

APRICITY

A COLLECTION OF POETRY



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PROLOGUE

Apricity is a word I've only recently been aware of, and have come to adore. The word, which is often accompanied by a squiggly little red line on all of my documents, as it is not yet defined by the Merriam-Webster dictionary, is a word for the feeling of the sun's warmth in the winter months.

I'm not usually fond of winter. In the months that follow the chaotic holiday season, I typically find myself cold, tired, sad and lost. This feeling could not be truer this year, as I have found myself fighting the most difficult battle over my own mind in the last several months, and I think I'm losing, badly.

It's one thing to be sad in the summertime. The sunlight and the flowers and the warm weather can brighten any spirit, at least by a fraction. When the winter sun is cold and dark, I find myself in an even worse mood.

Which is why I love the word Apricity so much. For it to mean the sun's warmth in the winter, it alludes to the image of sunlight leaking through the bleak clouds, warming your face and melting the snow. It is a word I can *feel*, not just in my mind but on my skin, in a way that forces me to take a deep breath. It is the paramount image of hope and joy, the two things that my mind often convinces me I will never have again.

Depression is not for the faint of heart. Depression is not for the weak. When one struggles everyday to get out of bed, they are not weak for doing so. Surviving one's every day sometimes feels like an upward trek with both feet tied together. But that sunlight—that shimmering light that catches the sparkling snow as it rains from the pine trees in the wind, that is Apricity.

That is why I am dedicating this collection of poems to each and every person who has struggled with depression or anxiety. This collection is for all of the ones who fight daily to remain themselves.

These poems are not all about sadness and anxiety. Many of these are about love, sunshine, and rooting oneself in who they know they are. Not everything has to be so sad all the time; that is what Apricity has taught me.

I'm very proud of this collection; not just for the thoughts and images it has provoked, but for the utmost sincerity with which I now show myself to you, reader. I have always tried to remain in control of my image, fearing condemnation or judgment poised by vulnerability. This time, I refuse to keep so many poems hidden, for Apricity also melts away the ice and the cold, and brings forth all the blooming buds of new life into the sun.

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I Grew This Body From the Willows

I have never been domesticated.

But from the wild Wind River willows,

I grew the bones I stand on.

The breeze that blows the cotton

From the trees each spring and summer

Filled my lungs when I took my first breath.

The water that runs into rivers

From the glaciers at the top of the Tetons

Flooded my veins and hydrated my blood.

I was one with the dirt that rots

The elk carcass and homes the rodents,

And I am one with the lakes and rivers,

The streams that flow into creeks

That run through the forests I grew up in,

The hills and valleys I made my home in,

The mountains and the trees

And the prairies and the fields

That I lived and breathed and died in.

Her Piano Plays Itself

On the wall, suspended in the air, a piano hangs,
And in the middle of the room,
It plays itself.

We sat on the ledge tonight,
Looking over a room shrouded
In pink light and blue neon signs
As every inch of the walls are covered
In sheet metal and scraps of the signs
That humans have left behind.

the sounds were echoes of human voices,
the last of our species to cry for help.

Your eyes turned to the sky,
Watching as the drum beat of its own accord,
And I saw the lights illuminate your face.
I floated there, suspended in the mix of your cologne,
And to stand so close to you,
to be near you and know
that only my heart could be as broken as this,
strangled by the overgrown ivy of a millennia,
Kept me stranded up there.

I feel the aching beat of my own arteries in my body,
My ancestors scream and shout and roar
against the dying light, and my heart pounded
As though you and they have reached a hand deep inside
My hollow chest, and plucked the veins
Like a bass, keeping time; a symphonius cacophony
On the wall, suspended in the air, where a piano hangs.
And in the middle of the room,
It plays itself.

Adore me, love me, praise me

The velvet pink dress hangs unworn in the closet,
Ivory pearl necklaces tied up
In knots on the dresser.
An empty wine glass carries her lipstick
Stain to the next world,
Where tv screen static lights the
Forgotten hallways and blue neon lights
Buzz incessantly, coughing and sputtering.
She had once been an aspiring actress,
Had dreamed of life under the warm glow
Of the stage lights, arms outstretched
Flying towards the crowd on a cord,
Her beaming smile glittered with diamonds,
The tears falling from the wrinkles in her eyes
As large as blue sapphires, hearing the way they all
Adored her; loved her; praised her.
Where the smile had sat upon her carved glass face,
Lipstick stained the corners of her mouth
She's got mascara blurred along the whites of her eyes
And her diamond smile turned into a coal-colored frown.
She had dreamed of being adored and loved and praised
Forever, but every failing actress knows
Those things never fucking last.
The flies adorned her body like jewels she once wore,
Buzzing incessantly, choking and gasping.
The tv remote was still clutched in her blue fingers,
Hissing static as they found her lying there,
Mascara running and lipstick stained
All over the empty wine glass,
On the bed next to the gun she had used
To kill herself
And in the motel bathroom, in the blaring light,
The words "adore me. Love me. Praise me"
Stretched across the mirror in red lipstick like
The blood that trickled from her temple to the pillow.

Stepping on Stinging Nettle

A child walks barefoot to the horse's barn,
Her small hand wrapped around Grandma's fingers.
Her shorts are frayed and her tee shirt is torn

And stained, three sizes too big. Sun lingers
Over the grassy hills and tall haystacks,
A horseshoe echo, Grandpa hit a ringer.

She loves the horses, dark as midnight black,
Neighing loud in the summer evening breeze.
She begins to wander off the beaten track.

Grandma lets go, the grass up to her knees,
The little girl treks alone through the brush,
Up to the red barn's window, the humming bees

Bounce by. She steps close, the summer falls hush,
As pain, sharp as splinters, shatters her world.
Through her bare feet, a fire heats from the bush

Of Stinging Nettle, green leaves unfurled
Against her skin, its touch made her shriek out
In grief, her vision ceased as the birds whirled.

The horse she had forgotten all about
As the tears stream down her ruddy face,
And carrots on the ground of her abandoned route.
Grandma scoops her up, a comforted embrace,
As she is carried down the dirt road home.
Back to that green house, to that safe, warm place.

The red barn falls under shadow of gloam,
Her tears dry on her reddened, childlike cheeks.
She never went barefoot again when she roamed.

LoverBoy

Bare brown shoulders burning red under the summer sun,
A scarf tied around your braided, coffee-colored hair.
You sit and strum your fingers along the strings of your guitar,
And the slightest hint of melon drifts along with your honey-coated voice in the warm air.

You have reserved the space closest to you, for me,
Where I can see the freckles that appear along your warm cheeks up close,
Dancing across the bridge of your sculpted nose, illuminating
The once barren color of your dark eyes until they glow.

Beads of silver and ivory pearls dangle around your neck, amethysts
And rose quartz, jade and lavender incense, your neck dripping from the fountain of youth,
And you hum and whisper words to songs I once only heard in my dreams,
Christening the ground you stand on with sweet vermouth.

It was a riotous occasion, knowing you for so short a time.
To feel your heart beating beneath my fingertips, if only for a second.
You were as sweet as the strawberry scented air that you disappeared on,
But your hands have left their mark, and from the dark, I can be beckoned
Once again into your lemon-cotton arms.

During the war, we were happy

Our cars still drove down streets that weren't covered in rubble.

We watched videos of explosions in fear,

And turned them off when we couldn't take anymore.

We smiled as we sunk into our beds at night, the house so quiet that

If you listened close enough, you could almost hear

The sounds of shells landing on buildings across the ocean.

We were happy during the war, where we stood on our porch

And watched the sky light up with fireworks, not bombs.

The bodies of our children never littered the yards, and

Our fathers came home at night when he left in the morning.

We ate our meals without fear that it would be the last.

Our house never shook, our glass dishes never broke.

We never had to walk past our old theater

And try to imagine it standing there through the rubble.

We were happy during the war, because we were able.

During their war, we were happy.

Scenes From Movies In My Head That I Put To Music: part I

The plane shutters at its colossal speed.
The lights flicker and people begin to scream.
We're going down, I think.
This is the end.
Someone behind me starts to hyperventilate.
In front somewhere, a baby cries.
The plane continues to tilt left.
The engines are roaring, but we're going down.
In my earphones, King by Florence + the Machine plays.
This plane is going down, I think.
And in the chaos, as Flo begins to shout,
I start to laugh and tears well in my eyes.
And I stare at the front of my seat
And I laugh.

In Bed Between Them

As a child, I remember
Plopping into bed between Grandma and Grandpa,
My icy toes chilled under the blankets.
They warmed me up in the glow of morning,
Before we would get up for the day and go exploring.
20 years later,
I slide into bed between them once more,
Except Grandma is the only one still breathing.
I kept my back turned to him, shoulders shaking
As I wept in her arms.
His body not even cold yet beside me.
“I’m sorry,” I whisper. “I’m sorry.”
How little it means to the man who can’t hear me.
How much it says about me, I think, that I showed up five minutes too late.
It wasn’t your time, Grandma says. It wasn’t your time
To see someone die.
But that 20 minute drive home
to grab a change of clothes
Will be the thing I regret most, forever.

After the Party's Over

After the party's over,
After the chaos of planning is done,
And the hour-long service is finished,
And everyone goes back to their jobs,
We stay here; Surrounded by white roses
And cards that say "sorry for your loss."
We remain in that dark grey hour
Between midnight and sunrise,
Where wandering up and down the quiet halls of this lonely house
Is the only solace we find from grief.
You had your coffee and your pie,
You said I'm sorry and we said goodbye,
But our hearts remain in that foyer,
Where we held each other as we cried.

Nobody tells us what to do
After the party's over.
Nobody explains how to cope now,
After the chaos of visits and phone calls cease,
And everyone but us moves on.
As life returns to what it was,
The white rose in the blue vase
Sitting on my desk reminds me of what we lost.

Muse

Something tells me you'll haunt me forever, my Muse.

In oceans of golden grass you sway
Like leaves blowing on the autumn trees.

Joy and living intertwine in an opaline sky,
Like the night you reached out your hand
And called to my decrepit bones, lifting me from the ground.

Your soul spins stories of dripping candles
And copper and sunlight, and snowflakes
That crystalize on a foggy window
In the chill of a winter morning where you lay.

Like the golden rays of afternoon pouring through
Grey clouds, your eyes drown with the weight of the stars.
The mist that covers the dark green countryside obscures my sight.

I saw you first standing by the bay, flowers in your hands,
And the brightest smile in the heat of day.
And the effervescent green and golden light,
Like film flitting by on a white screen,
Plays over and over in the deepest crevices of my mind,
Until the waves come once again and wash it all away.

Mummies

What is the word for that feeling,
When you see something that used to frighten you
As a child, only now,
It isn't nearly as big or terrifying as you had once believed?
And the disappointment that comes then,
At realizing that you perhaps were not
As brave or as strong
As you thought you were,
When conquering such a fearful quest...
Is there a word for that?

Woman

You treat me like a trophy.
Honey, my body is nothing more than a vessel,
Getting me from one place to the next.

Day in and day out,
You think I carved this life
With your help?

You think anything but these hands
Put me in this place?
Anything but this body?

Not you, you quiet, unadulterated soul.
No one to tuck you in at night,
No one to scare you from walking alone in the dark.

You think you are an ally?
Tell your friends to stop harassing me.
Stop treating me like I'm less worthy

Of a full dollar than you.
Tell them to stop raping my sisters.
Tell them to stop killing my sisters.

You want to be an ally?
Stop believing that your love
Is all my worth is good for.

Your crown is sideways darling,
Let me fix that for you.
You hungry?

I'll make you something.
After all,
I made everything I've got

With nothing but these hands and this heart and this mind and this body and this soul.

The Obituary Section

Sometimes when I'm bored,
I google my own name
So that I can read the obituaries
For the people who were once me.
And I'll flip through pages of Emma Mayers,
Read about their families, their livelihoods,
Their cults and their religions.
And I've discovered that, once, I was a painter
With a gallery in New York City.
Once, I was a postal clerk during the war,
Although which war, I could not tell.
I have been a teacher in Bismarck,
And a lawyer in Plymouth.
I have been a wife and a mother,
A caretaker and a holocaust survivor.
And all of these beings through which I imagine myself,
Had a heart beating differently than my own.
It loved differently than I do, it felt more or less than I can.
And while our blood does not intertwine,
Our histories have no possible way of crossing,
I find myself connected to all of them,
Like their stories are my past lives,
And in each of these Emma's I see shards of myself in.
Like looking through a shattered mirror, each fragment
Catches glints of light that reflect the faces of so many different me's.
And in the tiny room where I reside, ten different Emma's
Look back at me, reminding me that I am not so alone as I feel.

Quiet In The Wartime

A woman lives alone in the city.

In the period of calm between shellings, she stands by her front door and puts her winter coat on, zipping it to her chin. A hat is thrown atop her red hair, and she wraps a red scarf around her neck, tossing it over her shoulder. She picks up the leash and walks her dog up the stairs, out the door.

In the winter cold, she looks around. Where cars once honked lively down the street, it was now nothing but desolated asphalt. She recalls when buses would drive past, when people would bump her shoulder as she and the dog walked down the crowded sidewalk. She remembers passing the bakery on the corner, where the scent of pastry would float and waft about her head. The smell from the bakery now is only char and gunpowder and ash, broken bits of glass lying about as the building smolders silently now, burning still from the bomb that destroyed it a week ago.

Where the high-rises used to stand tall and shade her from the sun, the light now breaks through the gaping holes in the walls. "The entrance to building #105 is burning down," she thinks to herself, and sure enough, the glowing flames devour the doorframe, licking up the walls as quietly as the street it sits upon.

Her dog hides behind her legs at the distant echo of gunshots, and her feet scrape against the ground as she walks through the neighborhood she used to know so well. When she took this walk, she used to keep her head down. She used to close her eyes when she passed all the demolished places she used to know, but after so many days, she found the strength to look. She looked at the house of the little girl who used to sell her chocolate, where the windows, now glassless, sit like gaping mouths screaming in silence. She wonders where the girl and her family went, if they made it out safe. She knows her father is probably patrolling the streets with a gun in his hand, but she prays quietly that the rest of them are not still in their house. She looks at the curtains torn by fire, at the splintered wood and broken awning that littered the ground and made a mess of things.

The woman and her dog walk past the playground that was once covered in children who laughed and cried and played. She tries not to look at the iron thing that flew in and landed there. And she tries not to look at the people in the streets who lie there, unmoving; where the ground runs red with blood and shredded cloth and skin and faces, and she knows she cannot look because she'll probably see someone she knows.

Once, just a few weeks ago, she walked past a solitary limb laying in the street. The dog shivered at the sight of just the arm, and they rushed home in an instant.

It's not a new thing; she's heard of people getting blown to pieces. The shells that hit Kyiv and Kharkiv have torn both buildings and people apart. And here, in Mariupol, she knows that it's only a matter of days. Only days before she finds herself lying in the street with the others, where her red scarf will splay out on the street with her blood. She tells people online that she only hopes her body will stay in one piece.

Only three weeks have passed, but she simply cannot remember a life before this one. A life when living in shelter was all that she knew. The ghosts of that life reside in the rubble of the building where she once worked, and in the playground and the bakery and her neighbor's dead, lifeless eyes. There is nothing more than this now, she thinks.

A tear threatens to fall, but she no longer has the strength to cry. She breathes slow, her breath coming from her lips in a cool mist in the winter air. "It's hard to live," she thinks. The dog begins to howl. The sound of bullets heighten and she can hear them getting closer now. She knows, and the dog knows, that they will start to bomb her city again.

The silence on her street is deafening. She turns around and picks the dog up, and lets her feet scrape against the metal and plastic and blood and fire as she walks herself home.

Wildflowers

I want to go out
Into the middle of the woods,
When the sun has just barely set
And thunder rolls softly over the mountains.
When the clouds turn grey above my head,
And the breeze on the trees silences all other sounds of life.
And on a night so quiet and peaceful as this,
I want to scream.
I want to feel my throat burn and hear my voice break
And feel the air in my lungs coast through my teeth.
I want to scream and bellow and howl
At the empty forest around me,
And I want to scream until I run out of breath,
Until I sink to my knees,
And wrap my arms around myself
When I feel my voice give out.

And I want to lay there on my back,
Under the cathedral of pine,
Watching the clouds get darker
And wait for the first drop of rain to caress my face
And drip down my cheek like a tear.
And the rain will start,
Soaking my clothes until they melt with the dirt beneath me.
I want to lay there in the forest,
And let my body become one
With the mushrooms and the moss,
Until the wildflowers
Begin to peak their little heads through my ribcage,
Outstretched towards the sky,
Their vines wrapped around my lungs.
My hand outstretched towards the sky above me,
Reaching, cupping my hand
And catching the tears that the sky let fall,
And I will breathe in the scent of the rain-covered woods,
And sigh,
And sleep.

Plums

Picking plums in my private Idaho,
Bees bouncing along the bumbling branches.
Sun streaming westside on the trees blanches
The fruit, red and tender—they sit and glow.
We pick the plums and suck the sweet juice slow,
Teeth grazing the skin till the flesh detaches
From the pit inside, and our breath catches.
“Climb down from the ladder and sit below.”

The soft grass stains blue denim a pale green,
And Billie Holiday cuts through the air,
Tossing melodies through the kitchen screen.
A moment in the summer heat so rare,
Where I, at the ripe age of seventeen,
Swore the plum-sweet trees the richest to bear.

Fable Of The Cricket and the Flower, Amongst All Other Flowers

A very tall, strong, handsome cricket was walking home from town one day, when he passed by a lovely flower garden.

Knowing that he had time to spare, he decided to take the long route home, and he found himself wandering through without the gardener's pardon.

The lovely little flowers could see him walking down the path, and they primped and preened their pretty stems,

And fluffed up their petals, coating them with dew drops, so they glistened in the sunlight like pristine gems.

And to each of these little flowers, Mr. Cricket admired, humming his way along the path and raking them with his eyes.

But one little flower, he noticed, had not tried to primp her petals or don herself with dew, and he stopped, taking note of her sighs.

"What's the matter, little flower?" Mr. Cricket asked. "You are not excited to make yourself look pretty, to catch my attention?"

"What's the use?" The flower sighed. "When I know that you want nothing more from me than my affection?"

"Now how can you be sure of that?" Mr. Cricket frowned. "You are lovelier than all the flowers here, of that, I am sure."

The truth was, the poor little flower's heart was broken, because she had heard that line, and many others, before.

"I may be a lovelier flower than some," she said, "but Crickets will say anything just to carry me in their pockets for a day."

The Cricket frowned and looked her down, smacking his lips as he wondered what to say.

"You needn't say anything," the flower said instead. "Be on your way sir, for crickets won't want a flower like me."

Not often, the proud Mr. Cricket was speechless, but he did as she asked and walked away, and the flower finally shed a tear or three.

For every cricket was the same, she knew. The poor flower could never fathom a reason why any Cricket would want her for more than just a day.

"There would be nothing left to love in the end," she said, "if I had let him take me away."

444

I FIND PLENTY OF JOY
IN LITTLE MOMENTS.
IN THE PRESENCE OF A FRIEND,
WHEN LAYING IN BED
WITH THE SUNLIGHT CASTING SHADOWS
ON THE FLOOR THROUGH THE BLINDS,
AND TALKING ABOUT OUR CHILDHOODS,
MEANS EVERYTHING TO ME.
WHERE THE NUMBERS ARE DRAWN ON THE CEILING
AND THE WALLS, AND ON THE BOOK ON THE NIGHT TABLE
THAT I READ UNTIL 2 A.M., WHEN I WAS TRYING TO CRY SILENTLY
SO AS NOT TO WAKE HER.
IN THOSE PRESENT MOMENTS,
I FIND THE JOY MY SOUL IS FIGHTING FOR.
IT'S WHEN I START TO THINK
ABOUT THE FUTURE, AND ALL
THAT COMES WITH IT,
THAT I REALIZE JUST HOW DEEP
MY DEPRESSION SEEMS TO RUN.

Tuesday Morning

Light leaks from between the branches that frosted over in the pale winter night,
Behind the pink clouds sparkling with white,
Crystalline shadows dance in their space, where they are suspended in air,
And the frosting covered fir dusted with sugar shakes gently in the breeze,
Snow catches the wind softly graces down to touch ground.
Frozen dew drops decorate the spider's web,
And the thin twig branches on the barren crab apple tree.
Aristotle sits on the mantle, his white eyes glazed over, forever stoic,
His gaze traverses the pink sky and white trees, as though he had never seen anything
Quite so lovely as this, Tuesday morning.

Coffee-Stained Brain

There are coffee rings staining the surfaces of my brain.
Beneath the piles of books I keep stacked away,
Most still have yet to be read,
There are valentines I wrote to boys when I was 6.
There are birthday cards I keep from my Nana,
Because the words that she underlines in those cards
Are words I know she would never say to me out loud.
There's an old high school t-shirt I keep to sleep in,
And a beat-up floral shoe box full of old coffee sleeves,
With the names of the people I shared a drink with written
In black ink along with the date, and I have no idea
Why I keep all those things, but I keep them anyway.
And beneath all the textbooks with pages of water damage
From doing homework in the bathtub,
And my old blue blanket that has been faded
Between my fingers over time,
I scatter notes across blank pages,
Write single lines of poetry on deli napkins
And quotes I overhear on used candy wrappers.
And sometimes I get frustrated that I'm not turning books
Out of all these little mediocre thoughts of mine,
But then I think, well who the hell would want
To read all my thoughts anyway?

Silk Swans

Two ivory swans flew above the frozen river I stood above.
Their wings beat in sync,
Black feet skidding across the indigo waves, dipping
Up and over the silent monolith,
Glaciers that parted the roaring waters
With a gentle and commanding hand. Like God
I stood above where they circled in the grey sky,
Barefoot in the snow, where I, in my nightdress
That clung to my wet and frozen skin,
Shivered relentlessly in the cold, my blue lips chattering.
Gasps for air echoed over the icy cliffside as I caught my death,
Perking the ears of the swans that flew below me.
Their great wings pounded in my eardrums
With the rushing of hot blood through my veins,
And as they swooped down, I jumped,
And flew through the air to meet them.

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