,
But my mirror is cracked and lags behind.
I look like a girl trying not to fall -
Which is accurate, frankly. I'm not fine at all.

And yet -

I stayed.

I sipped.

I wrote this line.

Which might not seem brave, but it feels like mine.

And that's the thing about coffee for one:

You arrive as a joke, but you leave as someone.

I learned how to sit without bracing to flee,
How to look at a stranger and just let them be.
How to fumble and blush and still not go,
To exist without purpose and take it slow.

I learned the world doesn't stop when you trip,
And silence, though loud, won't crack or rip.
That nobody's watching as hard as you think -
They're busy with sugar or missing their drink.

I left with a buzz - not from caffeine,
But from realizing awkward can still be serene.
And though I'm no goddess with bookstore flair,
I'm someone who stayed. And that counts
somewhere.



4. The Cry you schedule

I didn't plan to cry today -
But it fit so neatly between 9 and halfway.
I woke up with that throb behind the eyes,
The kind that says "something's wrong, but let's not
analyze."

So, I showered like I was rinsing a mood,
Skipped breakfast, stood weirdly, forgot my food.
The kind of morning where your own breath sounds
fake,
And even your shadow feels like a mistake.

The tears came sharp at 10:13,
Just after I muted a Zoom screen.
I cried with purpose. With perfect pace.
Like it was cardio - but for the face.

I gave myself twenty. That felt fair.
To break just enough without noticeable wear.
At 10:31 I wiped off the proof,
Said "You got this" while shaking a tooth.

At 10:33 I joined the call,
Said “Hi, so sorry!” and raised my wall.
I smiled with corners I didn’t possess,
And nodded through charts like I wasn’t a mess.

I looked in the mirror just to assess -
And weirdly, somehow, I looked... my best.
Hair a little wild, eyes soft and wet,
I hate to admit it - but post-cry? I’m a threat.

Because here’s the truth no one likes to imply:
Sometimes I look really pretty after I cry.
Like pain makes me glow, like grief adds depth,
Like mascara running gives me character and breath.

They talked in bullets. I blinked on cue.
Said “That’s a great point” without having a clue.
My mascara held like a loyal friend -
One who lies but stays till the bitter end.

At 11:00, I left the screen
And stood in the hallway like a figurine.
Then cried again - but just for five.
Because I had an email, and I needed to survive.

That cry was quieter, more refined -
The sobbing equivalent of "I'm fine."
The kind where you choke so your voice won't break,
Because Slack notifications don't tolerate ache.

I didn't cry because something occurred.
I cried because the silence slurred.
Because no one asked and I didn't say,
Because healing costs more than minimum pay.

I cried in shifts, in bits, in sips.
I cried between clicks and calendar slips.
I didn't have time to unravel in full,
So I scheduled collapse like a meeting rule.

The city outside kept doing its show,
With its indie cafés and "growth" in tow.
And I? I collapsed in high-res disguise,
Then opened a doc and monetized my highs.

Sometimes I wonder what would occur
If I had no deadline to defer.
If I cried for real, not just on breaks -
Would something soften, or would something shake?

But I don't test the theory. I've got things to do.
Like vacuum the sadness and pay what's due.
So I press my sadness into a drawer,
And cry again later - between 4:04 and 4:24.



5. What If It's Not Sad Enough Anymore?

I was halfway through a sandwich when it hit -
That maybe I'm healing? Just a little bit.

I wasn't crying or faking a grin,
Just chewing in sunlight and letting life in.

The sandwich was decent, the sky was bright,
The pigeons were judging me (probably right).
And I realized, mid-bite, while scrolling my screen,
That nothing around me was tragic or mean.

No aching playlist, no cinematic rain,
No doom-shaped thought clawing into my brain.
I wasn't spiraling, wasn't on guard,
Just... fine. Which, for me, is emotionally hard.

I looked at a dog like "That dog is free."
Then cried a bit - not sad, just me.
It's weird to be normal when sad's been your brand,
When your trauma's a playlist, a post, a demand.

I wanted to panic - like, "Bring back the ache!"
Like happiness had to be some kind of fake.
I almost texted my ex just for flair,
To spiral in style with great, messy hair.

But I didn't. I just let the moment stay,
And suddenly joy felt... kinda okay?
I laughed at a meme I'd normally skip,
Then wore lip gloss and didn't let it drip.

I looked in the mirror and, swear to the sky -
Sometimes I look really pretty after I cry.
Like something about the chaos gives glow,
Like heartbreak's a serum the influencers know.

But today I wasn't glowing from pain -
Just natural lighting and a quiet brain.
No heavy monologue, no tragic twist,
No inner dialogue I couldn't resist.

And that freaked me out, in a gentle way -
Like when your anxiety goes on holiday.
What do I write when I'm not a wreck?
What do I post when life's not a speck?

I used to mourn with poetic flair,
With bathtub photos and sad girl stare.
Now I just... floss. And heat my food.
And occasionally feel a bearable mood.

I miss the drama, the long text drafts,
The 2 a.m. questions, the late-night crafts
Of turning my heartbreak into something artful -
But now my biggest issue is mild and chartful.

I think I'm okay. Not healed or pure,
But fine enough not to need a metaphor.
And that, my friend, is truly wild -
To wake up and feel like a semi-stable child.

So no, this poem won't trend as a tweet.
No bleeding words or suffering sweet.
Just me in a hoodie, finishing lunch,
Feeling okay and a little unsure bunch.

Will I break down again? Oh, for sure.
I cry on Thursdays. It's part of the tour.
But today I smiled, and meant it inside -
And that kind of peace? It's harder to hide.



6. Spin-Cycle

I was doing laundry and suddenly fighting
With a girl I've never met but was definitely slighting
Me in an Instagram comment three years ago,
So I folded a hoodie and said, "You don't even know."

"You think I'm weak because I cried at brunch?
At least I don't post vague quotes about healing a
bunch."

Then I smirked in the mirror like I'd won the debate -
Except the mirror said, "That's not a flex. That's
hate."

Fine.

So I pivoted to a fake TED Talk moment,
Lecturing my detergent about fear and atonement.
"It's not that I'm scared. It's that the world is absurd."
The Downy said nothing. That stuff never says a
word.

Next, I practiced a run-in with my ex at a bar.
He looked surprised. I looked like a star.

He said, "You look good." I said, "I know."

Then reached for a sock and lost the glow.

Because then I remembered he never looked back.

And I folded a shirt like it held the lack.

"You loved me wrong," I told a towel,

Which felt dramatic, but still... kinda foul.

A sock asked, "But didn't you ghost him first?"

I gasped. Betrayed. "Wow. You're the worst."

But it had a point, and I knew it was fair,

So I shoved it in a drawer like I didn't care.

Then I imagined my therapist entering the scene:

Calm cardigan, clipboard, eyes full of caffeine.

She asked, "How are we doing with boundaries this week?"

And I said, "I only cried once while folding a fitted sheet."

She nodded. "Progress. But let's unpack the rage."

So I ranted to my pajamas like they were a stage.

I told them about middle school, love, shame, and need.

They said, "Girl, you're tired. Drink water. Proceed."

So I switched the setting to a future date,
With a man who reads books and arrives not late.
We're laughing over tea. He calls me sublime.
Then my bra snapped in my hand - perfect timing.

He said, "You're magical." I said, "You too."
Then tripped on my jeans like that's what I do.
I imagined him loving the mess that I am,
Not asking me twice why I cancel my plans.

And somewhere between the rinse and spin,
I got in an argument with my second skin.
My old hoodie said, "You've changed. You're clean."
And I whispered, "Good. That's what I mean."

Then I had a full breakdown with my favorite tee,
Held it like a lifeline, said, "You knew me."
The tee didn't flinch. It's seen my worst.
It knows every version that got there first.

"You still feel like her," I told my sleeve.
"The girl who stayed when she should've just leave."
And the sleeve said back, "But look where you are -
You're washing your wounds, not naming them
scars."

I wanted to clap. Or cry. Or sit.

But I had more towels, and I had to commit.

So I folded my grief into cotton and thread,
Tried not to spiral into the things I'd left unsaid.

And maybe this sounds like I'm losing my mind,

But this is what healing looks like sometimes.

A one-woman show with no crowd, no end,
Just a girl and her clothes and her voices pretending -

To be fine, to be fierce, to be everything now.

To survive in silence while learning how

To love herself loudly in moments so small,

Even if the laundries still folded all wrong after all.



7. Things I googled at 1:17AM

At 1:17 A.M. my brain said “nope,”
So I turned to the only thing left: blind hope -
Which is to say, I opened Chrome
And tried to Google my way back home.

I wasn't crying, but I wasn't okay.
I just wanted one search to take it away.
So I typed with purpose and half a tear:
“Can someone die from cringing for a year?”

Then: “Do ghosts get bored?” and “Do exes feel
guilt?”
“How to wash pillowcases soaked in built-in wilt.”
“Why does my soul feel allergic to calm?”
“What does it mean when your sadness has charm?”

I Googled “Is bread a meal or a phase?”
Then immediately followed with “Do introverts
craze?”
I searched “Why do I imagine fake fights in the
shower?”
And “Do people peak or just lose their power?”



I asked Google if I was “emotionally brave,”
Then searched “is it normal to sob when you shave?”
“How long is too long to stalk an old flame?”
“Does watching his stories count as a game?”

I got distracted, typed “best horror films ranked,”
Then “how to flirt subtly” (my attempts are tanked).
“Can you fall in love with a playlist alone?”
“Is it clingy to text if the tone is unknown?”

I looked up “Do therapists take walk-ins for vibes?”
“Is ‘it is what it is’ just emotional bribery?”
Then: “Best comebacks I should’ve said at the time,”
And: “How to cope when you’re ghosted mid-prime.”

At 1:33 I found myself typing,
“Do people regret not liking me back?”
Followed by:
“If I went off-grid, would anyone crack?”

I asked if houseplants absorb emotional pain.
I asked if it’s healthy to name your brain.
I asked if the moon causes poor self-esteem.
I asked if the barista felt our connection was real (or a dream?).

Then I stared at a candle and thought about fate.
Typed “Should I text him or simply hydrate?”



My keyboard was judging me. So was the floor.
Even my blanket said “girl, no more.”

And just when I thought I was done with the cringe,
I typed, “How to know if your ex is unhinged.”
Then backspaced quick, like “no, this is a trap,”
But it was too late - the spiral had mapped.

I Googled “How to dress like a girl with her life
together,”
Then laughed because I was wearing two socks from
two weathers.

I searched “How to stop Googling your feelings at
night,”
And the top result said “girl, turn off the light.”

But instead I typed, “Will I ever be fine?”
“Or is ‘coping in style’ my lifelong sign?”
And just before closing the final tab,
I searched:

“Why do I always feel better after a digital grab?”

So I didn’t sleep, but I giggled a bit,
At the chaos I typed and refused to quit.
And maybe I’m messy, but at least I’m aware,
That healing at midnight is never that rare.



8. This is my Villain Origin Outfit



I went to the mall because I needed a win,
Because silence was loud and I hated my skin.
Because my room felt like an ex I can't block,
And all of my feelings were folding in sock by sock.

I passed a Calvin Klein ad with men who smolder,
With cheekbones sharp enough to gaslight and
shoulder

Every bad decision I've ever worn like perfume -
And I said to myself, "You need to change your
costume."

Not into comfort, or peace, or some growth-friendly
fleece.

No.

I wanted to look like revenge that refused to cease.
I wanted to look like heartbreak had hired a stylist.
Like I'd come to collect what he owed in the finest.

I strutted into Zara like I owned the lease,
Grabbed leather and lace with the vibe of "release."

I tried on a coat with Bond-villain flair,
And boots that said, "I dare you to care."

In the fitting room, I channeled rage with a gloss,
Lined my lips like a woman who's counting her loss.
I posed like a threat. I pouted like sin.
I looked like the reason he'd drink gin again.

A corset whispered, "Just let me hurt you."
A skirt said, "Text him, and blame the virtue."
But the boots? They just said, "Walk away hot."
And I believed them - boots do not plot.

I practiced my smirk in the cracked mirror glass,
Stood like a woman with too much class
To ever admit she was crying last night
While scrolling through memories lit by phone light.

I imagined my ex seeing me in this fit,
And immediately knowing he ruined it.
I imagined his jaw clenched, slow and tight,
While I ordered oat milk and blocked him mid-sight.

I didn't buy the corset (I need to breathe),
And a necklace that screamed "you almost had me,"
And jeans that said "you never really did." Tragically.

The girl at the register said, “Going somewhere nice?”

I said, “Just becoming someone who no longer thinks twice.”

She smiled like she understood the need
To dress like a warning label people read.

I stopped at Sephora. Tried on six scents.
Picked the one that smelled like “you can’t afford this.”

Spritzed it on my wrists like breaking a curse,
Then smiled in the mirror like it could be worse.

Because it could. I could be crying on his floor.
Wearing oversized tees I don’t even adore.
But instead I was here, an aesthetic grenade,
A girl with lipstick that could ruin a decade.

I went home like the mall was my final arena,
Dropped my bags like I’d just fought Athena.
Put on a playlist that would terrify men,
And strutted down my hallway once again.

I cat-walked in silence. Lights down low.
Tried on each outfit like a solo show.



Blew a kiss to no one. Closed my eyes.

Twirled like I'd never once compromised.

And when I peeled it all off, stood bare in my room,

Under soft light and leftover perfume,

I smiled - not because I was okay,

But because I finally liked how I looked not getting
saved.

So no, I'm not healed, or kind, or calm.

But I'm hotter than grief. And sharper than harm.

And if this is my villain origin arc?

Then let the camera roll. I look good in the dark.



9. Morning After Pill



I woke up with a throat like gravel and glass,
Tried to sit up but my body said, “Pass.”
My head was a kettle, my skin out of phase,
My limbs felt like ghosts left over from days.

I sneezed once, then twice, then cried from the third -
Because somehow that sneeze hit my soul like a word
I didn’t want to hear, like “you’re not strong,”
And even the tissues agreed I was wrong.

I messaged my boss with a voice note fake,
Said “Just a little off! Just need a break!”
Put a smiley face like a hostage sign,
Then collapsed on the bed like I’d crossed a line.

I felt it then - cramp number one.
That slow, familiar, here-we-go-hon.
Checked the date. Of course. My period arrived,
Like a guest who ruins your brunch but somehow
survived.

No pads left. Just one sad tampon in foil,
Crumpled and bent like it’s seen the turmoil.

I stared at it like a prayer I forgot,
Then laid back down like “This is my plot.”

My body was glowing - but not in a trend way.
More like “if I lie down weird, I might pass away.”
My stomach did flips, my back did a twist,
I genuinely wondered if I still exist.

My mom called. “How are you, my love?”
I said, “I’m fine!” in a tone unworthy of
An Oscar, a Grammy, a Daytime Emmy.
She said, “Eat soup.” I said, “Already!” (I hadn’t any.)

I stared at the ceiling for three sad hours,
Too weak for Netflix, too drained for showers.
Just me, and the cramps, and the cough on repeat,
And the blanket that smelled like emotional defeat.

I tried to meditate. I tried to nap.
I tried to sit without needing a map
To find the version of me that had her life straight -
The one who didn’t need ibuprofen to negotiate.

I posted a meme that said “Monday Mood,”
As if humor could cover this gladiator feud



Happening inside me, unseen and unpraised -
Like "Look! I'm dying! But socially glazed!"

I whispered to my heating pad like it was God,
Held my hot water bottle like a romance odd.
I begged for release, for a little less hurt,
But settled for crying in an oversized shirt.

I made toast and forgot it in the pan,
Ate cereal dry like a post-modern plan.
Choked on a spoonful of air and said "Cute,"
Then cried again watching a baby eat fruit.

I remembered the pill I took last week,
The one that promised "no baby, just bleak."
And thought, "Wow, my uterus is mad as hell,
She wanted to ruin me slow, and she's doing it well."

I googled "How long do cramps make you humble?"
And "Is it normal for organs to grumble?"
"How many sick days before you're fired?"
"Is crying in leggings deeply required?"

But somewhere in the pain, the sweat, the mess,
I realized this: there's a kind of holiness



In surviving a day you wanted to skip -
In living through hell and not losing your grip.

Because no one saw me. No one clapped.
I didn't wear makeup. My confidence snapped.
But I stayed in my body, broken and sore,
And somehow kept breathing through hour four.

And maybe that's what purity is -
Not softness, or grace, or ethereal bliss.
But groaning alone in a t-shirt that stinks,
Whispering "I matter" between sobs and blinks.

So no, I'm not glowing. I'm not composed.
I'm not that girl with the chic red nose.
I'm the girl who survived being sick and alone,
Bleeding and aching and checking her phone -

For no reason but to see the world go on,
While I lay there wondering where I'd gone.
But I stayed. And I'll stay. And tomorrow I might
Feel a flicker of something that almost feels right.



10. Wannabe Wonder woman



I woke up today with a heroic heart,
A headache the size of a modern art.
Told myself, "Enough. Today you shine,"
Then chugged two coffees like they were wine.

I put on a bra - already a feat,
Tried to clasp it behind like I don't cheat.
Fought with the strap, made weird squeaky sounds,
Finally snapped it, feeling warrior-bound.

Mascara in place, eyeliner sharp,
Lipstick on like a renaissance harp.
I looked in the mirror, made confident eyes,
Then gasped - my shirt was inside out. Nice.

I changed, regrouped, tied up my hair,
Grabbed a bag that was half Tupperware.
Forgot my keys, went back upstairs,
Stubbed my toe, swore twice, said prayers.

Still - I persisted.
Posted a quote: "Rise, queen, rise."
Then tripped on the stairs in platform highs.

The guy from 4B said, “You good?” with a blink,
I said, “Totally! Just trying to think.”

Then my tote bag split from the bottom out,
My planner, lip balm, tampons spilled out.
I scooped them all while pretending to laugh -
Because crying in public is not on my graph.

Arrived at the train like a heatwave myth,
Sweaty but smiling, spiritually fifth.
Stood like a champ while the train car shook,
Holding a pole, trying not to look
Like a girl who googled “am I failing slow?”
While sweating through her Target show.

I answered emails with passive grace,
Said “Hope this helps!” while hiding my face.
Tried to sound chill while crying on mute,
Then got up to “stretch” and eat something cute.

I ate a sad wrap that fell apart,
Wiped hummus off my anxious heart.
Called my mom, she said, “You sound tired.”
I said, “I’m just inspired.”

Went to CVS for “one quick errand,”
Left with cough drops, chocolate, and a pregnancy
test.

No reason. Just vibes. Just chaos and fear -
And yes, I bought shampoo I don’t need this year.

Back at home, I changed into "loungewear chic" -
A hoodie that smelled like last week’s peak.

Made a to-do list titled: “Conquer World,”

Then spent 45 minutes watching a girl
Fold her laundry in a way that felt holy,
While I lay in bed and messaged my goalie
Of emotions - aka my group chat:
“Do you guys ever feel deeply like THAT?”

They said yes, but also, “Maybe eat?”
So I microwaved soup, then fell asleep
While holding a fork and a vague regret
About not becoming a ballet vet.

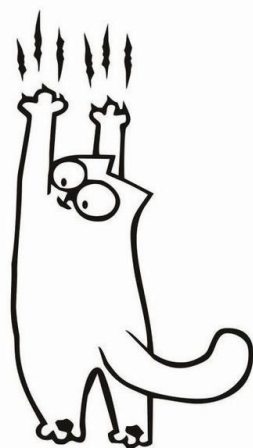
Woke up at 6 with my hair unbrushed,
A rice grain stuck to my elbow, crushed.
Still - I got up. Still - I replied.
Still - I kept my Thursday pride.



Because even when I crash and bend,
I show up again and again and again.
Maybe not polished, maybe not planned,
But half-feral hope still sits in my hand.

I may not lift buildings or run at the speed
Of a Marvel lead or some Pinterest queen,
But I text people back. I flossed last night.
I cried with style and re-wrote my fight.

And maybe that's what power is now -
Not lightning bolts, just showing somehow.
Waking up in a world that wants your glow,
And saying, "Not today. But maybe tomorrow."



11. Therapy Is Just Performing for a Woman Who Knows I'm Lying



I arrive seven minutes early to feel in control,
Take off my coat like I'm shedding a role.
Her couch is the same - a neutral grey cloud,
That has witnessed more unraveling than I'm allowed.

She greets me like always, soft and slow,
With a voice that says "I already know."
And I sit like a girl with posture to spare,
Like holding my spine might fix the despair.

She says, "How are you?" and I say, "I'm fine!"
Like I haven't rehearsed that exact line.
Like my brain didn't coach me the whole train ride here-
"Say you're good. Say you're clear."

I smile too wide. I laugh too light.
I talk about my dreams and how I slept last night.
Except I didn't. I watched four hours of crime,
Then googled "how to tell if your sadness is prime."

She leans back. I cross my legs.
Talk about work and feeling like dregs.
I mention a guy I'm "kind of" seeing -
Skip over the part where I caught myself fleeing
When he called me beautiful. That felt obscene.
So I changed the subject. Classic routine.

I joke about crying in Whole Foods again,
Say it was allergies, say it was zen.
She doesn't laugh, just writes in her pad -
And I panic inside. Did I sound that sad?

I want to say, "I'm tired of existing this way,"
But instead I say, "I'm doing okay."
Because vulnerability feels like taking off skin,
And I'd rather she guess at the chaos within.

I tell her a story that almost gets real -
About how I felt nothing during my last meal.
She says, "That sounds numb," and I nod too fast,
Say, "Yeah, but like in a cool girl way - it passed."

I talk about my mom, but only the fluff,
Say, "We're fine now," and skip the rough stuff.
How I still crave her approval like air,
But pretend I've transcended, like I don't care.

She asks, "What do you do when it gets too much?"
And I say, "I light candles, I journal and such."
Which is half-true. I write one word, maybe two.
Then scroll for an hour and eat something blue.

The silence that follows is deep and kind.
I panic - was that a prompt to unwind?
So I fill it with clever, with jokes, with charm,
Because silence means questions, and questions
disarm.

I tell her I'm fine in five different ways.
With metaphors, shrugs, and yoga clichés.
She says nothing, just waits with care,
And I feel so seen I almost dare -

To say: "I'm not okay, and I'm scared I never will be."
To ask: "Do you think someone could actually love
me?"

To admit: "I miss people who were bad for my soul."
To whisper: "Sometimes I don't feel like I'm whole."

But I don't. I breathe. I laugh instead.
Mention how I cried in bed.

But make it sound like a quirky flex -
Like crying's just cardio for emotionally complex.



She smiles, not smug, but knowing and wide,
Like she's met every version of me I hide.
And it stings, how gently she sees through my script-
Like my mask is glass, perfectly equipped.

I check the time. Five minutes remain.
She says, "You don't have to perform your pain."
And my throat does something - small, unkind -
Like it remembers how not to be designed.

I nod, thank her, say "This helped a lot,"
Though I didn't say half of the thoughts I've got.
She says, "Same time next week?" like a prayer, not a
rule.

And I say, "Of course," like a woman in school.

Because maybe one day, I'll walk through her door
Without lipstick armor, without metaphor.
And maybe I'll sit, and maybe I'll speak,
Like healing doesn't mean being mystique.

But for now, I leave. And I breathe. And I try -
To feel proud of a session that was mostly a lie.
Because sometimes surviving is playing the part,
Until someone claps for the ache in your heart.



12. Smooth Operator



It happened by accident - like all great love.

I wasn't searching. I wasn't even above

A good 3 a.m. scroll in my crumb-filled bed,

When a man in red popped into my head.

Not just red - Ferrari red.

The kind of red that makes exes regret what they said.

The kind of red that screams legacy, heat,

The kind of red you don't meet on the street.

Carlos Sainz.

A name. A smirk. A storm on wheels.

With hair that looks like romance heals.

With arms that say "I fix things quietly,"

With a face that has made peace with rivalry.

He wasn't even the fastest. I didn't care.

There was something in the way he brushed back his hair.

Something in the way he said "smooth operator"

That made me black out and wake up three hours
later.

I watched one video. Then four. Then ten.
Then one of him and Charles. And I ascended then.
The way they laughed like old film reel friends -
The hand slaps, the eye rolls, the bro-bond bends.

I saw them hug after that wet Imola run,
And I wept like someone just blocked out the sun.
They were rivals. But brothers. But fate on screen.
And Carlos said "I trust him." And I said "I'm seen."

Then I found the interview where he fixes his collar,
And casually breaks me without spending a dollar.
Then the photos in suits. The Monaco light.
The helmet hair. The jawline. The fight.

I don't even like sports. I panic at speed.
But I read his telemetry like poetry I need.
I watched tire strategies like moodboard lore,
And cried when I found out he won't wear red
anymore.

He's leaving Ferrari. And I took it... bad.
Like he broke up with me - I was genuinely sad.
I imagined him packing. I imagined the garage.
I watched the tribute video like it was my own
collage.

I saw Charles tear up, just slightly, just there -
And I knew: this wasn't just racing. This was care.
This was love. This was brotherhood painted in
speed.

This was a boy who gave more than they'd need.

And now he's going to Williams. I respect the choice.
But I miss the way "Carlos Sainz - Ferrari" had a
voice.

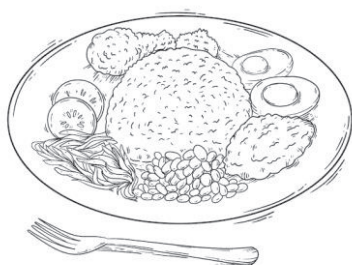
I miss the Italian drama. The espresso flair.
The way he looked at Charles like "I got you there."

I know I sound insane. I know it's too much.
But crushes like this aren't just about touch.
It's about finding someone who makes you feel
Like your sadness has wheels, like your joy is real.

Carlos, I don't know you. That's part of the charm.
You've never ruined my life. Never done me harm.
You just exist - somewhere, in Spain, in blue -
And for some reason, that brings me through.

You remind me I can still feel new obsession.
Still spiral with taste. Still host confession.
You gave me something to root for again.
Not healing. Not wholeness. But a soft chaos blend.

So no, I'm not okay - but I'm in a phase.
Where I cry over F1 edits and sunlit gaze.
And if anyone asks what love looks like now,
I'll say: he drives like anger but speaks like vow.



13. Carlos, If You're Reading This: I Can Cook Rice

It started with a tweet. Or maybe a thread.
Or maybe a dream I half-made in my head.
Something about Carlos. Something about rice.
And suddenly? My grief turned into spice.

Because apparently - he loves it. Arroz.
Said it in an interview, all casual and close.
And I, a woman with no rice-based skill,
Said "Okay, let's do this. Let's learn. Let's kill."

I googled "how to cook rice without shame."
Fell down a rabbit hole I now can't name.
There's jasmine, basmati, brown and black,
Forbidden rice that looks like a witch's snack.

I learned about soaking. I learned about steam.
I learned that cooking rice can be a dream.
I bought a rice cooker. I bought a new spoon.
I whispered "vamos" to the pot like a honeymoon.

I watched tutorials filmed in dim-lit flats
Where aunties cooked rice like tender combat.
One said, "Don't stir it or you'll break the soul,"
And I cried like she'd just made my body whole.

I made congee, paella, jollof and biryani,
Fell in love with the names - wild rice, koshihikari.
I spent twelve hours on a risotto course,
Then wrote a haiku about short-grain force.

I texted my ex, just to say, "Rice is powerful."
He didn't reply. Honestly? Wonderful.
Because I had grains to wash and salt to consider,
And I didn't have time to mourn a quitter.

Carlos, if you're reading this - first of all, hi.
Second, I hope your rice isn't dry.
I know you're busy. I know you're elite.
But if you ever want arroz that tastes sweet -

I'm here. With cumin. With bay leaves, too.
I'll cook it with care like I'm driving for you.
I'll fluff it with pride, like I own a team,
I'll serve it with silence or passion or steam.

I learned how to say “al dente” with flair,
Though that’s pasta. Don’t judge me. I’m self-aware.
But the point is: you sparked something absurd,
A soft domestic fire from one tiny word.

And maybe that’s what love really is -
Not grand. Not loud. Not sealed with a kiss.
But cooking for someone who’ll never show up,
Still plating the rice like you’re good enough.



So no, I don’t need a reply or a ring,
Just know I now understand seasoning.
And if the world ends, or your car breaks down -
I’ve got warm rice and a napkin crown.

I started storing rice in aesthetic jars,
Labelled by region, grain, and stars.
I read cookbooks like self-help guides,
Took notes on starch content. I cried.

I began to believe that a good pot of rice
Could cleanse the ache, could feel precise.
That if I mastered jasmine, I might master pain,
That if I seasoned right, I could reroute brain.

My therapist asked what I've been learning lately.
I said, "You rinse until the water runs stately."
She blinked. I explained the absorption method.
She said, "Okay, but what about feeling dread?"

And I said: "I am. But now with garlic oil."
And isn't that something? A ritual? A spoil?
To be broken, and still stir in turmeric and grace,
To still want your kitchen to smell like a place.

Carlos, I don't expect you to ever reply.
I know your team's busy. I get the sky.
But if I ever meet you, and time aligns -
You'll get the best rice in three different kinds.

I'll make the one you missed in Madrid,
The one your grandma probably once did.
I'll serve it warm with saffron and ache,
And say, "This one is for every heartbreak."

And maybe I'll cry while chopping the chive.
But I'll still serve you proud. Still arrive
With grains that were rinsed with alms and salt -
And not a single thing that was ever your fault.

Because this isn't a recipe. This is repair.
This is grief cooked low, with patient care.
This is proof that I can still love what I make -
Even when I know it won't be part of your plate.

So Carlos, wherever you are tonight,
Know someone is steaming her soul just right.
And though you'll never know how much this meant -
I've become the woman who makes rice with intent.

And honestly?
That's more than healing.
That's magic in a pot.
That's survival.
Still warm. Still soft.
Still hot.



14. I look better than I feel

I woke up with a headache shaped like doubt,
But still picked a dress that screamed “go out.”
My hair was chaos. My soul was worse.
But I still looked decent, and that’s the curse.

I painted my lips with surgical grace,
Like maybe red gloss could replace
The ache that sat behind my ribs,
Like maybe bronzer could silence fibs.



I wore mascara like war paint chic,
Cried at breakfast but kept it sleek.
Wiped the tears with the edge of my sleeve,
And told my reflection, “Smile. Don’t grieve.”

Because looking okay is its own reward.
It gets you nods. It keeps the horde
From asking “Are you sure you’re fine?”
You get to say “Of course!” and lie in line.

I wore earrings that sparkled like I had peace,
While my thoughts screamed like unpaid lease.

I wore heels that hurt like buried shame,
But made me feel sharp, untouchable, flame.

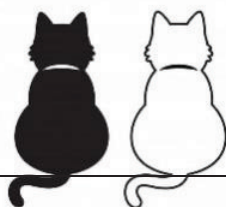
I sat at lunch with coworkers, cool,
Said "I love that for you" like it was a rule.
Laughed at a joke I didn't hear,
Because laughter means "I'm thriving here."

I posed for a photo, tilted my head,
Wore sunglasses like the grief was dead.
Got 12 likes. Felt mildly known.
Then turned off my phone and sat alone.

And still - I looked good. Objectively, sure.
Like someone with dreams, or something mature.
But inside? A blender of fear and fog.
A girl in a dress playing emotional frog.

I went home and peeled it all off -
The lashes, the posture, the well-placed cough.
Stood in my bathroom like a fraud in silk,
And washed off the glow with shame and milk.

But here's the thing I'm learning slow:
The girl who fakes it still has glow.



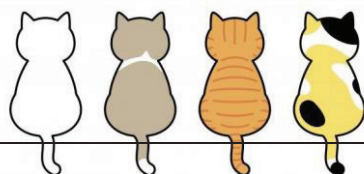
Because some days, all you get is this -
A decent outfit. A temporary bliss.

And that's enough. It has to be.
To look like strength while breaking softly.
To wear pain like perfume - light but real -
And walk through the world like it can't steal.

So no, I don't feel whole inside.
But I look like someone who hasn't cried
In three whole days (which isn't true),
But my eyeliner wing? It practically flew.

And that's a win. For now. For me.
To fake it in style and not let them see.
Because maybe healing's not bold or bright -
Maybe it's lipstick. Maybe it's white
Sneakers on a day you want to die.
Maybe it's "I'm good!" with a glittering lie.

And I'll keep showing up. That's the deal.
Looking better than I ever feel.
And one day, I might feel it too -
But until then, fake it like queens do.



15. Thank you feel too loud in my mouth

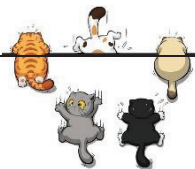
I was walking like I owned the hour -
Messy bun, clean sneakers, borrowed power.
Had a pen clipped to my collar, like I write for real,
Had a coat that said "I've processed what I feel."

My playlist was perfect. A tiny parade.
Each step was soft triumph in café-grade shade.
I had nowhere to be, but I walked like art -
Like someone who'd finally made peace with her part.

And just as I passed the bakery glow,
She looked up from her oat milk, said "Hey, you know
-
You look really good today." Just like that.
No setup. No reason. No layered subtext flat.

And I?
I stood like a joke mid-tell.
My face cracked open but I didn't swell
With pride or glow or delight or grace -
I just kind of froze in my same-old face.





Didn't say thank you. Didn't say you too.
Just blinked and sort of mumbled "...eh. Cool view?"
She gave a polite smile, returned to her phone.
And I walked away like I hadn't just blown
The rarest of moments: to feel seen for free.
To be complimented with no fee.

But instead I spiraled. Like I always do.
Was she mocking the bun I didn't redo?
Was she laughing at how I held my phone,
Like a girl who's rehearsing being alone?

I checked my reflection in every car door.
Was the pen too much? Did I walk like war?
Was my smile too practiced? My vibe too fake?
Was she just being nice for kindness's sake?

Because no one says "you look good" and means it
plain.

It's always a trap, a joke, a game.
Right?

That's what the old voice says in my mind,
The one that catalogs every unkind
Thing I've ever been told by kids or men -
The ones who laughed when I dressed at ten.

Who told me my teeth were “too much” when I
smiled.

Who asked if I was pregnant. (I was twelve. Mild.)

Who called me “cute” in tones that meant less,
And taught me how to brace for the guess.

So now, compliments feel like a setup punch,
A precursor to insult, a backhanded brunch.
And even when someone just means it clear,
I still hear echoes that ruin the cheer.

I don’t know how to receive a soft thing.

I overanalyze every good wing.

You say “nice outfit,” I hear “for someone like you.”

You say “your hair’s cute,” I assume it's askew.

To stand in the world and suspect affection.

To flinch when kindness offers connection.

To wear a good outfit and still not believe

That anyone sees what I try to achieve.

But maybe - I don’t know - maybe she meant it.

Maybe I looked good and she just... sent it.

Maybe my shoes did their silly job well,

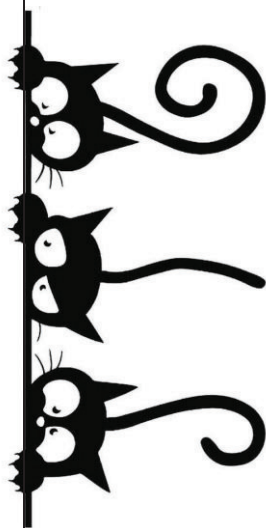
And maybe the pen said “she writes stories to tell.”



Maybe my walk looked like a woman who tried.
Maybe the bun was perfect, slightly wild.
Maybe I looked like someone healing out loud,
Someone brave, someone almost proud.

And even if I didn't believe it today,
Maybe the next time, I'll find a way -
To hold that kindness like warm bread in hand,
And let it exist without counter-demand.

To say "thank you" without fear or pause,
To accept that looking good has no cause.
That it can just happen. That I can just be
Beautiful. Randomly. Publicly. Free.



16. I thought he was flirting

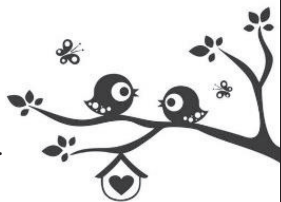


I was running late but looking good,
That fragile kind of morning mood
Where your bun's a mess but it feels intentional,
And your reflection says "Maybe... exceptional?"

I had on sneakers that said "she walks fast,"
A scarf that gave "European past,"
My tote bag held crumbs and three notebooks of lies,
And I felt, for once, like I could romanticize.

The city was glowing in pre-caffeine haze,
I queued at the café like I had my own praise.
Ordered my coffee - croissant on the side -
Tried not to look like I almost cried
When the barista said "You're early today."
(Which, to me, is affection in a casual way.)

Then - he appeared.
New guy. Table six.
Reading a novel too thick to be a trick.
Beard like drama. Shirt soft blue.
And I swear he had main character cue.



He stood, just slightly, as I turned to leave,
And handed me something like “Don’t over-believe.”
A flower. A single, unwrapped, yellow bloom.
From his hand to mine. In a coffee shop room.

“Thought you might like this.” He said it like breath.
Like he does this every Tuesday before facing death.
I took it - because I was trained for this plot.
Smiled like someone who flirts a lot.

But inside? Static. Brain in fog.
Like I'd just been hit by a gentle dog.
I muttered “thanks?” with a question mark,
Then stood there glowing but also stark.

He sat down, like nothing had happened at all.
And I carried the flower like a holy call.
Walked home with it clutched in a tote of crumbs,
Imagining backstories in emotional sums.

Maybe he’s an artist who lost his twin.
Maybe I remind him of what could’ve been.
Maybe we were lovers in 1492,
And now he bakes sourdough and misses me too.



Maybe he saw me last week, sobbing on train,
And said “That girl needs something floral to
remain.”

Maybe he’s rich but secretly sweet,
And this flower is step one to something elite.

I wrote a whole film while brushing my teeth,
Called “Flower Boy: the grief beneath.”

I gave him trauma. I gave him skill.
Made him someone who sees me, still.

Then - day two.

Same café. Same hour.

I walk in, this time with my full girl power.

And he looks up. Same eyes. Same page.

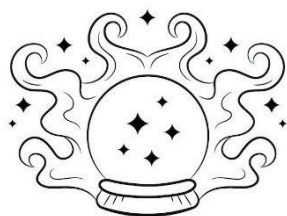
Still wearing that quiet emotional stage.

And instead of just... smiling,

Or saying “Hey, thanks,”

I hand him the flower.

Dead. Brown. Shrank.



And I say - dear God, I still replay this line:

“I think this belongs to someone who loves wrong in
time.”

He blinks.

Then smiles.

Says, "Okay. That's a song."

And just as he opens his mouth to go on -

I run.

Not walk. Not shuffle with grace.

I run.

Like I just got caught with a forged face.

Like he's the FBI and I'm emotional crime.

Like the flower exploded and I did the time.

Down the street. Around the bend.

Into the wind like a tragic trend.

Croissant in one hand, shame in the other,

Wearing the scarf of a panicked fake lover.

I don't look back. Can't face the door.

I think I lost a shoe on that café floor.

He probably thinks I'm a poet on drugs,

Or a runaway bride from overpriced mugs.

But in my heart, I held something true -

A sliver of proof I still wanted new.

And even if I spiral, and flee, and choke -
At least I believed in the what if joke.

So no, I won't go back for a while.
He's probably banned me. I get it. Style.
But if anyone asks, I was brave that day.
I accepted a flower...
And completely ran away.



17. I Burped and They Accepted Me

It started with a walk and a questionable mood -
One of those days where even toast feels rude.
I threw on shoes, a hoodie with stains,
And left the house like I was dodging brains.

No plan. Just motion. Just fog and grey.
And five minutes in - I lost my way.
Wound up near a path I'd never tried,
When suddenly -
A voice from the left-hand side.

"You're late," said a man in a green track suit.
With socks pulled high and orthopedic boots.
I blinked. He nodded.
"Let's go," said Joe.
And before I knew it - I was in the flow.

Four old men. One pigeon.
No context, no names.
Just a slow, strange stroll with Olympic aims.

One had a thermos. One had a cane.

One wore two scarves and forgot his own name.

They walked like gods, like kings in fleece,

Debating weather, and taxes, and yeast.

One said "I once beat a horse in a race,"

Another said "That's illegal in most states."

They didn't ask who I was, or why.

They just nodded like "we already like this guy."

(They still think I'm named "Charlie" or "Kev."

I haven't corrected them. It's part of the lev.)

Harold gave me a Werther's with lint,

Said, "If you chew it right, it unlocks your glint."

Colin told me to "watch out for squirrels -

They've unionized now. Especially the girls."

Bill tried to explain TikTok for ten whole steps,

Then got mad and said "We had Vine. It was the best."

Joe announced, "Tomatoes are in fact, a lie."

And I said "Okay," because who am I to deny?

We stopped mid-walk because Harold had gas,

And no one flinched. It was oddly class.

They clapped when I said I was “in between jobs,”
And cheered when I found a rock shaped like Bobs.

They told me their wives hate their shoes.
That spinach is a scam. That aging is news.
They argued about socks for a full block straight -
“Wool itches!” “You’re soft!” “I miss Watergate.”

Colin swears he once flirted with Meryl Streep.
Harold insists he knew a man who didn’t sleep.
Joe says he invented cereal (he didn’t).
And Bill? Bill just wants to pet every pigeon.

And I? I walk beside them, stunned and amused.
Heart weirdly full. Logic confused.
Because they don’t ask about dreams or shame -
Just whether I remembered Harold’s name.

They saved me. Accidentally. Fully unaware.
With their tiny mints and communal care.
I haven’t told them my name. I won’t.
They call me “Kid” or “That Girl Who Don’t.”

And every morning I show up in disguise -
Unshowered, chaotic, with under-eye skies.

And they welcome me back like I'm part of the squad,
Like my existence was approved by God.

They wait if my lace comes loose mid-step.

They argue loudly but hold no rep.

And once, when I cried and tried to pretend -

Bill handed me banana bread. Said "That's the end."

And it was. For a while.

That walk. That smile.

That small sacred gang of joyful denial.

So now I rise before the sun's even real.

For four men, a bird, and something to feel.

And maybe I'm lost. But they walk like a map.

And that? That's my peace. My soft collapse.

They wait if my lace comes loose mid-step.

They argue loudly but hold no rep.

And once, when I cried and tried to pretend -

Bill handed me banana bread. Said "That's the end."

And it was.

For a second.

But then - I burped.

Loud. Not cute. Not gentle. Uncurved.

A deep, guttural, coffee-born whale.

It echoed off trees. It left a trail.

I froze.

They turned.

And then they cheered.

Harold clapped like the sky had cleared.

Colin said "Finally, one of us!"

Bill bowed. Joe made it weirdly a plus.

And just like that, I belonged. No test.

No name tags. No tears. No need to impress.

Just one loud burp in the morning air -

And four old men who simply cared.

So now I rise before the sun's even real,

For men who walk like stories you feel.

They don't ask what I do or if I've healed -

They just walk. And wait. And keep it real.

And I? I walk beside them with ease.

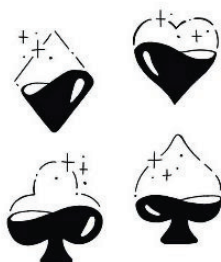
With mints in my pocket and air in my knees.

And if I burp again, so be it, I'm free.

They're my people.

My walking crew.

My unlikely therapy.



18. He smelled like Wednesday



I was mid-sip of my “I deserve this” latte,
Mind firmly set to do not interact today.
Hair in “don’t ask” mode, brain in slush,
When he sat down - no warning, no blush.

Flower guy.
From last week.
From The Incident.
The dead flower. The existential sprint.

He just... sat.
Like we were mid-scene.
Like there was no awkward flower exchange in
between.

No “hey.”
No “sorry.”
Just:
“Do you believe in fate and footwork?”

I choked.
He nodded, dead serious.
Held up his sneaker.

Said, "Jordans. Triple black. Emotional armor.
Serious speaker."

Then he launched. Like a preacher mid-drive.
Started telling me how "basketball saved his vibe."
That when he was six, he cried in a closet
Because he missed a lay-up and lost it.

"That was the first time I met God," he said,
"And also the last time I ate bread."
I nodded. Why? I don't know. Trauma bonding?
Or just fear of interrupting the monologue spawning?

He said "Love's like a rebound, you know?"
I did not. But I let it go.
He said "You gotta jump even when you fall."
Then knocked over my oat milk. Didn't pause at all.

"People don't understand loyalty anymore,"
He said, while unpeeling a banana from the café
drawer.

(Where did he get it? Who allowed this?)
He ate it dramatically. Like that proved his thesis.

Then -
He pulled a crumpled napkin from his coat.

Opened it like a will. Like a vote.

On it: a poem. In three colors of pen.

Titled: "Love in Game Seven."

I said nothing. I blinked. I whispered "...art."

He said, "Thanks. It's about my cousin and a broken cart."

Then - "Do you believe in soulmates or just snacks?"

I blacked out briefly. Came back fast.

I tried to steer the convo, asked "So... what do you do?"

He said, "I transcend. But also, retail. At the Nike store. You too?"

I lost it. Inside. Deep internal scream.

Meanwhile he compared heartbreak to his high school team.

He said "Pain is a pick-and-roll, you feel me?"

I did not. But I clapped softly. Politely. Guiltily.

And just when I thought this couldn't get more absurd -

He reached into his hoodie and pulled out... a bird.
A LIVE BIRD.

Named "Respect."

"He only chirps when he senses regret."

I said "That's beautiful."

He said "I know."

Respect chirped once.

Like: "Yeah. Let her go."

We sat there in silence. Me, him, the bird.

My latte forgotten. My world disturbed.

And then he smiled, like the sun knew his name.

And said:

"You're cool. You feel like a Wednesday that rains."

I nodded. Of course. What else do you say?

When a man with Jordans and a bird delays

Your spiral by exactly 34 minutes and change -

You let him talk. You embrace the strange.

And maybe he wasn't flirting.

Or maybe he was.

But either way - I left that café

utterly confused

And weirdly loved.



19. Can you erase Sound Waves?



Can you erase sound waves?

Those echoes that bounce around inside your head -

The ones that replay every word you said

Like a broken record that never stops spinning,

Searing into your brain from the moment they

beginning?

I'm trying to work - truly, really work -

But every keystroke and mouse click

Turns into a flashback of that tiny conversation

That lasted six minutes and yet feels like an endless
formation

Of every awkward syllable, every chuckle I fumbled
out,

Every pause that now convinces me I'm the joke, no
doubt.

I still hear him saying,

"Sup?" in that laid-back tone so cool,

So minimal, yet it carved a hole

In my mind that echoes on over and over like a

stubborn fool -

A sound wave that keeps rippling across my soul.

I recall how I attempted to be clever:

“That’s my hoodie - emotional insulation at its best,” I
said,

Laughter catching in my throat, my vision turning
red.

It was so short, so fleeting, barely a drop in the ocean,
Yet now it’s a tidal wave of thoughts in endless
motion.

Every time I open my laptop, the screen flickers
And for a moment, I swear, I see his half-smile
Rewinding over the data of my brain’s compiled
Memoirs of a conversation - his casual “sup,”
And my clumsy reply that sounded too abrupt.

Can you erase a memory like you’d clear your search
history?

I’ve tried, believe me - Ctrl + Z, delete, refresh -
But his voice is engraved like a low-budget tattoo on
my chest:

A reminder that a compliment, even the simplest
kind,

Can transform your inner world into something
painfully defined.

I sit here, staring at a blank Google Doc titled
“Chapter One,”

But my mind drifts back to that moment in the café
when

He said, with the sincerity of a man who’d read a
thousand scripts,

“Your hoodie looks like it was designed to eclipse
The gloom - like you wear your sadness like a crown.”
And I froze, all I could muster was a smile that
frowns.

I remember that I blinked, my voice left behind in a
muddled haze,

While my brain then compiled every possible phrase:
Was it irony? Was it care? Was it meant as a subtle
dare

That made me overthink the sound of it - the “sup”
that wasn’t just air?

Now my work is riddled with footnotes of that sound,
Each keystroke a reminder, each line a battleground.

I've tried to concentrate, to bury this echo deep
within,
But it surges up like I'm trying not to begin
A conversation about love, vulnerability, and how I
never learned
To simply accept a kind word without the whirlwind
I'd discern.
Because every "thank you" in my head morphs into a
tempest,
Every genuine "you look great" feels like a test.

I replay my own voice in my mind - the strain, the
sudden laugh
That turned into a stutter, a silence, a photograph
Of a girl who tried too hard to be cool while
crumbling inside,
As if every syllable spoken was a secret I must hide.
My colleagues might see me typing, lost in a mental
haze,
But I'm not writing code - I'm rehearsing that split-
second phase
When his casual "sup" crashed my inner peace,
A gentle quake that turned quiet moments into a riot
that wouldn't cease.

There's a part of me that wishes I could just erase
Those sound waves - the unsaid words, the awkward
phase -
As if my mind were a chalkboard and I could just
wipe it clean,
But no, they're stubborn inscriptions in my memory's
machine:
A loop of nervous laughter mixed with utter disbelief,
A reminder that even in a moment of brief relief,
My heart picks apart every detail - my hair, my shoes,
the pen in my hand,
The way I tried to act cool, like I'd already planned.

And so I sit, surrounded by the quiet hum of daily life,
While my internal cinema replays that conversation
like a knife
Cutting through the silence of my hopeful, broken
script;
Each word a verse, each pause a crypt
Of what might have been if I'd just said "thank you"
without fear,
If I'd let that moment be, instead of overthinking it
here.

Can you erase sound waves?

I'm not sure we can - and I'm not sure I want to.
Because in each echo of that tiny, awkward "sup,"
There lies a spark of truth that I can't ever corrupt:
That kindness, however brief, carves a permanent
part,
And though it stings to remember and tears may soon
start,
It is proof that I am alive, that I can still feel
Even if each memory is a funny, painful ordeal.

So now I write these lines in a desperate bid
To capture the chaos that I can't rid -
Every laugh, every cringe, every stutter that remains
In my coffee-scented mornings and endless workday
refrains.

I'll keep typing until these sound waves finally
subside,
Not erasing them, but learning to let them reside -
A reminder that even the awkward, embarrassing
parts
Are fragments of beauty that make up my heart.



20. Picking my Poison



Tonight, I pick red - not for rage, not for lust,
But the kind of red lipstick you wear when you must
Convince yourself you are perfectly fine,
While eating dry cereal and drinking cheap wine.

I light a small candle that smells like regret,
And pretend I'm a girl no one's managed to get.
No texts. No plans. No secrets to keep.
Just winged eyeliner too pretty to sleep.

I put on my heels like a minor event,
Just to hear them click while I pay my rent.
I catwalk my hallway, pausing to pose,
In an outfit that says, "yes, I'm mentally closed."

The music is French. The lighting is warm.
My chaos? Controlled. My grief? In form.
I spritz on perfume with dramatic flair -
Now I smell like a poem and financial despair.

I stare in the mirror and fix my one curl,
Practice three faces: aloof, coy, and girl.

I try on four dresses, then land on The Slip,
The one that screams “wife me” but also “I dip.”

I sip from a mug that says “girlboss” in gold,
While my soup sits untouched, probably cold.
I toast the air. I raise my glass,
To the woman who thrives with no audience, no class.

I scroll through my camera and like my own post,
Then rehearse fake laughter for flirting, at most.
I Google:

- “How to look casually hurt,”
- “How to forgive him if he flirts first.”
- “Is romantic delusion a spiritual gift?”
- “Do emotionally broken women age swift?”

I watch an old edit of Carlos Sainz -
Because that man drives like he’s hiding crimes.
And suddenly I’m clutching my throw pillow tight,
Whispering “Carlos, take me somewhere with less
light.”

I try texting my ex, just the word “hey” -
Then delete it. Then panic. Then back away.
Then write a full poem in Notes I won’t send,
Titled “You were never that deep, but okay. The end.”

I put on my rings like I've just been engaged,
To my best self, or chaos, or someone unaged.
And I eat olives directly out of the jar,
Because cutlery tonight feels emotionally far.

I set the table like I'm hosting a ghost.
Pull out two chairs. Then just smile at the most
Ridiculous thought: that maybe one day,
Someone will love me exactly this way.

But for now -

I sip. I pose. I twirl. I sit.

In a room full of silence that somehow feels lit.

I pick my poison: a look, a vibe, a choice.

To scream "I exist!" in a soft, glitter voice.

Because getting ready for no one at all

Is still its own victory. Its own kind of ball.

It's proof I can sparkle when the dark won't end -

A date with myself. A night I pretend.

So no, I'm not going out.

But I'm dressed like I might.

And that's sometimes the only

Way I survive the night.



21. Noise I never Reported

It started with a sound - not loud, but deep,
The kind that drags you out of sleep.
Not thunder. Not dreams. Not someone's phone.
A thud that meant someone was not alone.

It wasn't the crash of a falling glass,
More like a body thrown with class.
Or rage rehearsed in heavy shoes,
A slap that made the silence bruise.

I sat up in bed with one mascara'd eye,
Wearing regret and last night's lie.
My mouth was dry, my heartbeat slow,
And something said, "Get up. Just go."

I crept to the window like a girl in a play,
Peeking at lives just one wall away.
Her kitchen glowed with a flickering bulb -
The kind of light that doesn't scold,
But watches everything go wrong
And stays on like it belongs.



Then came the voice.

His first. Sharp and wild:

“You think you’re smart? You think you’re mild?”

Hers followed, flat like pressed white sheets:

“I think you’re loud when you admit defeat.”

I blinked.

Then crack. A plate, I guessed.

Or maybe a heart. Or both.

I dressed

In silence - a robe and borrowed shame -

and brewed my tea like this was fame.

I didn’t scream. I didn’t cry.

I sipped my tea and watched the sky.

Then bam! Another thing hit a wall.

I heard a grunt. I heard a fall.

I swear I laughed. Just once. Just brief.

Not from joy. But from relief.

That something real had split the dark

and broke the boring night apart.

Then came his voice again - less tough:
“You done? You done?” Like he’d had enough.
And hers - not yelling, not even loud:
“You always beg when there’s no crowd.”

I took a note.
Yes, a literal note.
Right in my phone, beneath a quote
about lentil soup I meant to try.
Now it reads:

“3:25. One man’s cry.”

There was a scream. Not hers. Not long.
Then silence sat where he’d been strong.

No sirens came. No lights. No knock.
Just me. My tea. A ticking clock.
I stayed there, perched, like some weird god
watching lives unravel, flawed.

And no, I didn’t intervene.
But I kept the details crisp and clean.
I wrote them down. I saved the scene.
I kept it in my memory screen.

Because something in me liked the sound -

The smash, the scream, the body down.

It wasn't right.

It wasn't good.

But I understood.

It gave the night a shape, a thread.

It made me feel a little less dead.

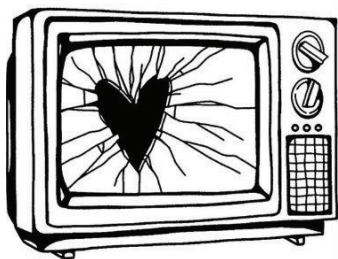
So I didn't sleep.

I didn't try.

I just stared out at their sky.

And whispered to the empty air:

"I'll be watching. I'll be there."



22. I started naming Episodes

The first one I named “Glass and God,”
because he yelled “Jesus!” and then something flawed
hit tile or bone or kitchen wall -
a shatter that didn’t sound like a fall.

I sat up in bed, mascara dried,
half-curled in shame, half glorified.
Like I’d been chosen to hear this unfold,
like the walls had whispered, “watch - be bold.”

She didn’t scream. But something broke.
Her silence landed like a joke
that no one laughed at - just let sit.
And he said something, low, a hit.

I named the next one “Tuesday Bruises,”
because the way she spoke felt like she chooses
every wound she lets him make -
like giving him permission to take.

He said:

“You’re nothing without me, you know that, right?”

She said:

“Then why do you come home every night?”

I made tea.

Took notes.

Didn’t cry.

I was far too interested to ask why.

Wednesday I tried to distract my head.

Played lo-fi, danced, made banana bread.

But 3:14 came like a curse on cue,

and I was already reaching for my shoe

to press it against the wall - not hard -

just enough to feel the yard

of tension stretched between their rage

and my blank Google Docs page.

That night I called “Cracked Voice.”

He sobbed. She didn’t. That was her choice.

I heard his hiccups, wet with guilt.

I heard her pour wine, slow and spilt.

I turned off my lights to hear it best,

as if darkness helped suppress the rest.

And I wrote:

“3:46. Crying. Male.

Sounds unearned. Repeat detail.”

By Thursday, I was naming arcs.

Their fights had beats, like haunting marks

left on the floor, in rhythm, rhyme -

I started timing rage by time.

Friday’s title: “You Started It.”

She whispered it after he threw a fit.

“You don’t get to play the hurt one now.”

And he just gasped like he’d lost how

to form a word that didn’t sting,

a sound not shaped like suffering.

I wrote that quote in pen, not phone.

I wanted to hold it like a stone.

I stuck it on my wall, mid-art,

right next to “You only win when I fall apart.”

I tried, that night, to change the plot.

To act like maybe I forgot.

Played French jazz loud, sprayed lavender mist,

Lit incense like denial exists.

I picked a playlist named “Serenity Soup,”
but their voices cut through like a loop.
No matter the beat, I knew their cue -

“You always lie.”

“And you always do.”

Then a slam. A stomp. A plea for breath.
A silence so long it sounded like death.

I pressed pause. My tea went cold.
I stood in the hallway, still and bold.
One earbud in. The other hung low -
because I needed to hear the blow.

It came. Eventually. It always did.
Like thunder waiting beneath the lid
of some divine, abusive pot
that boiled whether you stirred or not.

Saturday I gave it a name
before the fight had even came:

“Return.”

Because I knew they would.
They always did. They always should.

It started soft - a creak, a sigh.
A sentence thrown. A quiet lie.
Then came the build - like a wave on shore,
until she screamed -

“You don’t know me anymore!”
And he said:
“I don’t think I ever did.”
“Then why are you still here?”
“Because you won’t let me quit.”

I didn’t cry.
I didn’t cheer.
I sat there like a puppeteer
holding onto every thread,
as if their war fed how I bled.

I took one bud out.
Turned off the track.
My music couldn’t fight them back.

And in that moment,
in that slap and stomp and blame,
I knew I wasn’t just watching a game.

I was in it.

Not invited. But still involved.

A problem that will never be solved.

And I whispered,

soft, like prayer or spell -

“This isn’t love. This is what you don’t tell.”



23. Her name was the Clue

I prepared like a widow with excellent taste,
wiped off the bowl, no fingerprints, no waste.
Scooped ice cream like it was evidence stored,
and sat cross-legged by the vent I adored.

I dimmed the lights, lit one single match,
to feel like I mattered, or maybe to watch
shadows crawl up my kitchen sink
while I pretend, I don't know what I think.

Because I knew they'd start again.

They always do.

3:14 like clockwork due.

She never speaks first. That's the rule.

He lights the match. She keeps it cool.

"You make me sick."

"You make me small."

"You don't make sense."

"You don't make calls."

I marked it down, like always: Episode Fifteen.

Then turned on the fan so I wouldn't seem mean.

Because I was getting comfortable in this breakdown
show.

I knew when to flinch and when to go slow.

My spoon clicked once against the bowl,
when she said something that froze my soul.

“Tell Dr. Elowen March I remember it all.”

Now that -

That was a name.

Not a soft, forgettable, lowercase flame.

But Elowen March.

Like frostbite law.

Like someone who lives where no hands thaw.

I dropped the spoon.

Not for drama. For plot.

And pulled out my phone to see what I got.

Typed in her name like I had a mission.

And up she came with clinical precision.

Dr. Elowen March, MD. Trauma. Lecturer. Survivor
Whisperer.

Profile pic: a haircut you can't afford.

Quote: “Pain, when named, stops being the sword.”

Her credentials glowed like steel-cut glass.
Oxford. Leeds. Childhood class.
Author of a memoir called “Control as Currency.”
(With a cover that screamed silent urgency.)

I gasped.
She was real.
Not some made-up past.
Not a ghost from a prior, broken cast.

And suddenly I wasn’t watching abuse.
I was witnessing history being cut loose.

He was pacing by then.
The thuds had begun.
She said nothing.
Which made everything run.

“You wrote her letters,” he shouted. “You wrote her
lies.”

“I told her truth,” she said. “And she cut the ties.”

Then a sound.
Like shoes hitting tile.
Like dignity dying in cursing style.

I didn't move.

I barely blinked.

Just typed:

"Dr. Elowen March - link: trauma/Leeds.

Client: Possibly her. Or someone she feeds."

Then came the final line.

He screamed it hard.

The kind of thing you can't discard.

"You make me wish I could spit on your soul.

I want to rip out every piece you stole!"

Then - metal.

Heavy.

One clean drop.

Like a knife or pan with nowhere to stop.

I stared at the floor.

Felt the air grow thin.

Heard nothing next.

And everything within.

No breathing.

No crash.

No wineglass whine.
Just steel and silence holding a line.

I wrote:

“3:49.

Soul. Spit.

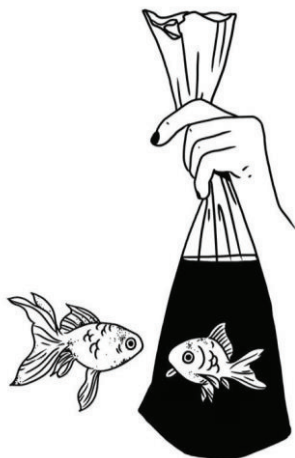
Elowen March.

Steel hit.

Scene split.

Nothing after.

Ice cream quit.”



I closed my phone.

Let the fan hum low.

And stared at the wall like it might glow.

Because this wasn't noise.

This was my case.

And Dr. March?

She just showed her face.

24. Control as a Currency

This morning, I woke up and didn't scream.
Didn't cry. Didn't ache. Didn't dream.
I just walked to the sink like nothing was wrong,
scrubbed a coffee mug while humming a song
I didn't like, but knew by heart -
the kind of thing you keep
when you fall apart.

I made tea.
Didn't drink it.
Lit a candle that smells like softness and taxes.
Then organized the glasses
by height, not use -
because chaos feels worse when it's obtuse.

I wiped the mirror until I vanished,
then reapplied eyeliner to say I hadn't.
Sat on the floor with a cleaning wipe,
and Googled:

“Why do I tidy instead of type?”

First link:

“Control is a trauma response.

The body remembers what the mind renounced.”

Second:

“When children grow up feeling small and betrayed,
they organize spaces to feel less afraid.”

I laughed.

And scrubbed a little more.

Just in case the bacteria knew the score.

I read more:

“Cleaning is a way of erasing the scream.”

“Lists are how survivors pretend to dream.”

“Control is not power – it’s the safety you fake
when emotion starts flooding and something might
break.”

I nodded like a student with a crush on the class.

Then opened my Notes app and made a new pass:

Folder: Things I Can Manage

Subfolder: Emotions I Delay

Checklist:

- Pretend today was fine
- Don’t google grief again

- Remember to water plant before it's too late
- Do not email Dr. Elowen March

Because yes -

I read the book.

Control as Currency.

Dr. March in her cashmere rage.

I read it like scripture.

Like gossip with weight.

Like maybe her pages would excavate fate.

Chapter Three:

“Control is how women are taught to seduce pain.

Make it pretty.

Schedule it.

Call it routine.

Name it rain.”

I underlined every goddamn sentence.

Then sat very still.

In performance penance.

Because I don't fall apart like a storm.

I fall apart in uniform.

With spreadsheets and scented trash bags and teal

pens.

With color-coded dinner plans I never send.

I arrange instead of feel.

I prep instead of pray.

I text "I'm fine" while making a meal
for a guest I won't let stay.

I rearrange my bookshelf by genre and grief.

I match my playlist moods like belief.

I clean when I'm broken.

I cry when I mop.

I refill the sugar jar -
nonstop.

Why?

Because control is the story I like to tell.

That I'm composed. That I do well.

That I manage the weather when things go insane -
when someone screams "spit on your soul" through
the wall again.

That I'm not affected.

That I'm not like her.

That I'm collected.

That I prefer

a little pain with a little neatness.

A lot of chaos, but never weakness.

(Weakness looks like laundry piles.)

(Weakness smells like emptied tiles.)

(Weakness is silence with no mess.)

(Weakness is truth. Control is less.)

Dr. March says:

“Some women use words. Some use dustpans.

Some arrange cutlery like defense plans.”

I closed the book.

Felt seen, then sore.

Then did what I do when I want less war:

I swept.

I wiped.

I sorted.

I planned.

I built a fortress with one shaking hand.

Because I’ve learned how to look functional when I
ache.

I’ve mastered how to fold heartbreak like a cake.

I've iced it. Plated it. Served it twice.

And no one's asked what's underneath the slice.

So no, I didn't break today.

I disinfected it.

In rose water and "it's okay."

In Playlists for Calm, Volume 8.

In ignore the noise and shut the gate.

But I know what's beneath the bleach and steam:

a girl who doesn't cry -

she schemes.

She doesn't feel -

she curates' pain.

She doesn't break -

she names the strain.

And maybe control isn't healing.

Maybe it's the most delicate kind of theft.

A way to keep bleeding with good lighting

and one polished breath.



25. Nothing's wrong, everything is fine



I put on mascara like I meant it.
Like today was the day I'd reinvent it.
Brushed my hair with third date precision,
then changed my shirt - twice - for vision.

I told myself: Go outside, you're cured.
You're not obsessed, you're just... a little lured.
The case is closed. The files are sealed.
No more Notes app crime scenes revealed.

No more stalking Elowen March.
No more whispering "spit on your soul" in the dark.
No more pressing my ear to the goddamn wall.
Today, I'm normal. I'm five foot tall.
I'm chill.
I'm fine.
I own a plant.

And today's not the day I spiral or rant.

So I packed a tote bag full of lies-
lip balm, almonds, alibis.

A book I wouldn't read, a phone I wouldn't check,
and sunglasses for emotional wreck.

I walked to the market with casual flair,
like no one screamed "soul" in the apartment upstairs.

I bought kale.

I hate kale.

It just looks like health.

And I needed to pretend I have stealth.

I picked up plums.

Held them with grace.

Then dropped one.

It bruised.

Relatable face.

A man walked by in a grey wool coat
that looked exactly like his - I froze in my throat.

He turned. He smiled. He wasn't him.

But my knees still buckled on a whim.

So I laughed. Out loud. Like a feral flirt.

And whispered "No, I'm fine," to the hem of my shirt.

I passed a bakery.

Bought a roll.

Because carbs, if nothing else, console.

I ate it on a bench with zero poise.

Then heard a sound.

Not his voice.

But boyish. Close.

A bike bell hum.

And I blinked like something bad might come.

But it didn't.

It was fine.

Just a child on wheels.

I watched him zoom and thought:

“Does trauma heal or steals?”

I checked my phone.

Nothing there.

No new fights.

No poisoned air.

Just emails from Nykaa and doom.

And one spam link titled “Redecorate Your Room!”

(Thanks, internet. That feels rude.

I like my grief in beige and nude.)

I sat in a café. Ordered chai.
Told the barista, "I'm good."
She said, "You look tired, though."
I said, "I cry."

We laughed. I tipped. I took my drink.
Tried not to spiral every time I think.

But the café had vent-style walls.
And white tile floors.
And two loud calls
from someone's AirPods in the back.
And I thought: "That's it. I've relapsed. Crack."

I took a breath.
Bit my straw.
Reminded myself I'd done nothing wrong.
I'd left the flat.
I'd bought a fruit.
I'd worn a bra.
I looked so cute.

So why did peace feel unfamiliar here?
Why did quiet sound like a chandelier
about to drop?

I checked the app.

(The police report one. Don't judge the trap.)

Nothing listed. All was good.

So why did I still feel like wood?

Stiff.

Polished.

Fake.

Alone.

With one clean list and no known tone.

I wrote a note in my Notes app, soft.

“Day 3: Still weird.

Bought kale.

Tossed it off.

Cried once. Mild. Didn't post.

Had coffee.

Missed a ghost.”



26. The socks are still damp

I did my laundry like a cleanse,
like I was breaking up with old sock friends.
Piled them high with bold regret
and one sports bra I've never sweat in yet.

The blanket I cried into last Wednesday night-
that one went in on extra light.
I stared at the cycle like it was fate,
wondered if tears add extra weight.

I found a sock with tiny hearts,
the kind that witness mental starts.
It had no pair, it had no plan-
just watched me break up with a man.

The shirt I wore to the café once
when I misread "have a good day" for blunt romance
still smelled like hope and cinnamon tea
and me, pretending to casually be me.

I used detergent like a priest:
three pours for mercy, then one for peace.

Added softener for emotional growth,
and whispered “cleanse us all” like an anxious oath.

I sat on the floor while the dryer spun,
ate a banana that judged everyone.
Scrolled through texts I never sent
while a dryer sheet preached self-content.

The socks came out a little damp,
like hope in winter, or tragedy camp.
I matched them all with careful eyes-
then watched each pairing start to lie.

There were patterns that had moved on,
socks that used to belong to someone gone.
One had a quote that said BE BRAVE
so I folded it like a guilt-washed wave.

“Sure, brave,” I said. “But where’ve you been?
Under my bed like an unpaid sin.”

Some towels folded crisp and proud.
Others slouched like they missed the crowd.
One looked like a sad burrito wrap
so I rolled it tighter like a soft relapse.

It didn't cure me. It didn't fix.

But the lint tray held some of the tricks.

And for a moment, I smelled pure spring
and nothing screamed or threw a thing.

The floor was warm.

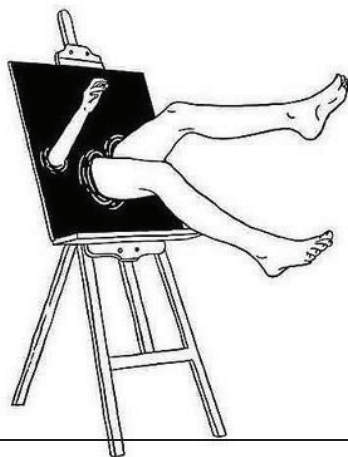
The socks were soft.

I stacked the shirts like I knew aloft
meant maybe I'm okay today,
or at least I know how to halfway stay.

I didn't cry, but I folded slow.

Like holding grief I didn't know.

Like every pair that found its twin
was a little peace I let back in.



27. You, Me, and Two Toasts too many

I saw him again.

He had jam on his thumb and gravity in his smile.

Ordered black coffee and toast “burnt just a little -
enough to earn the crunch, not the trial.”

I laughed before I even sat down.

He looked up, smirked, and asked:

“You allergic to small talk, or shall we pretend to
frown?”

I said nothing helpful.

Just nodded like I agreed with him cosmically.

And then - as if we’d been doing this forever -
we split a table and two sugars, methodically.

His name?

He said it too casually.

Like a note passed in class: almost familiar, vaguely
magical.

I forgot it right after,

but the syllables stayed

like the sound of your doorbell on the best kind of day.

I told him just a letter.

He asked “First? Middle? Fake?”

I shrugged and said “Yes,”

and he laughed like I was half a heartbreak.

We sat in that café for too long

with not enough tea and three slices gone.

He told me he collects calendars - not for time

but for “font loyalty and mood design.”

His favorite’s a frog in a velvet cape.

He named his inbox “Emotional Landscape.”

“I have a calendar just for days I feel like a rake.

And one for times I eat dinner too late.”

I told him I cry at cooking shows

and once googled how to eat mangoes slow.

He said “you’re the opposite of cereal.

You spill pretty.”

“You leave milk on the floor and make it look like poetry.”

So we met again.

And again.

And then for a month straight.

Always breakfast.

Always accidental fate.

Never Friday.

He hated Fridays.

Said "They try too hard to be free."

So we met on the quiet days.

Tuesdays and soup.

Thursdays and tea.

One time he brought a croissant too big

and we stared at it like a domestic gig.

We shared it with six napkins and zero shame.

I told him my childhood felt like a long board game.

He nodded like he knew my deck.

Pulled out a sticker of a robot from his pocket

and stuck it to my coffee check.

"This is for your archive," he said, "for future regret."

And I wanted to say "What do you mean regret?"

But instead I said "Thanks." And stared at the exit.

I never told him my name.

Just that one letter.

He never asked again.

Like he knew better.

Like the mystery was the prize, not the debt.

Like he liked me more for the secrets I kept.

He told me he once kissed someone in an elevator

because the silence made him feel like the narrator.

He said "I want to be the kind of person people never
forget

but only remember years later with no regret."

And I laughed like he'd just cracked a safe.

And we buttered more toast

like we had a little faith.

We never called it dating.

Never touched hands.

But one morning he said:

"I dreamed you wore purple and told the sky it was
bland."

And I nearly choked on my tea.

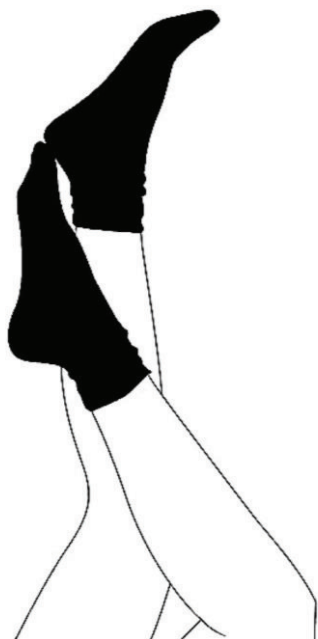
Because how dare he see me

in dreams I wasn't invited to?
How dare he sound like home
when I wasn't looking for view?

So we kept meeting.
Tuesday to Thursday.
Croissant to jam.
We spoke in metaphors
and calendars of who I think I am.

And he still only knows one letter of me.
But it's the only part I give freely.

And somehow...
that feels lovely.



28. I Think I Know Who You Are

He was already seated when I walked in.

Like always.

Same table.

Same cup, already half-full.

A folded napkin under his phone, like he was trying to
quiet something down.

He waved with the same hand he once used to pass
me jam

and for the first time,

I wondered what else those fingers have done.

The bruise was small.

Near his wrist.

The kind you only notice if you're trained to look for
pain in soft places.

I've spent months eavesdropping on grief through
plaster.

My eyes are good now.

He smiled.

That same practiced, early-morning grin.

But this time, it didn't land.

It hovered between us,
like a question I was too afraid to ask out loud.

“Didn’t sleep?” he said.

I nodded.

He sipped his coffee, too slow.

“Dreams again?”

“No,” I lied, “just a heavy night.”

Last night

I sat by the vent again - I promised myself I wouldn’t,
but I did -

because silence had become too clean.

And I missed the mess.

Not the violence, I told myself - just the pattern.

Just the architecture of broken things.

But then it wasn’t her I heard.

It wasn’t her breath catching like wire.

It wasn’t her voice curling like a wounded vow.

It was his.

Not like the man who tells me why he prefers burnt
toast.

Not like the man who names his coats after old jazz
songs.

But a version of him that sounded guttural and feral

and cornered.

He begged.

I heard crashing - something heavy, something
wooden.

A door maybe.

Or maybe him.

Falling.

And it shook something loose in me that I thought I'd
already written down.

So here we were now, over tea and toast,
and I could not stop staring at his wrists.

I could not stop watching how he touched his cup.

Not gently - no. Too gently.

Like he had something to make up for.

He told me a story about a memory test app he's
using.

Said he wanted to remember what he felt like before
COVID,

and all he could recall was a hallway, a broken
toothbrush, and the sound of TV static.

I laughed. Politely.

But my chest had already split into three timelines.

The one where he hurt her.

The one where he's being hurt.

And the one where I'm sitting here like neither
version matters, as long as he still asks about my
week.



He reached for the toast.

His sleeve pulled up.

The bruise was clearer now.

Purple around the edge.

A blooming question.

A memory mark.

A fingerprint from last night that I didn't ask for, but
recognized.

I wanted to say:

"I know what you sound like when you scream."

But instead I said:

"Do you want more butter?"

He nodded. Smiled.

His lips didn't even twitch.

Like he hadn't bled.

Like we weren't pretending.

Like we were just two people with toast again.

And that was the worst part.
That I didn't know if I was right.
That I didn't know what's more horrifying - if he is
the man who screamed, or if he isn't.
If I've been sitting across a monster, or a mirror.
If his bruises were karma, or a warning.
Or both.

We finished breakfast.
He said, "See you Thursday?"
And I said "Maybe."
But I already knew: I wouldn't.

Because I've heard him before.
Through walls.
Through lies.
Through the gentleness that always comes after
someone's been loud.

And now I can't unhear him.
Now my hands go cold whenever he stirs his tea.
Now every joke sounds like an alibi,
and every bruise feels like a question I wasn't brave
enough to ask.

29. No one knocks in a poem

She sat on the bench like the breeze had allowed it,
like grief had manners, and the earth had outed
all of its pain into petals and stone,
and now we could sit in its aftertone.

The garden was full of unbothered bloom.

A boy chased a bee.

A dog sniffed gloom.

I was reading a book I'd already lied about,
when she sat beside me and truth flushed out.

She wore a coat with intentional sleeves.

Her scarf said "I remember but I won't grieve."

Her fingers were clean. Her eyes were not.

She looked like someone who knew what I thought.

"Hi," she said. "I'm Maya. I live next door."

"The one with the music and nights that roar."

"We've never met,

but I've seen your shoes.

On the welcome mat

when I'd cover my bruises in blues."



I blinked.

Nodded.

Smiled - wrong.

She smelled like citrus and a quiet song.

We sat like friends.

But not like that.

Like two strangers sharing the weight of a flat.

She reached for a tulip.

Didn't pluck.

Just touched the stem like an almost-luck.

And said:

"I once read a story about a woman who screamed,
and someone next door who dreamed and dreamed,
but never knocked.

Never asked.

Never spoke of her breaking glass."

"She listened.

She journaled.

She probably cried.

She watched the show.

And the woman died."

I wanted to laugh.
But I don't have that grace.
I just tilted my chin like I'd misplaced my face.
And she - oh, she -
she had a grin like a carved reply.
The kind poets fear.
The kind truth buys.

"People like you," she said, "have neat little pens.
You write down chaos and call them friends.
You paint bruises in metaphor's hue.
You sip your tea while I scream at you."

I finally spoke.
It sounded like dust.

"Some people just can't help themselves-"

She laughed.
Short. Sharp.
Like a mirror in rust.



"I was screaming," she said, "and you stayed inside.
You heard me break.
You heard me hide.

And all you did was rhyme the floor.
You turned me into a metaphor.”

The garden kept pretending not to notice.
A child ran past. A bee buzzed like punctuation.
But I sat there, unable to hold my spine upright.
Because she wasn’t yelling.
She didn’t need to.

She stood.
Shook her coat like a woman used to shaking off dust,
blood, silence.
Her boots made no sound at all.

“Writers make great voyeurs,” she sighed.
“They never stop the fall - just describe the slide.”
“But since you’re so good at watching pain,”
“Let’s try again. Don’t miss the frame.”

She leaned in -
close enough that I could feel the poem coming before
it arrived.

“Tonight, I’ll leave my window wide.
Sit by yours.
And watch me hide.

Be as silent as wind,
be as still as glass -
just watch me burn,
like you did last.”

She walked away.

The garden swallowed her in leaves.

I sat.

Still.

Like I'd just been written about.



30. Boil me Soft

I boiled an egg because I didn't know how else to exist.

Because crying felt too theatrical and pacing had lost its twist.

Because Maya had left something in the air -
not a smell, not a stain,
but a sentence that kept twitching inside my brain.

I watched the water bubble like a threat.
Like Maya's boots had followed me home.
Like someone was about to confess something -
but made of steam.

And on the counter:

The yellow timer - ticking like a lie
wrapped in plastic kindness.

Three minutes, he said.

"Set it for your spirals, or when you want to cry."

I laughed when he gave it to me.

Back at the café.

We were both hungover on not knowing anything.

And still he smiled like brunch could fix a year.

Then handed me guilt, in duck disguise.

And now I can't tell what I'm cooking or why.

Because my life?

Oh. It's egg-based now.

Scrambled on Mondays - chaotic, brave.

Too hot. Too much. Saved by the wave

of a text from no one,

a thought undone,

a bruise I didn't earn but still run from.

Poached on Tuesdays - fragile and still.

All white on the outside,

but inside I kill any truth before it starts dripping out.

I eat in silence.

I google doubt.

Hard-boiled on Wednesdays -

dipped in regret.

Cut clean in half, but still too wet.

Too smooth. Too tame.

No smell. No name.

Looks fine on a plate, but it isn't the same.

And fried?

That's Thursday, I guess.

Maya's night.

Where the walls play dress-up in violence and fright.

Where she yells things like scripture,

and he cries like rust,

and I sit in my kitchen pretending to trust

the yolk won't burst

or the pan won't hiss,

or someone will call someone after this.

I tried to make deviled eggs once.

Burnt the paprika.

Dropped the tray.

It was a metaphor for my entire dating history.

I cried because they looked perfect and I ruined it
anyway.

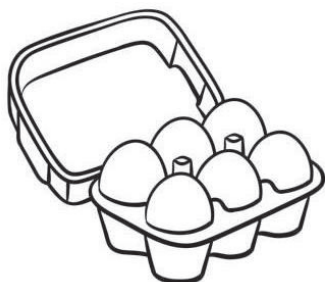
And isn't that love?

A pretty thing you mess up out of pure confusion and
heat?

He texted me yesterday:

"Egg timer okay?"

"Still ticking?"



I almost replied "I dropped it in the sink
and watched it spin like the truth you won't admit."

But instead I said,

"Cute as ever. Still chirps. I'm fine."

Lie by lie, served over brine.

I peeled the egg too early this time.

It bled.

No drama.

Just hot gold sliding down the line
of my thumb, like memory on a Sunday.

And for a moment,

I thought maybe this is what healing tastes like -
a little underdone.

A little ugly.

Still mine.

But then the scream.

Not Maya.

Him.

A slam.

A sob.

A sound like furniture learning to sin.

And Maya?

She laughed.

“You think I don’t know what your quiet means?”

“Keep hiding.”

“Keep bleeding in between.”

And I?

I took a bite of egg and said nothing.

Because I’m seasoning my silence now.

I’m garnishing guilt.

I’m plating my panic with parsley

and hoping it counts.

Boil me soft.

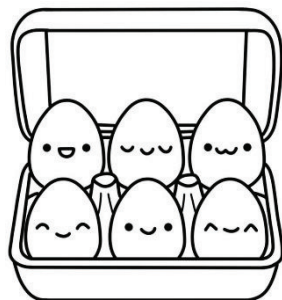
Don’t break the shell.

Make it look normal.

Don’t let it smell.

Keep me spinning in steam and lore.

Until I forget what I’m cooking for.



31. This was supposed to be Risotto



I signed up for a cooking class like people sign up for skydiving after a breakup - with shaky hands, misplaced hope, and a discount code.

It promised Italian comfort in three sessions or less, and I thought maybe parmesan could do what therapy hasn't.

The form asked for dietary restrictions and I almost typed:

"I can't digest memories of emotionally unavailable men."

Instead, I ticked "vegetarian."

Close enough.

The room was half stove, half tension.

Someone brought their mom.

Someone brought their regret.

I brought two hair clips, a new apron, and the urge to run.

And then -

he was there.

Egg Timer Guy.

Café flirtation turned domestic thriller cameo.

Wearing a 'Pasta is My Love Language' apron like
he hasn't been haunting my moral compass for weeks.

He looked up from his cutting board and smiled,
like we were in Act I of a romantic comedy
instead of Episode 9 of a slow-burning psychological
spiral.

"You cook?" he asked.

"Emotions," I said.

"Same."

"But also garlic?"

"Always garlic."

We were paired up.

Of course.

Because God hates me in very theatrical ways.

Our first task: dice the shallots.

He said:

“You’ve done this before.”

“Yeah. Chopping vegetables helps me pretend I’m in control of my life.”

“Ah, the stir-fry illusion of stability.”

“Exactly.”

I laughed.

He stirred.

I tried not to think about how easily charm can survive through drywall.

The instructor, Preeti, was aggressive with joy.
She said:

“Risotto is like trust - slow, needy, high-maintenance.”

“You abandon it, it punishes you.”

“You give it too much, it gets mushy.”

“Just like your last situationship.”

I almost cried into the Arborio.

Instead, I added more salt.

For balance.

Or vengeance.

He watched me stir like he was timing my recovery.

I asked,

“Why are you here?”

“My fridge was starting to judge me.”

“Mine too. And my therapist cancelled last week.”

“So we’re both here for the carbs.”

“And the illusion of healing.”

“And to finally learn how to use olive oil without setting off alarms.”

“That too.”

Halfway through, Preeti yelled,

“Plate like it’s a peace offering to someone who ruined you.”

I looked at the risotto.

Then at him.

Then back at the risotto.

And thought,

this should be enough.

But I know it never is.

He garnished with aesthetic detachment.

“This says: emotionally repressed, but at least I watch MasterChef.”

I responded,

“Mine says: might cry if you ask a follow-up question.”

He laughed.

And I laughed.

And we both pretended that laughter fixes things.

We sat down to eat.

Our knees nearly touched.

He poured sparkling water with the grace of a man who has definitely over-apologized in his life.

“It’s good,” he said.

“Too salty.”

“Yeah, but so are you.”

“Don’t confuse personality with preservation.”

“Never. I like my women brined and slightly unstable.”

“Perfect, I come with a side of doubt and generational trauma.”

“And basil.”

“Obviously.”



I wiped my mouth.

He wiped his conscience.

And then he said:

“Same time next week?”

“What’s on the menu?”

“Grilled boundaries, served warm.”

“I’ll bring the panic attack and a bottle of denial.”

And just like that, I walked home
smelling like butter, shame, and flirtation,
holding a risotto I couldn’t finish,
and wondering how much longer I can feed my guilt
in courses.



32. Leftovers & Silence



She was standing by my door like a decision already
made,
wearing a jacket I almost mistook for his -
same navy blue,
same torn cuff,
same ghost of cologne
like the fabric hadn't learned how to forget yet.

I blinked.

Keys in hand, mouth open.

She smiled like she'd been waiting long enough to not
be angry anymore.

"You're home," she said.

"I made tea. Want to share?"

Not a threat.

Not a trick.

Just an invitation that made my ribcage sweat.

I nodded.

Because what else do you do when your neighbor



from the walls

is waiting with chamomile and unfinished truths?

I followed her in.

She walked like she was no longer afraid of footsteps.

Like she had inherited every sound I never
interrupted.

Her flat was soft.

Books. A single candle. A plate of risotto.

“Leftovers,” she said, “I saw you carrying it. Figured
I’d try making some myself.”

My stomach folded.

My throat decided now was not the time for
questions.

We sat.

She poured tea like forgiveness was steeped into the
leaves.

I watched her hands - still,
delicate,
a little red near the knuckles.

We didn’t toast.

We didn’t clink.

We just existed, silently, in the space between tea and guilt.

She took the first bite.

Then said,

“Did you know he hated risotto?”

“Said it was too clingy. Too needy. Too slow.”

“Funny, right? For a man who begged to be held like air wasn’t enough.”

I nodded.

Not sure who she was feeding anymore.

“I started making it last week,” she added.

“Every day. Until I got it right.”

“He never tasted it.”

“But I kept feeding someone. Even if it was just the silence.”

I sipped the tea.

It tasted like calm rehearsed too many times.

She looked at me - not with pity.

Not even rage.

Just recognition.

Like we were two poems in the same stanza.

“You listened,” she said.

“All that time.

The vents. The thuds. The sobs. The fights.

You heard the chairs scrape.

The apologies bend.

And still, you made breakfast.

Every day.

Like my bruises were part of the building.”

I wanted to speak.

Say something about boundaries or fear or how some people don’t know how to help until it’s too late.

But she interrupted me with a smile.

Soft. Terrible.

“It’s okay.

I didn’t knock either when he started crying.”

“We’re not heroes.

Just women who learned how to season survival.”

We finished in silence.

She poured more tea.

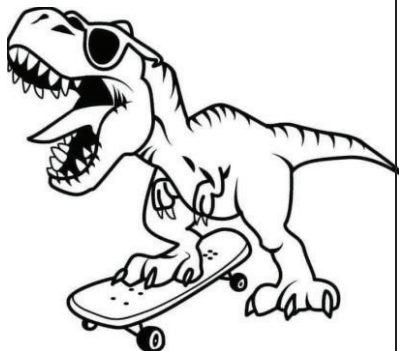
I poured more denial.

“If you want,” she said, “we could do this again.
Just tea. No need for listening through walls.
You can just sit. Observe.
Like you always have.”

She stood, walked me to the door.
Her hand brushed mine.

“You watch well,” she whispered.
“Maybe next time, watch me stay quiet and know
what it costs.”

And she closed the door.



33. And still, I boiled water

The screaming began like it always does -
not with rage, but with rhythm, like they'd practiced
this symphony of ruin.

She led with a shriek that cracked through the vent,
and he followed, as usual, with something broken and
bent.

I didn't jump this time.

I just stirred my pan,
as if garlic and oil were a plan against man.

My pasta was overcooked, but my calm was al dente,
and while the saucepan hissed like a warning, I
thought -

how many times can a body listen to pain
before it starts calling it plot?

I didn't flinch when the glass hit the wall,
I just moved to my fridge and took out the cream.
I've learned to make lattes in tempo with fists,
to foam milk as she threatens to scream.

They are loud.

But I've become louder on the inside,
where sarcasm simmers beside salt.

Where I whisper "how quaint" as the bookshelf falls,
and "should've used nails" when I hear drywall halt.

Last week I called it trauma.

Today I call it Thursday.

Tomorrow I might name it ballet.

They move in patterns now - familiar, absurd.

And I crack eggs to the beat of her word.

I should care.

I used to care.

But something in me has adjusted to this soundtrack,
like the chaos is part of the lease.

And while her voice ricochets like war on repeat,

I reach for a teabag and find inner peace.

The spoon I stirred with didn't even rattle,
as she threw a vase and he called her insane.

Instead, I garnished the bowl with a sprig of regret
and sprinkled some chili for pain.

Then came silence.

Not the gentle kind - the kind that pulls your ears

apart.

The kind that lands in your room like a stranger
and rearranges your heart.

And then-

one knock.

Just once.

Low.

Flat.

Behind my bed, behind the wall,
where no one should reach
unless they've read my thoughts and taken notes

I froze.

Not out of fear, but out of absurdity.

Because I'd finally learned to treat violence like
wallpaper,
and now the wallpaper winked.

I didn't answer.

Didn't breathe.

Didn't blink too long.

I just turned back to the stove.

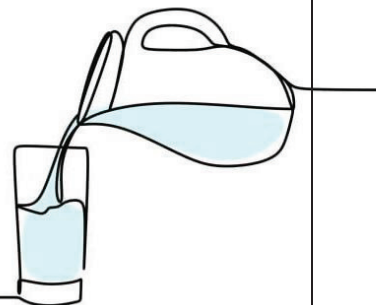
To the kettle.

To the water.

And still - I boiled it.

Because if the world is ending through drywall,
then I'll meet it with chamomile and order.

Because I've seen chaos come in waves,
but I control the boil.



34. Romance is dead



She wore yellow like survival had stitched it herself -
a dress too bright for someone whose nights sound
like hell.

She stepped in slowly, her hand curled in sleeves,
like if her arms were hidden, no one would believe.
She didn't speak.

I didn't ask.

There was tea between us and the illusion of masks.
Her smile cracked somewhere between guilt and
grace.

And I passed her a cup she wouldn't raise to her face.

"I don't scream anymore," she said, soft but dry,
"He wins when I break. So now I comply."

Her mouth held a twitch.

Her fingers, a scar.

The silence between us burned like a car.

Not crashed. Not flamed.

Just waiting to ignite.

And then came the knock - like a gun in the night.

The sound made her flinch before she could think.
I felt my own heart pause at the edge of the sink.
She stood - barely - one foot a ghost,
and whispered:

“That’s him.”

Like she was confessing to a host.

She didn't move.

I did.

Because some mistakes call louder than guilt ever hid.

He stood in the doorway like he’d never left.

Not a man - an echo shaped like theft.

His face held calm.

His posture, weight.

“She here?” he asked.

“No,” I said.

Too late.

He didn’t ask again.

Didn’t look around.

Just stepped through the silence and made it sound.

She ran.

Down the stairs.

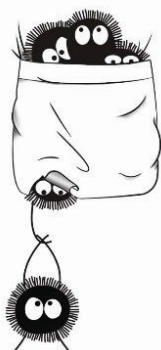


He followed like a wolf who already knew where.
I followed too - not as a hero,
just a woman who knew the cost of zero.

The garage was colder than it had any right to be.
Light flickered above like a truth too tired to see.
Oil stained the floor in blossoms of regret.
And everything felt cinematic, but no one called
“reset.”

She turned -
and he grabbed her - hard and raw.
Not like a man.
Like something beyond law.
Her head jerked back.
Her body bent low.
He slapped her again - flesh against woe.

She spit blood.
Stood up.
He laughed.
Then hit.
The sound was wet, like a heart that won't quit.
I screamed.
He turned.



I rushed.

He blocked.

My ribs met the wall - everything locked.

I gasped - a sound not meant to be heard,
just a body apologizing without words.

She kicked.

He caught.

She scratched.

He threw.

And then out came the knife, and time split in two.

The blade wasn't shiny - it was used.

Like this wasn't his first girl he bruised.

He raised it.

She staggered.

He aimed - for throat.

She stumbled.

It grazed - her shoulder's coat.

Blood.

Real.

Visible.

Slick.



I screamed.

He grinned.

“One more trick?”

And that’s when he came in.

The café boy.

The guy who gave flowers like they meant prophecy.

His eyes scanned fast.

His hand held a gun - casually.

Like he’d been taught not just how - but when.

Like this was the version of love he’d always defend.

He stepped between us - quiet, slow.

The kind of calm that lets the whole room know.

His hand didn’t shake.

But his breath was tight.

His face held history - not the kind that’s light.

“Put it down,” he said.

No raise. No rage.

Just the voice of a man turning his own page.

And then everything froze.

The knife still up.

Her arm still bleeding.

My mouth shut up.

The two men locked eyes - neither blinked.

Like they were writing a code in the air, inked.

“You gonna shoot?” the abuser hissed.

“You gonna beg?” the café boy missed.

He didn’t move.

Just aimed with truth.

Not bravado. Not rescue. But grief like proof.

Then -

he lunged.

The blade swung.

The girl ducked.

The bullet fired -

the floor struck.

Everyone gasped -

the garage itself, too.

Like we’d all held our breath and didn’t know who’d

pull through.

The knife dropped.

The man stood, paused.



He didn't speak.

He didn't applaud.

He just looked at us like we'd cheated fate.

Like his version of justice couldn't wait.

But it had to.

Because three against one.

And his story was over. Ours had begun.

Maya stood.

Bleeding.

Shaky.

Alive.

She looked at me like we'd both survived.

She looked at him - the café boy - too.

And he nodded like this was overdue.

His hand still held the gun, but looser.

His chest was rising, not like a victor - but a bruiser.

He was breathing hard.

His mouth ajar.

Like he'd shot more than a bullet - he'd shot the scar.

"You didn't have to," she whispered slow.

I touched her hand.

"I know."

“But I did,” I added,
“Because romance is dead.
And no man gets to write the line where she bled.
And not all love is softness and song.
Sometimes it arrives when everything’s wrong.
With a bullet.
Or silence.
Or just someone who stays -
and gives you one second more than the blaze.”



35. Camera's on, Officer



We climbed the stairs with knees that didn't want to cooperate,

each step an echo of what we didn't say yet.

The flower guy held the railing like he was holding the moment still,

and Maya gritted her teeth like the pain had asked to borrow her mouth.

We left a trail of boot prints, red drops, dust from the garage -

but what we carried was quieter,

and heavier than the knife still lying next to the bloodstain downstairs.

The kitchen greeted us like a crime scene between courses.

A spoon on the floor.

A cup still half-full.

One chair toppled like someone tried to stand up and remembered too much.

I grabbed the pan like that's what people do
after a man nearly kills them -
they make eggs.

Maya leaned against the counter, breath slow,
her left arm bleeding beneath a folded kitchen rag,
but her right hand still reaching for the salt like
flavor might fix this.

"We should eat something," she whispered,
like eating was how you rejoin the living.

I nodded, already whisking eggs with the wrong end
of the fork,
my lip throbbing, my vision narrowed,
and my hands pretending that making breakfast
meant I was still in control.

The café boy opened the fridge like it might explain
anything.

He pulled out juice, spilled a little, didn't care.
He looked like a man who'd spent all his adrenaline
and was now running on crumbs of instinct and guilt.

"You okay?" he asked Maya.

"Yeah. You?"



“Don’t know.”

“Want some toast?”

“Only if it comes with trauma spread thin.”

We laughed.

Not because it was funny.

Because we needed the air to move.

We ate on mismatched plates, knees touching table
legs,
elbows bruised, skin flaking with dried blood,
sipping tea like it could wash out the image of a gun
in his hand,
and a knife raised to someone who stopped ducking.

“They’ll ask questions,” I said.

“We’ll tell the truth,” said Maya.

“Self-defense.”

“Camera footage.”

“Eggs as alibi.”

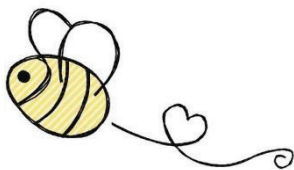
“Tea as evidence.”

“Us as survivors.”

“Him as lesson.”

And then the knock.

Three slow ones - deliberate.



No yelling.

Just the kind of presence that makes ceilings flinch.

I opened the door with hands still slick with dish soap and shaking.

Two officers stood - one tall, one tired,
both eyes scanning the room like they weren't sure if
we were victims or very calm criminals.

"We got a call," the taller one said.

His voice was steady - practiced -
the kind of tone you use when expecting people to lie.

"Garage. Man down. Three people upstairs. You
called?"

"Yes," Maya said.

"It was self-defense," I added.

"There's a camera."

"Downstairs."

"It saw everything."

"So did we."

"He came with a knife."

"We came with hands."

"He tried to kill us."

"We made breakfast instead."

The officers stepped in.

Not hostile.

But alert.

They looked at our bruises.

At the drying blood on my arm.

At the broken teacup still sitting near the burner.

“Do you want to press charges?”

“No,” Maya said.

“We want to finish eating.”

The younger one blinked.

“We’ll need statements.”

“You’ll get them,” said the café boy,

“But can we sit? Just for five more bites?”

They paused.

And in that pause, we lived.

We weren’t noble.

We weren’t brave.

We were hungry and broken and trying to save
whatever dignity hadn’t bled into the floor.

And when they left to check the footage,
we chewed in silence.

Maya wiped her mouth.

The flower guy rubbed his wrist.

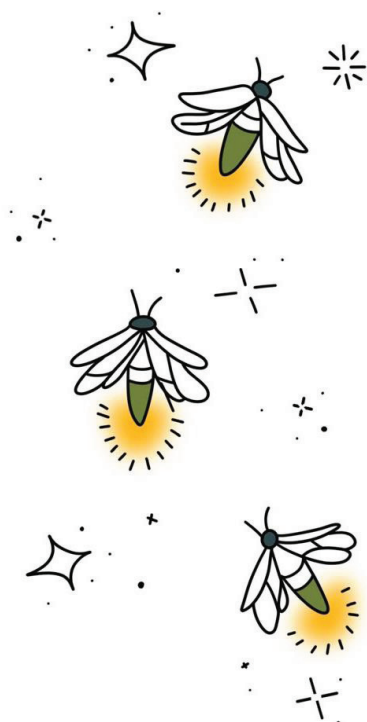
I looked at the yolk on my plate and thought:

This is what healing tastes like.

Messy.

Burnt.

And served with too much salt.



36. This was home

Maya didn't leave like a scene from a show,
no music, no storm, no dramatic go.

Just a duffel bag, granola bar, and sigh,

"Alright then," she said, "this is my goodbye."

I nodded. She smiled. The flower guy waved.

It felt kind of holy. It felt kind of brave.

She'd stayed for a month.

Which in grief-years, you know,

is longer than healing usually lets you go.

She slept on the couch like it owed her rent,
wore my old hoodies, and left her scent.

She drank all my tea, rewrote my playlists,
and taught me that rage makes great dishlists.

We danced in the kitchen, we yelled at the sink,
and once she confessed she couldn't not overthink.

The flower guy showed up with herbs and a grin,
looked at the chaos and just... stepped in.

Never asked questions, never got loud,

just stirred the soup like he made us proud.

Maya once said,

“You’re emotionally safe. That’s horrifying.”

He cut his thumb. I laughed. She kept lying -
on the floor, under blankets, eating week-old fries,
telling us truth like it came in disguise.

Then she packed. No speech. No blowout fight.

Just a note that read,

“Text me when your hearts feel light.”

“Don’t let her stop dancing.

Don’t let him grow roots.

If you two get married, I’ll sue in my boots.”

So she left.

And we -

stayed.

No, the flower guy didn’t move in.

But he came with breakfast and a gentle grin.

He brought too much garlic, bought new rice,
and started seasoning pain like it needed spice.

We made dinner, sometimes twice a day,
and I stopped crying every Saturday.

He never said “us,” and I never asked,
but we made friendship feel like a holy task.
He washed the pans. I dried the cups.
We didn’t kiss. But we showed up.

Sometimes Maya sends us memes at night.
Sometimes she sends photos of her dog mid-fight.
She said,

“He only bites men who lie or frown.”
We said, “Iconic. Give him the crown.”

Our apartment stayed messy,
our playlists stayed weird,
but the hallway stopped echoing
with everything we feared.
And one night, while slicing a lemon in half,
he looked at me, paused, and stifled a laugh.

“I like this version of who we became.”
“Me too,” I replied,
“Even without a name.”

Because this was home.
Not forever.

But now.

And that's somehow enough.

Where nothing got fixed,

but everything stirred.

And the things that were said

no longer hurt like words.

Where he stayed,

and she healed,

and I got to breathe -

in a room with a kettle

and no need to leave



37. End Note

If you're reading this, thank you - truly.

You could've stopped anywhere. But you stayed. You made it here. And that means more to me than I can say.

Reverie wasn't meant to be a book at first. It was a feeling, a mess, a way of processing quiet chaos - the kind of thoughts that show up late at night when the city feels too loud and you feel too small.

I wrote it for the girl who moves cities and hopes things might finally make sense.

I wrote it for anyone who watches the world a little too closely, who feels too much, laughs too loud, gets attached to strangers, or falls in love with silence. And if you saw even a small part of yourself in these pages - I hope you feel a little more understood now.

If this book taught me anything, it's that healing is not linear, loneliness isn't always loud, and sometimes, surviving the ordinary is its own kind of magic.

Thank you for holding this story in your hands.
I hope it kept you company. I hope it made you laugh.
And I hope it reminded you that even when life doesn't
make sense - you still do.

And if someone asks how Reverie was, just smile and
say:

**“Girl moves cities. Girl overhears. Girl never
recovers.”**

That's all they need to know.

And, hey,

**stay hydrated, stay a little weird, stay a little
kind, and keep smiling.**

