



March 11

The city is never deserted, but it's noticeably quieter this week. There were empty shelves and short lines at the supermarket. I stood staring at packets of non-perishable food items, wondering if I should add more to my basket. The panic has now become a pandemic. It's a strange time.

Earlier, I turned my phone on Do Not Disturb to focus on writing, something I'm doing more and more often. Letting go of the idea that the World will end because I'm not contactable for a while. Then I deleted a bunch of messages that I haven't replied to. It felt like oxygen.

Later, I checked Twitter and saw Harvey Weinstein has been jailed for twenty three years. I let out a little victory cry. It's not enough. And it's still quite something.



March 12

Sitting up here in the sky. Trying to stay grounded. Everything is more muted than usual. Our illusions of control are being tested and torn apart. We are realizing our collective fragility.

I notice the things I most want are the things I already fill my life with. Art, always. Give me all the words. All the photographs. All

the meaning. Connection with the ones I love, humans and animals. Save chai, wine and chocolate, that's really it. The fabric of me. When everything else comes undone, that's what's left.

And of course this city. Oh, New York. Even when you're down, you're never out. I love you so.



March 13

The emails keep coming in. On Wednesday it was the events. Yesterday it was the museums. Today it is the libraries.

Postponed. Cancelled. Closing.

Today is the first day that the anxiety crept over me. Fearful thoughts of the coming weeks and months. What does working from home look like when you and your husband both rely on working outside the home for the biggest part of your income?

What does paying rent look like? Bills? Not just in April, but in the months beyond?

Today I feel quiet. Reflective. Uncertain.

I am wondering if lockdown is coming. I am thinking of the others in my world who are already impacted. The freelancers who can't get paid. How do I help them? What can I offer them? What does sanctuary and safety look like right now?

I am thinking of those who rely on medication to stay alive. Those with chronic illness. Those who don't have a supply of cash or a stock of food. Those who rely on tips to cover the essentials. Those who were already struggling to survive and are now feeling the full weight of a World that will still look past their basic needs and perhaps even blame them for not being prepared for the unprecedented.

All I can think of doing is creating. It's how I process, how I translate, how I make sense of the senseless.

I can write, I can capture, I can connect through creativity. And maybe something good will come from that.



March 14

Taking comfort in all things creative. Paying extra attention to the dance of light and shadow and the way the setting sun catches the tips of the roof tops. Pausing to look outside before bedtime to see the city still shimmering and not sleeping. Enjoying puppy snuggles and the first spiced chai of the day. Feeling the cool breeze on my face as I walk the now-spacious streets. Noticing the still-bare branches on the trees and the woman sitting on the

bench with her upturned face to the sky. Watching the flow of the sculpture pool water and the glint of the coins like so many stars. Dreaming of new ways, new Worlds and nobody being left behind.



March 15

Heading home after pet sitting and getting ready to stay put for the foreseeable future. I stopped at Whole Foods on the way

back, not to panic buy, but to get a few things we're likely going to need over the coming weeks. There were people just staring at the shelves, many of which were empty. We're still feeling our way into this strangeness. Nobody seems quite sure how to react.

Two of my friends in England have just given birth in the last week or so. One of my client-friends in NYC is about to give birth any day. New life arriving to join us in this complex new World that is changing shape each hour.



March 16

Before starting my day. Before the first chai. Before checking the news to see what has unfolded or escalated overnight. Before stretching or writing or letting my mind jump ahead to all the what if's.

Claiming these Before moments was something I was already practicing. And now it seems more essential than ever.

Checking in with myself upon waking. Who am I today? Before the outside World shapes my mood or influences my nervous system? Who am I in this body, in this breath, in this moment? Can I stay connected to this Me throughout the day? Can I remember to gently guide myself back to Her when the overwhelm and noise creep in?

It's the 76th day of this new year, this new decade. I'm thinking of how much is out of control, and still how much we get to choose. How many moments we get to be who we truly are, if only we claim them. We can always return to ourselves. Always. There is so much comfort in this for me.



March 17

Social distancing with sciatica means not giving up movement completely, but taking some outdoor exercise and steering clear of other people. Not that there's a whole lot of people about right now. Just one day of being at home has increased the pain down my left leg, despite regular stretching. But these are times to modify and make-do, and I'm really just thankful we can meet our

basic needs right now and, at least for the moment, take walks and feel some kind of connection to our environment.



March 18

It feels as though we're moving through the thinnest air. The kind of air that can't be trusted to hold any of the pieces. The kind of air that drops all of the certainties and lets them shatter at our feet.

We walked again this morning. Three miles of cautious steps. The pendulum in my mind swinging between spaces of calm and unease, humor and horror. They're saying the city that never sleeps should now be the city that doesn't move. We are waiting to find out if there'll be an official lockdown.

I'm writing in the afternoons now. Something I've never really done before. The words always wanted to come out in the morning. But now they have slotted into a new space in this different World. And I am trusting that they know best.



March 19

I'm noticing this new routine I'm settling into and how quickly I gravitated towards some kind of order. Even though my days have been blown wide open with hours that were previously filled with client visits and commuting, I still want to structure the space. I thrive better this way.

Our morning walks have become medicinal in more ways than one. Sometimes we talk, sometimes we move in silence. Almost everyone we pass is wearing a face mask. When we return home, we immediately wash our hands and shower. Then we're inside for the day. Both working on creative projects, both taking creative courses, both reaching out to loved ones and checking in on our circle.

One of my friends in England sent me a photo of her two week old son having his first bath. So simple and normal and reassuring. People are dying, systems are unraveling, and still we are continuing in all the ways we know how. Finding solace in the quiet ordinary moments and seeking beauty in all the uncertain spaces.



March 20

Something I've realized over the last couple of days is that I've got much better at accepting help. I used to take such pride in doing it all alone. A delicate and dangerous juggling act of showing the World how well I was holding everything together. Never really feeling any sense of reassurance in my ability to keep it all going, but always striving to do so anyway.

I don't do that anymore. I think I just got to a point where I realized it wasn't working, and fooling myself otherwise felt like a cruel and unloving way to live.

Now, when help is offered I do my best to accept it gratefully and gracefully. I trust that invitations of assistance are offered because they are possible for the other person. I let go of analyzing whether it's "right" to accept. I let go of agonizing over whether I'm deserving of receiving.

It's taken time to get to this space. And it's still not entirely comfortable. But I'm still saying Yes and Thank You and not coating my words with shame.

My community feels more cherished than ever. All of us rooting down and doing our best to stand strong. Right now, it's enough.



March 21

It's ironic that these days of irregular life have brought with them the most regular routine I've had in some time. Walking. Reading. Writing. Connecting. Resting. Suddenly I'm sticking to a set schedule and my body seems to appreciate this consistency, even though my mind swings between chaos and calm.

Today we did some cleaning and cleansing. Nag champa drifting through the apartment. Almost like a normal Saturday at home together. But not quite.

We talked about what it is to see a landscape change, but not yet be able to glimpse a clear view of the new picture. What it is to hold space and enforce boundaries during this time. The things that are no longer true. The things that might be true soon.

Lockdown will be in full effect as from tomorrow evening. The Governor has instructed all nonessential businesses in the state to close by 8pm. The subways are for doctors and nurses and essential staff only. The Mayor has called NYC the “US epicenter of this crisis.

It's a wild, wild time watching all of this unfold. Knowing nothing. Expecting anything.



March 22

It feels like the last week has been a whole month. Not necessarily in the worst way, but it does feel like there's a whole lot of distance between the new normal and the old routine.

It was colder today, and we decided not to walk as far. But once we got going we wanted to keep going. So we did.

This medicinal time feels like it's my savior right now, symbolic of so much. Putting one foot in front of the other and moving forward.

I send smiles to the people we pass. They can't see them because we all wear scarves or masks. But maybe they sense something anyway.



March 23

Rainy day, bubble bath, news of a friend who has the virus, pictures of puppies, tired eyes, messages from Spain, texts from England, almonds and cranberries, cleaning the fridge, writing the words, checking the news, more rain, green smoothie and extra vitamins, focusing and zoning out. Nothing is normal. Everything

continues. It's all different and the same. It's all strange and familiar.



March 24

It's hard to tell if my 4am restlessness is a symptom of perimenopause or a response to the pandemic. Maybe both.

I haven't had a period since January. My body seems to know exactly how to navigate this new chapter. She's prepared for this change. It's my mind that's not quite there yet.

Earlier, I wrote in my journal about the things that fuel me. Like the kind of art that's born from bold, bare truths. Like women who show up in strength and simplicity. I notice how much I crave that these days. I don't want to have to peel back a thousand layers. I just want to see the truth. Feel the truth.

It's been a bad hair, hot chai, soft robe kind of day.



March 25

Today just hit me like a sledgehammer. Along with the realization that I feel woefully unprepared for any of this. All the feelings are thundering through me, but they're in excruciating slow motion.

Tiredness that is deeper than the need to sleep. Anger that is a natural response to preventable deaths. Irritation at bubbles that don't ever seem to burst, and contempt for those who live in them.

Gratitude for the ones I can communicate with using few words and great understanding. Fear for the ones who won't make it. Concern for the ones who will.

Everything is tinged with sadness right now. And I'm letting myself feel it, I'm letting myself process it, and I'm letting myself create from it.



March 26

The difference a day can make. A less restless night, bluer skies, some good news from two friends, an unexpected offering, nourishing food, creativity and quiet time. My inner world has seen me feeling lighter and more grounded today.

In the outside world the hits keep coming. The New York Times ran a report from our local hospital in Elmhurst today. It's horrifying and it's happening just a few minutes walk away from our apartment. We've seen the lines of people queuing up to be tested. My heart goes out to those who are affected and to those who are working around the clock to do everything they can to save lives.

The dance of shadow and light. The way conflicting truths can co-exist. The way the World is mending and breaking all at once.



March 27

It's not been the best Women's History Month in terms of attending some of the events I'd hoped to get to. But I've never really believed in confining ourselves to a specific period of celebration. I want us to spill over into all of the spaces, all of the time.

Nevertheless, I've been enjoying reading Therese Anne Fowler's latest, *A Good Neighborhood* and also Anna Lovind's *The Creative Doer* as I'm working through her amazing online course. I've been dipping into the other books, too.

There's so many riches in all these pages. And, as I'm sitting here drinking wine from a tumbler, I'm raising my glass to all the women who have come before me, and all the ones who are here now. Our creativity is perhaps more essential than ever, and it's exactly what's getting me through this month, and whatever the coming weeks hold.



March 28

All of the days are similar, and yet none of them looks exactly the same. There's a pattern of darkness and light, hope and despair. All the feelings merged with all the things. And even though I know all of life is like this, it's magnified more than usual and hitting home so very hard.

Today, we are hanging on. We are hoping for better news. We are stumbling through the hours and we are asking for the coming days to be kind.



March 29

My pill box is doubling up as a day tracker. Sunday has been full of reminders and rituals and rain falling outside.

The song that comes through my headphones sparks a wave of nostalgia, the piano intro pulling me back to 1990. I remember she had this track on vinyl. We'd listen to it over and over again.

The already-frequent sirens seem relentless today. As I type these words another one begins blaring. It's impossible to forget how close the hospital is, or to stop my mind from wandering to what's happening inside.

He's watching short films and I'm putting a homemade protein pack on my hair. My stomach keeps flipping over when I think of the unanswered message. I'm trying not to create a story from the silence.

The light is fading. The sirens keep screaming. I want to wrap my arms around the World and, at least for a moment, stop holding my breath.



March 30

All the machines in the laundromat whirling the washing around. Like our minds are doing with all the thoughts. Like our stomachs are doing with all the fear. Like our hearts are doing with all the love.

News feels weighted. No news feels even worse. Exhales feel so thin and fleeting. Still we tend to the day-to-day tasks. The things

that give us structure and comfort. The things that reassure us with their mundane consistency because as long as we're following at least some of the usual threads of our lives, things will be normal or manageable or not quite so threatening.

Who are we in the midst of all this? Who are we on the other side? What does it look like for those who will emerge relatively unscathed, compared to those who will never be able to reassemble the pieces?

All the washing. All the thoughts. All the fear. All the love.



March 31

Looking for little sparks of hope to balance out some of the sadness. It's the 91st day of this documentary project. It seems strange to think that life has already altered so much since January. Unprecedented big shifts and everyday small moments merging together. All of it contributing to a World we recognize and have never seen before.

I'm staying true to the core theme of this project, which is to tell the truth. No matter if it's deemed dull or repetitive or uninspiring. I never wanted this to be about reach or likes or feeling pressured to create content that would be well received. It was really about stepping away, away, away from all that and moving closer to who I am and what I actually want to create. It was about being honest and transparent about my own life, my own body, and what day-to-day living looks like in my World.

It still feels like such a relief to show up for myself this way. Now more than ever. This daily ritual of creativity and truth, this offering of words and imagery that aren't about beating an algorithm or meeting anyone's expectations. It's a permission slip for myself from myself. A reminder that I get to choose my creative expression. I get to create on my own terms without negotiating with anyone or holding myself hostage.

And, whilst everything else seems to be spinning out of control, this makes such perfect and beautiful sense to me in the most affirmative way. I'm grateful for that.



April 1

Today was our weekly trip to get groceries. Almost all the local independent supermarkets have now closed. The ones that are open have long lines and few options. Our neighborhood is shutting down more and more each day. We are hoping our community is staying safe but each new closure brings more doubt.

We walked to Target, passing Elmhurst hospital along the way. There's now a Thank You tribute outside for all the workers inside. It's hard to explain what living here is like since the pandemic hit. I hear sirens in my sleep and I can't tell if they're real or not. By day, they definitely are.

The side entrance to the hospital has a steady stream of people lining up to be tested. It's eerily quiet. Silence or sirens. That's it.

On the way back home we passed a body in the road. A man laid out with a mask on. His glasses had fallen from his face. A police car was there, but the officers remained inside the vehicle. Their presence let us know that we didn't need to call an ambulance, but everything else was unanswered.



April 2

Morning walk. Lunchtime bath. Afternoon writing. My stomach keeps signaling the arrival of the period that never comes and I can't help but wonder how our bodies are storing all these personal and collective experiences. We can't even begin to know how these days will shape the years ahead of us.

My mind scatters so often to those who are living with increased fear, risk and threat right now. People I love. People I've never met. People on the periphery of all the stories that are centered and spotlighted. People who are always overlooked and never asked.

Structure and boundaries are helping my mental health in ways I need and crave. Creativity is giving me a way to process and release what I'm able to.

And as for the rest...

I have none of the answers and this knowledge comes wrapped in relief. Because then I am free to do my part, in my way, and not position myself as an authority on how to handle these times (or any times). It also means I don't have any such expectation from others. I'm simply doing what I can, with what I know, using what I have.



April 3

Our landlords are in their mid-eighties and they live in the apartment downstairs. We've been checking in on them every few days since the pandemic hit, offering help and support. They're grateful to be asked but they're also fiercely independent, so we've been trying to strike the balance of being there for them without taking away their autonomy.

One of the few remaining local supermarkets still open has senior hours each morning. However, there are long lines outside. Although our landlords insist on doing their own shopping, they did permit us to hold their place in the line so they could wait elsewhere and not have to stand so long.

Walking to the supermarket in single file, gloves on and faces covered, I wondered what I would have thought of this scene if I could have glimpsed it a month ago.

The available ventilators are expected to run out by Sunday. This city that I love to the bones of me is splintering a little more each day. And, even now, there's nowhere else I'd rather be.



April 4

Today I'm noticing the way that art always finds its way into the World, no matter what. I'm feeling the deep tiredness that has enveloped my body, courtesy of broken nights full of dreams where I can't catch a full breath and wake up gasping. I'm remembering the pre-dawn helicopters that we've heard circling the neighborhood this week. I'm listing to Tom Petty singing about a good girl who's crazy 'bout Elvis. I'm thinking of the hot flashes

that went away for a few weeks and are now back in full force. I'm wondering what I'll most remember about these days in years to come.



April 5

We are still continuing with our morning walks. We barely pass any people so staying safe, and keeping others safe, is mercifully not an issue.

The closed shops and quiet streets are such a contrast from what we're used to. Signs of the times are, quite literally, showing up everywhere.

We don't know how any of this ends. And really, we never do. There are no guarantees in any situation. I think this pandemic is reminding me of how easily everything can fall away. And how important it is that I notice what's left. That I pay attention to what's still calling me. What I'm still moving towards. What I'm still lovingly holding onto.



April 6

Carrot, apple and ginger juice to help ease away some of the tiredness. Although there's still no sign of my period, my body seems to want to present the other usual accompanying symptoms, insomnia being one of them. Or maybe it's the approach of the full moon and the planets shifting their energy. Whatever it is, I seem wired to stay awake, despite wanting to sleep solidly for a week.

Writing the book often feels like a wrestling match. A back and forth between the words and the want. Trust. Despair. Clarity. Confusion.

I'm not sure that living is much different to writing. Maybe we're always entangled in something. Lost and found, over and over again, as many times as it takes to get to our truth.



April 7

I'm root clipping my hair after washing it. He's cleaning the picture rails. We're both making a shopping list of what we'll need to get on our weekly grocery run in the next couple of days.

Earlier, we were talking about human psychology and how people cling to ideas and information that best serve their own beliefs,

even if there are hard facts and scientific evidence to the contrary. And how easy it can then be, to manipulate those same minds, and steer them to behave in a way that enables certain systems to stay in place, or perhaps become even more powerful than before.

I'm noticing how I feel some nervousness about putting on the weight I've lost. About not having bathroom scales to confirm or allay this small nagging fear. And how ironic it is that I can be so affected by the cracking open and crumbling World around me, and still be so conditioned to believe that my weight is a marker of what matters. Even now.



April 8

Trying to gain access to the supermarket that we now have to enter via a rooftop so that the flow of people might be better managed.

Trying to gain access to the emergency funds that are barricaded behind antiquated systems that do not allow for speed or ease.

Trying to track down the information that will help us figure out which of the drop down selections to make on the antiquated system, even when none of them feel like a fit.

Trying to keep within the confines of this World that asks for distance and details and still give myself space to spill over and stay connected to the only things that have ever made sense.



April 9

Boiling flaxseed to make gel for my hair. Part of my therapy these past weeks has been to get lost in YouTube tutorials that teach me all about curly hair and how to best care for it.

After the mass shedding of hair I experienced last year, I have been trying to restore my mane to something other than a frazzled mess. I thought I needed more moisture and I was doing deep conditioning treatments multiple times a week. When it started getting even worse I turned to trusty YouTube.

Many, many hours later I know that my hair type is 2C/3A, my curls are fine and I have high porosity hair. The game changer has been protein. I was using a ton of heavy moisturizing butters on my hair and completely overloading it. I was also using products that contained almost zero protein. Getting that protein/moisture balance back has already helped dramatically. My curls have been springing back and I'm so happy to see them again.



April 10

Yesterday's flaxseed gel was a success. At least so far. But curly hair has its own life force and so we'll see what tomorrow brings.

Something I've noticed in the hair tutorials I've watched is how many of the techniques and methods are for able bodies. There's lots of head flipping and back bending suggestions to achieve desired results. And even a few short years ago this wouldn't

have been on my radar as an issue. But now my body has new limitations and different needs. And now I think much more about those who are in bodies with even more limitations than mine.

I can't easily tip my head upside down without pain, but I can lay flat on the bed and diffuse dry my hair that way. So that's where we are today.



April 11

Ever since the sciatica hit I've avoided sitting on our sofa, or sitting too long in general. This means I'm usually in the bedroom when I'm home as I can move around and switch position with a little more ease. But writing this way is challenging. It's hard to get into a flow whilst also making sure I'm not further aggravating the nerve pain.

But this is what life looks like right now, and since I plan to keep writing, it's something I just have to work around. I'm missing the movement that my usual routine (or semblance of it) brings, but we still have our morning walks and that's keeping my pain levels in reasonable check.

My indoor wardrobe continues to be as extensive as it ever was. A t-shirt, a robe, and never any pants (using the American meaning).



April 12

I've never been more thankful to have him by my side. It's wild to think of us first meeting back in 2009. Him stopping by my photography stall to look at my images. Us striking up a conversation and exchanging business cards. Me taking off to travel on my own for six months. Us finally going on a date almost two years after we first met. And then the many, many months of long distance travel bridged together with Skype calls,

interspersed with visa application milestones and all the tiny day-to-day moments that we had to find creative ways to share with one another.

As lockdown sees domestic violence rates soaring, I am thinking daily of those who do not feel anywhere near the same sense of safety as me. Those who are at great risk and living in fear, not just from a virus outside the home but from brutality within their own walls. Nobody is clapping and cheering for them each evening. They are struggling and surviving in a completely different way, and I hope we do not forget them or seek ways to protect them, both now and once we have found our way to the other side of this.



April 13

Monday is overcast, windy and very rainy, so our morning walk was replaced by stretching and movement. I used to practice

vinyasa yoga, but now I tend to do my own thing, moving as my body will allow and making plenty of modifications for sciatica.

I still like to set an intention, though. A few deep breaths to inhale something for the day ahead. A goal or a feeling. Or wishes to the World.



April 14

Maybe it was yesterday's rain, but the lines to get groceries today were the worst we've seen them so far. It doesn't really matter. We have time.

There's a few things we can't easily get right now, but there is so much we still have access to. Just to have money for groceries at

the moment is a privilege. To have money for groceries at ANY moment is a privilege. This is not something I forget.

I made some oat, banana and cranberry cookies yesterday. I rarely venture in the kitchen. I think it's because of the bulimia. Recovery isn't a straightforward road. Some behaviors I've let go of, but some still linger. So cookie making is not my usual thing. But these are not usual times, and we are making money stretch even further than before.

I feel like these might turn out to be the easy days for he and I. The ones we'll remember with some kind of tenderness when we look back at them. We're mostly cocooned in our own space. Doing the things we love to do. We have food and shelter. There's space and peace. Even the sirens are quieting down. And I know the coming months will have a different shape. So I'm truly trying to be here in these moments and stay as present as possible.



April 15

Laundromat life. Thankful for more space this time. It's our 33rd day of self-quarantine. Other than our morning walks and weekly grocery runs, this is the only thing we leave the house for.

There's a lot about this stripped back World that I like. The biggest thing that prompted me to begin this project was my frustration at

the overwhelming amount of influencer posts that were flooding my feed.

I wanted to push back against the heavily curated social media content which fuels the myth of perfection and “wellness”, leaving little room for realities that simply don’t look like that.

I’d also had enough of the avalanche of faux-vulnerability posts that started as confessionals and ended with an ask to “tag someone who needs this today”. It all felt too contrived. I wanted to be where the truth was, and I wanted to create from a space of truth, too. And so *A Woman in the World* began.

Now we’re in a pandemic and I’m seeing influencers scramble for content. Trying to remain relevant. Seeking ways to promote a lifestyle that is even less accessible now than it was before.

It is my hope that this time will lead to more truth. More honesty about what a life can really look like. Without all the frills and filters and engagement strategies. Because that’s the art I’m here for. That’s the content I love to see. Humans showing up as humans in all our ordinary wonder.



April 16

It will likely be a while before I socialize with anything or anyone at all. Our lockdown has now been extended until May 15th. Beyond that, we don't yet know.

This is what needs to be done, and so we do it. Much as I long to see friends and puppies, walk into coffee shops and soak up art in

physical spaces, I know these pleasures are not worth risking lives.

I don't know when we'll be able to work again. Or pay rent again. I don't know what six months from here might look like. But I also know that nobody else does either.

I'm finding new ways to surrender into this space. The controlling part of my personality has no choice but to mellow a little and become more comfortable with the uncertainty. But I also notice how the desire to control sneakily wants to show up in other ways. So I'm paying attention to that, too.



April 17

One of us has a tendency to hoard, and one of us loves simplicity and space. We've been going through the closets these past few days and de-cluttering, trying to honor both personalities.

I grew up in a house where the cupboards were full of stuff. All of them. Overflowing and overwhelming. My mum couldn't bear to

part with anything. I'm not sure if it was through fear of scarcity, or something else, but she wouldn't throw anything away.

She'd also stockpile tins of food. More than we could get through. Then she'd buy more of the same items, pushing the older tins to the back of the cupboard until they'd eventually go past their "best before" date and be discarded.

I can't think straight with clutter. Part of my need to have simplicity is probably linked to my desire to control. It's easier with fewer things. But I'm also a big believer in sharing and donating. Why does it make sense to hold onto something I'm not using if someone else can benefit from it? I tend to be guided by the question: Is it useful, beautiful or joyful? This gives such ease to the decision making process on what to keep.

I'm not a law of attraction believer. At least not in the popular spiritual Secret-style way, which does a fantastic job of bypassing and victim blaming.

But I do know this. I've been the recipient of more kindnesses than I can count. And paying it forward is one of my favorite things to do. So we're getting a bag together of things that might be useful, beautiful or joyful to other people and we'll leave them in the community so that they might find their way to their next home.



April 18

The World had Frida Kahlo for 47 years, and we did not celebrate her for nearly enough of that time. For many years, much of Frida's talent was overshadowed by the work of her husband. It was Diego Rivera who was credited with having a unique style and a profound impact on international art and social change.

It wasn't until the late 1970's, almost twenty years after her death, that Frida's work began to be widely recognized by art historians and political activists. Her art was, at least in part, a response to the chronic pain that she lived with for much of her life. Art didn't magically make her pain disappear, but it is a powerful reminder of how creativity acts as a translator.

I woke up feeling off today, the left side of my body aching and burning. Distorted dreams turned yesterday's optimism into something more weighted, much like the gray, gloomy weather outside. As I was cleaning my creative altar, there was Frida looking back at me.

Frida is one of my biggest reminders that the telling of our stories matters. And we do not have to look or feel a certain way in order to tell them. Our stories do not need to be shaped or edited for anyone else's approval. Their worth is not dependent on their recognition.

Today is a day to immerse myself in the things I believe in. Art, feminism, spirit, truth. Today I want spiced chai and cinnamon bagels. I want to seek all the beauty born from real lives and real living. I want a late afternoon bath. I want to soak up words from the ones without agendas. This is what matters most to me in these moments. Not to seek healing wisdom or transformative techniques, but to be as close to the center of the storm as possible, in company with all the hearts who have the tenacity to bear witness without looking away.



April 19

Quiet streets and closed stores. Covered faces and careful distancing. Spring still finding its way through to grace these days that are so similar and yet still not identical. Each breath, each breeze is new and never been before. All the illusions of all the control we never really had are crumbling away. I am looking for what's left. I am listening for what's true and timeless. I do that a lot these days.

Everything holds more meaning. My daily rituals give reassurance and reasons to keep showing up.

My back aches in that specific spot that usually alerts me my period is coming. Maybe it will this month.

He is showering and I am drinking my second chai. It's Sunday, this is New York City, and these exact hours will never come again.



April 20

Some things that made their way into my day... ■ Oat and banana cookies with chocolate chips woven in, left longer to bake so they'd brown and crisp a little more. ■ Feelings of frustration for the ones who are first to be ignored and last to be asked. ■ A

bracelet from an old friend, given to me before I got married, its simplicity so perfect and its sentiment so true. ■ The late afternoon light hitting the bedroom wall so beautifully and briefly before the day began to disappear. ■ The absence of my period, again. ■ Gratitude for good friendships that survive years and miles and imperfections. ■ Anxiety at the months ahead. ■ Hot flashes that start in my cheeks and travel swiftly down to my toes. ■ Anger at the mercy missing from the mouths of people who judge and condemn those who can't hope to get ahead in a society that was never built to serve them. ■ Carrot juice with apple and the soothing burn of ginger. ■ Pages of words, tumbling like memory, turning time on its head and taking me all the way back.



April 21

I mean, I really don't have many of the answers. And, in some situations, I don't have any answers at all. I can't begin to understand what prompts certain human behavior. I can't fathom how it's possible to remain so willfully ignorant and unconcerned with lives that do not look like your own. Lives that are considered less. Expendable.

I'm wondering when this will ever end. Not social distancing, or lockdown. Not the need to continue to practice measures that will save many more lives. But the inability for some people to consider the impact of their actions and act accordingly.

So here I am, with an egg and yogurt protein treatment on my head, not knowing any of it.



April 22

Towards the end of last year, Leon and I were walking in Central Park and we stumbled across a performance by singer and guitarist, David Ippolito.

During a break between songs, whilst speaking to the audience about the current climate of America and beyond, he said: “Decent people will always find a way to be decent”.

I remembered his words at the weekend as I read more damning news about corporations receiving bailouts whilst small businesses are struggling and self-employed people are going under (and much, much more besides). I remembered them again today as we walked past Elmhurst Hospital and saw the signs and the candles for the ones who are working and the ones who are dying.

Even in the heart of all the frustration and despondency so many of us are feeling right now, his words are still true. Decent people *will* always find a way to be decent.

Remembering this brings me comfort. Hope. A reason to keep going. Because no matter what the situation, or how high the odds are stacked against us, there are people who will never stop fighting the good fight and doing the decent thing. And that will always, always count for something.



April 23

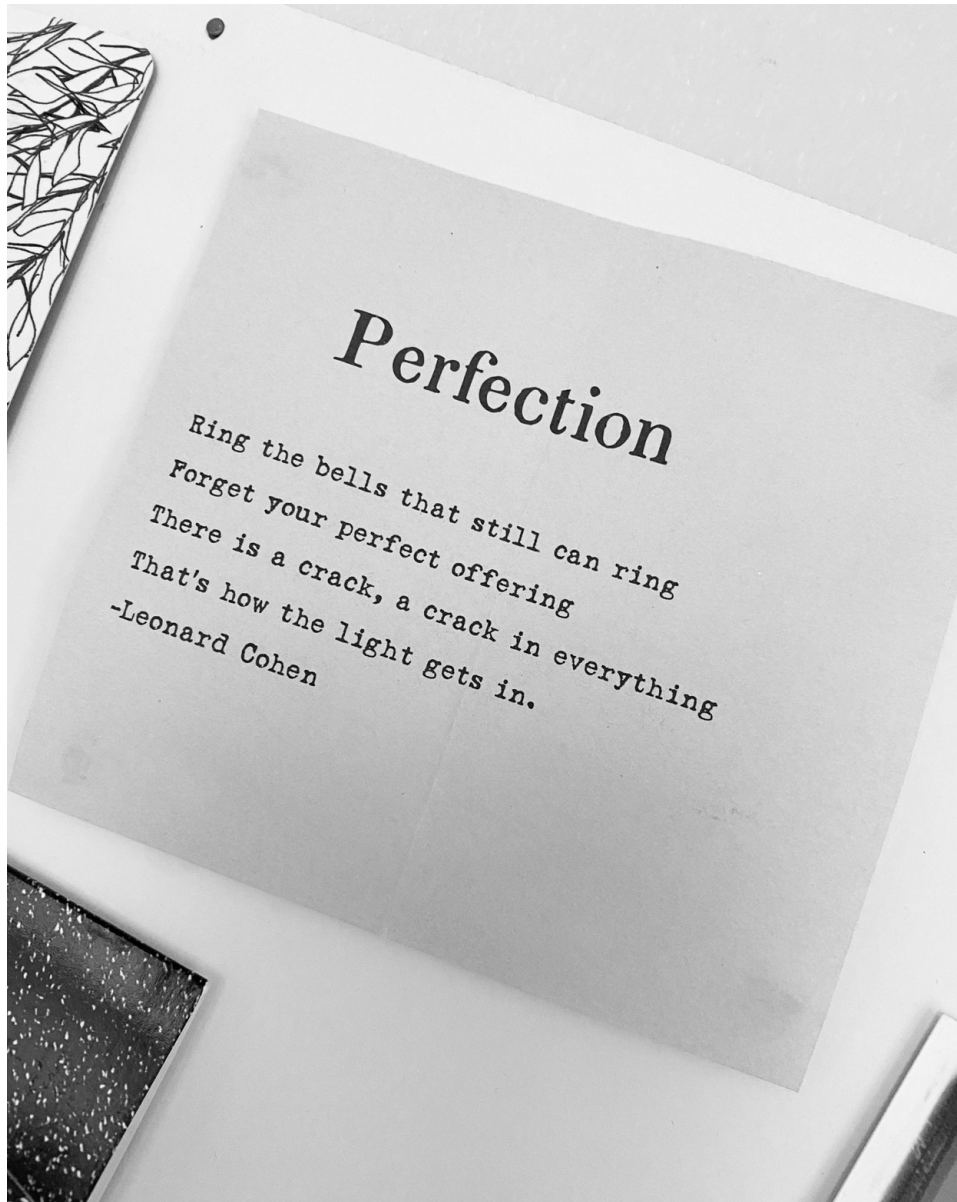
I've been thinking of how many times in the past I've longed for a moment more spacious than the rest. A pause. A chance to collect my thoughts and savor some of my day. And how these past weeks have, in a faltering and unexpected way, offered a whole string of spacious moments that weren't there before.

When I'm able to set down some of the anxiety (which is not always possible, nor something I always ask of myself) I feel like there's a chance. A chance to discover, or imagine, or create something that was simply waiting for space and silence to speak. Then comes this beautiful relief. An understanding. A sense of what Could Be when all the hours are not overloaded with all the things.

We both slept so badly last night. Today I looked for invitations to go slowly. Gently. To loosen my grip even more. I noticed how eager my mind was to dominate the day with more questions. (But *how* will the rent be paid? And *how* will our businesses survive? And, but, and...)

Still I kept looking for the invitations. Tiny opportunities to Be. Breathe. And they were there. Woven in and around all the daily tasks. Sandwiched between the news and the emails and the answers I don't have.

Today there was space to stretch and room to move. Moments to claim as my own. Simple and soothing and not pretending to be anything more than they were.



April 24

I came into the room to tell him how the words often trickle so slowly and how patient I have to be with myself as I search for what wants to be written.

How when I opened my MacBook this morning, Anne Lamott's words came to the forefront of my mind as I remembered that everything really is bit by bit, bird by bird.

How some of the words I've already written are just keeping the pages warm until I can summon the courage needed to write the others.

And then, looking up at the board where we post the things we want to remember, the timely reminder that no offering, nor life, is perfect. Which is just as well as perhaps we'd have no poems worth reading.



April 25

Sometimes my movement practice looks like getting low and staying still. Being with the discomfort of an ache or a memory. Asking how I can hold it or shift it or approach it from a slightly different angle.

What makes up a lifetime? What's the glue that binds all the pieces together? I think most people say love. Only love. Always love. But I'm thinking about how I always feel pulled towards something more like an unwavering gaze. An unapologetic statement. A deliberateness that doesn't ask for validation from the masses. Surely this matters too.



April 26

A dumpster full of food that can't be sold. We live right on the cusp of Elmhurst and Jackson Heights and our neighborhood is well known for its diversity, its vibrancy and its food. There are 167 languages spoken here and the restaurants reflect the culture of the community - many and varied.

It's been a ghost town for weeks and, today as we walked through the shuttered streets, we wondered how many local businesses will be able to reopen when the lockdown restrictions are lifted.

Lives here are being irrevocably altered in ways we can't yet fully comprehend. The truth is, we won't all make it. Some of us won't survive, be it physically or financially. And those who do will carry something more than before.

Somehow it seems more vital than ever to notice. To witness the changing days and all the honesty they offer.



April 27

Podcasts have never been my thing. On the odd occasion I've listened to one, I've found myself getting distracted then constantly skipping back to hear the bits I've missed. I told myself it was because audio alone didn't really capture my attention. But then I remembered how I used to adore listening to audio stories as a child, and later, talk radio for hours and hours.

These past weeks of slowing down have made me realize how much I'm used to cramming into my time, often unnecessarily. Indulging in a singular thing has become a rarity.

At the weekend, I remembered a recent tweet I saw from Cheryl Strayed about her new podcast, Sugar Calling. It's a series of conversations with writers over the age of 60 who have inspired her. I started listening yesterday and I'm hooked.

This morning, I laid on my bed in NYC and listened to Cheryl in Portland speaking with Pico Iyer in Japan. Suddenly the World shrunk and expanded at the same time as I marveled at how connected we are, in technology, creativity, and our human desire to find meaning.



April 28

A man from the National Grid was outside our apartment this morning as we left for our weekly walk to Target for groceries. He saw our faces were covered with scarves and went to his van and handed Leon two masks for us.

When we were waiting in line at Target, a woman in front of me was staring into the distance and didn't register when it was her turn to move forward. We caught each other's gaze and I tried to make my eyes wrinkle up to show her I was smiling.

It's been at least ten years since I've had a cigarette, but another night of insomnia has left a taste in my mouth that reminds me of too many Marlboro the night before.

The news crews were outside Elmhurst Hospital earlier. At the side entrance there's still a steady stream of people waiting to be tested.

Today, I've been writing about my old life in London and marveling at the memories of things I've survived. Not least of which was years spent drinking Southern Comfort and lemonade.

Tomorrow, we have to remember to carry some small bags of coins to offer to people begging for money. Twice this week we haven't had anything to give.

Queen and David Bowie are currently coming through my headphones asking why we can't give love one more chance. These are hard and beautiful days of revelation.

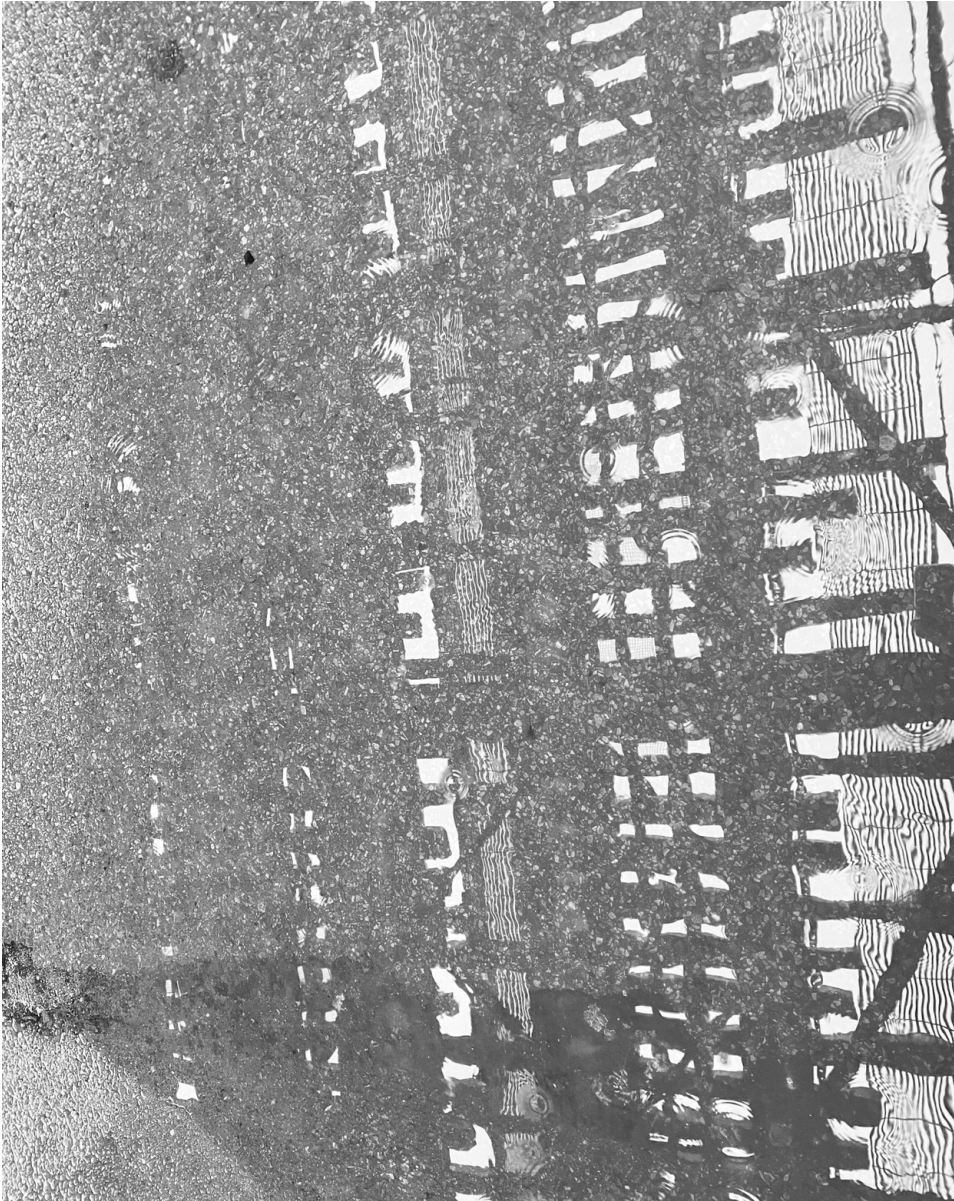


April 29

My eyes were still burning at 4.48am, yet somehow my mind was determined to pull me from sleep and list All The Things that must be mulled over immediately. It's the third night in a row, but it's been such a common theme throughout my life that I'm not even counting anymore.

We walked to Foodtown with the trolley to meet our landlady and help her get their groceries back home. It's the first time there hasn't been a line outside and we were all so shocked not to see it. Two strangers called across the street in amazement to comment on the same thing, making me realize what we consider to be remarkable has swiftly changed in the space of a few weeks.

I spent extra hours today on my poetry book and only a handful of useful words came. Everything felt disjointed, as though I was trying to rush something that wasn't quite ready. I keep telling myself to stay in the room and trust the process. We'll see what tomorrow brings.



April 30

The last day in April has everything falling from sky. I almost wish the wind would gather more force and blow away the remains of all the flimsy structures still standing. Can we build something else, please?

Nothing about the system is broken and it confuses me when people claim otherwise. The system works so perfectly that even

in the eye of a pandemic induced storm, it continues to serve those it was built for, and by.

I think expensive art in pristine houses might be the saddest, most soulless thing.

A man in the next building keeps throwing trash from his balcony and there are fat rats in the car park who thank him.

I haven't had a period since January and I feel as though my body wants to let go and hold on at the same time.



May 1

This morning I told him how much I miss New York. How much easier it would be to hole up in the cabin upstate that we ran away to for New Year's that time, than here in this shell of a city that once was. I miss being alone in crowds and coffee shops and stealing afternoons just for us to immerse our senses in all the art we love. To be in it, actually in it, not just peering through screens and trying to connect in ways that feel four layers removed.

None of this missing means I'm racing to return to a World I know needs more time to recover. Nor does it mean that there's not big chunks of the week when I want to linger even longer than I already have and keep my finger firmly on the pause button because I love the space it brings.

It's just the weather is changing and my anxiety is rising and there are a lot of things that are true at the same time.



May 2

Earplugs have been my nighttime companion for years. Blocking out sound (and light) is usually the best chance I have of getting any sleep. But, a few years ago I also began using them when I needed to write anything that required extra focus. As though disconnecting from the World outside helps me to go even further inside. Find whatever I'm looking for. I even put my hood up if I'm

wearing a top or a robe that has one. I think this is what safety feels like for me. A muted cocoon where I can come back to myself.



May 3

It's the second day I've woken up with stomach pains and had to rush to the bathroom. Ten years ago I was told I had either ulcerative colitis or Crohn's disease, my test results too close to

accurately determine precisely which. I was on meds for years and then slowly came off then as it was decided I was in remission. Sometimes I have flare ups and nobody is really sure why.

These days, conversations with my body seem more complicated than ever. When I try to follow the thread of what I think my symptoms are telling me, I find that answers are vague at best. Maybe it's insomnia, but maybe it's hormones. Maybe it's colitis, or maybe it's stress. Maybe it's weight loss, but it could be perimenopause.

Being 45 has shown me I know a lot less about life than I perhaps credited myself with in my thirties. Certainly my twenties. I used to be adamant that I had answers, and relentless in my pursuit to seek the answers I didn't yet have. I was always dealing in absolutes. Everything had to have a rightful place and firmly belong. Labels. Clarity. Control.

Occupying this new space of vulnerability is unnerving but also a relief. I don't have to know. I can just meet myself where I am. I can try to meet you where you are. I can say "I don't know, I haven't a clue" about all the things I haven't come close to figuring out.

I wonder what shapes us into thinking we are supposed to be experts on experiences we've either had, haven't yet had or couldn't hope to know. And why do we seek ultimate wisdom from others? What's so shocking about standing fully in our uncertainty?

These are the thoughts that circle around my mind as I get ready to walk around our neighborhood on the first Sunday in May, in a

World that has always been changing, ever evolving, and pretty much winging it since the dawn of time.



May 4

We were supposed to be on a flight to London this morning. My first time home in over five years. Longer for Leon. I'd been

making a list of British food I wanted to buy and bring back.
Mostly chocolate.

I'm tired from another 4am battle between my body and my mind.
I wish they'd get along a little better at times. My stomach is still
sore with something.

It's becoming harder to wear the face mask when we're out
walking. The humidity is creeping up and I try not to think about
what it might feel like to have my mouth covered in June or July
when the city is sweltering in a pool of liquid heat.

Staying alive looks different than it did a few months ago and
once again I am marveling at all the truths that co-exist and how
much trust it takes to just stay inside a moment.



May 5

Some things that made up the thread of today ■ Getting frustrated during the weekly shop in Target because the prices at checkout kept coming up incorrectly and they wouldn't honor the display price until I'd walked to back to the relevant displays and taken photos with my phone to prove it. ■ Feeling that my frustration was justified, and also knowing I could have handled it

better. ■ Wishing that we could support more of our local small stores and not the corporate giants. ■ More stomach pains that tell me I'll have to eliminate some foods to see what's causing this flare up. ■ Hope that this time, if I need meds, they won't make me go through yet another colonoscopy that isn't necessary and is really about making money and lining pockets and not what is best for me as a patient. ■ Anxiety that just lingers for the longest time and never fully leaves. ■ A text message from one of my best friends in England. ■ A text message from my ex-housemate in London who now lives back in Spain. ■ I miss them both. ■ A mini breakthrough with my book and the realization that switching a couple of sections around gives it much more flow. ■ Queer As Folk on Showtime for the hundredth time because it feels like safety and therapy and home.



May 6

He was stretching and I was drinking my first chai. We were both listening to Bryonie Wise read poetry via Instagram live. Her beautiful dog Winston was sleeping on the sofa behind her and technology magically brought them into our space, so we started the morning together. Some moments feel so sacred to me, and when I closed my eyes I knew I'd remember this as one of them.

The pain and discomfort I've been feeling has got worse so my doctor scheduled a tele-visit for midday. Mercifully (yet another) colonoscopy isn't an option right now so I can skip straight to treatment. I don't love the idea of being on meds again, but here we are. This is what is needed in this moment.

I'm feeling the kind of tired that isn't really about the body but a weariness of the mind. I've been daydreaming of time machines and what it would be like to visit other lifetimes. I think I've always had a tendency to want to run away.

And still I know that in any lifetime it would be all the same things that would bring me back to myself. Words, chai, creativity, chocolate, wine, puppies, and people who live as truthfully as they know how.



May 7

Our neighborhood is inching back to life. Slowly we are seeing more places open, more people on the streets. There's a feeling akin to relief, closely followed by haunted thoughts that say it's too soon. There will be more death, that we know. But nobody ever thinks it will be their lives lost, or their loved ones.

Today I had a pet sitting request for Memorial Day weekend which I plan to take. I'll implement as many safety measures as possible, but zero income isn't a long term option. In NYC, it's not a short term option either. I'm not sure that it's an option in any city in America.

The prescription the doctor issued yesterday was sent to our local pharmacy. We had a phone call prior to pick up to let us know that the cost was almost 1k. For a two month supply. Our new insurance plan doesn't cover any medication and our excess is 4k. If it wasn't laid out in black and white I'd think it was a joke. But it's not.

We're in the process of reapplying for insurance since both our businesses have come to a complete stop. I'm hoping we get approved. And soon. Until then the pills will stay in the pharmacy.

I can get by for now. But I'm thinking about those who can't. Those whose options are even more limited than my own. Those who are in pain, struggling, asking to be seen by a World that won't ever acknowledge them.



May 8

I'm craving malt loaf and Cadbury chocolate that you can't get here because even though they sell it, it's not the same. I want all the home comforts that come from the supermarkets we'd go to when I was a child. I want lemon curd sandwiches, marshmallow tea cakes and hot drinks in big cups we didn't call mugs. Maybe I don't need meds. Maybe I just need to go back.

Today has felt stilted and strange. Leon is trying to finish our taxes because even though there's an extension on filing, no financial support seems to be possible until they're completed. We're trying to get Medicaid assistance by way of health insurance. We are numbers tossed and thrown around in a system that is buckling with the weight of all the millions who are just like us. Or worse off.

I create daily because it's like leaving a trail of something I can follow when I forget my way. Words and photos to help me remember what matters. What's true. This too is comfort. This too is home.



May 9

The temperature has dropped and the wind has picked up, permission granted for us to stay home and not walk today. Not that we needed it, but still.

A midday bath and the The New Yorker poetry podcast. My eyes have been complaining again, reminding me I need to listen rather than look.

I'm about to break my fast with a bagel and egg brunch and black chai. I've been intermittent fasting for around a year now. It's not something I speak too much about because I don't want to contribute to diet culture. But it is a part of my life. As someone with a history of bulimia I know to be mindful of being overly controlling with food. I think this will be a lifelong practice of having honest conversations with myself.



May 10

Emerging from sleep and lingering in those soft seconds before fully waking is one of my favorite things. It's a time that sees me at my truest self. A space between Worlds. A chance to be in a moment that hasn't yet been shaped or stained by the hours to come. It feels like sanctuary.

Last night I had the kind of deep, restorative sleep I wish I could have more often. There were sweeping, vivid dreams that I'm still sifting through, but somehow my body felt as though it had reset.

It's Mother's Day here. I often struggle with these named days that make a great many assumptions and ask us to perform in a certain way. It's hard to opt out entirely because everything is everywhere and the pressure to conform to an ideal can feel very far reaching.

For me, mothering and being mothered has never looked like the storybook versions that are still largely upheld as the norm.

I'm not asking a World that doesn't always make sense to me to validate my experiences. I'm trusting that I know what is true and meaningful to me, and for me. I'm claiming the sanctuary of being between spaces and the magic of being a misfit who has different definitions than the ones so widely celebrated.



May 11

I find it a little easier on the days when the rain comes. When the clouds are thick with thunder and there's a feeling of rage that wants to be released. I feel something then. Something I understand more than the monotony of hours that merge and merge and merge.

Writing the book is reminding me of how much of my life has been in transit. I'm always leaving. Sometimes returning. Rarely staying. And now this pandemic is forcing me to be still. To stay in one place for far longer than I'd like. It's uncomfortable and there are moments when my body feels like it's screaming for me to leave. So I do the grounding things and the centering practices and I wonder if movement is my version of coming home or my means of avoidance.



May 12

It's not only that I find small talk stifling, it's also that light is really the language I love most. Instant art, finding its way into every day, gracing these walls with all the things I want to say but cannot find words for.

And just as I'm watching the shadows shifting, John Lennon comes through my headphones...

People say I'm lazy

Dreaming my life away

Well they give me all kinds of advice

Designed to enlighten me

When I tell them that I'm doing fine watching shadows on the wall

"Don't you miss the big time boy, you're no longer on the ball?"

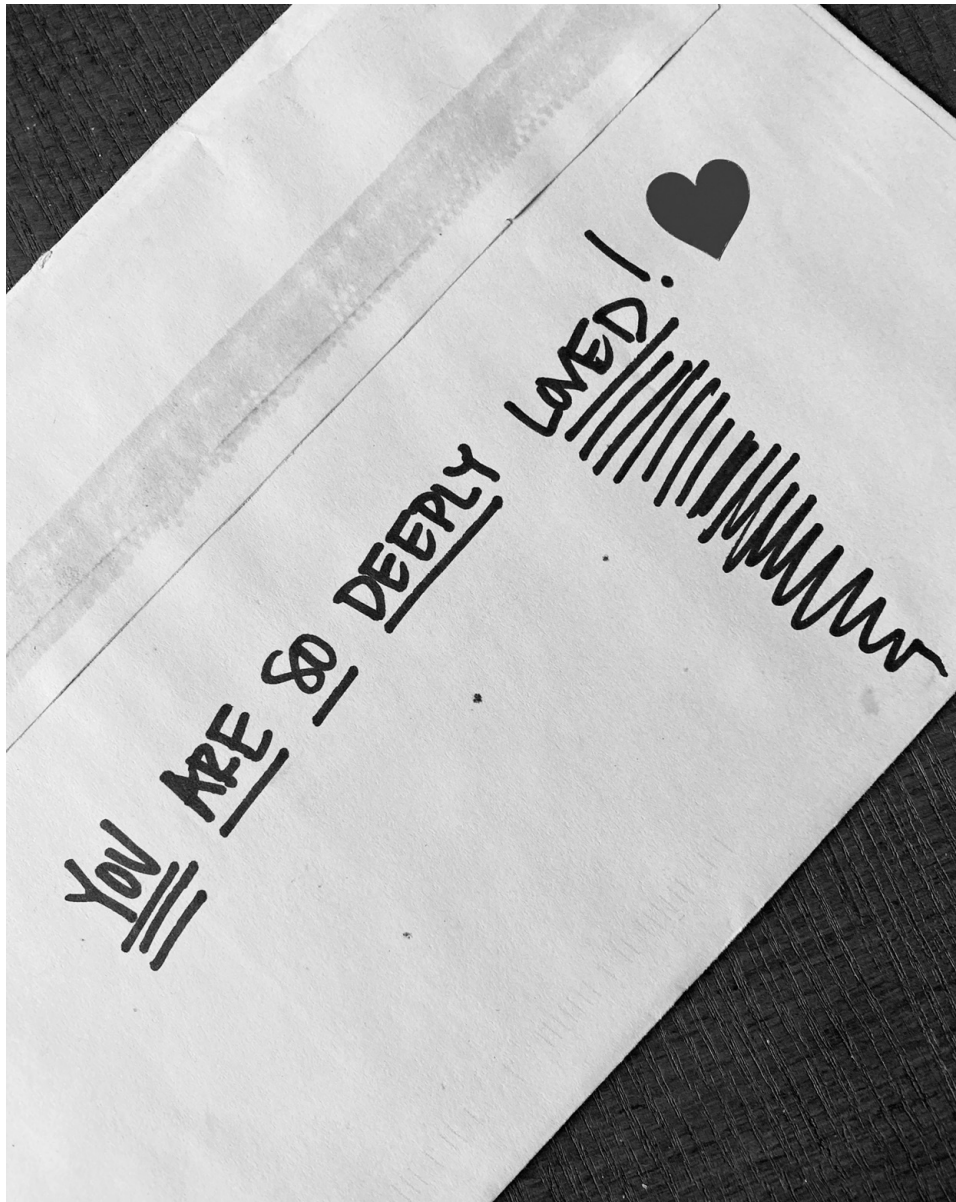
I'm just sitting here watching the wheels go round and round

I really love to watch them roll

No longer riding on the merry-go-round

I just had to let it go

I'm trying to make space in my body for the days to come. I keep thinking of how short our memories are and how soon we've forgotten the sirens. Nothing makes much sense so I'm inhaling and exhaling. Noticing light and listening to lyrics.



May 13

Our landlady fell outside the grocery store this morning. She turned too quickly and caught her foot on a small tree guard close to where she was standing. It was one of those slow motion moments when you know something is about to happen but you're not able to move quickly enough to stop it. She and Leon were both wearing masks and gloves and he was able to help her back up after a few minutes. One of the store workers also offered

to help but my eyes immediately traveled to his bare hands. COVID-19 has brought a second layer of checks for every action. It's become automatic.

When we came home there was beautiful mail from my friend Jess that made other memories come crashing back. My whole life has been strung together by moments of kindness. People who have opened up homes, or arms. Offered help or shelter in numerous ways. Usually not because they've been asked, but simply because they could. Because they wanted to. Because compassion is something they believe doesn't have to be earned or documented on a spreadsheet of things owed.

More recently kindness has looked like care from client-friends whose love has made the difference between us having to join the queue for the food bank. It's looked like landlords who haven't been banging on the door asking for something we simply don't have. Today it looked like the envelope from Jess with photo cards enclosed.

Between (slowly, slowly) writing my poetry book and finding ways to stay afloat, I've been thinking of ways I can spread more kindness. One of the things that came to mind was to send poetry by post to anyone who'd like something kinder than a bill to land through their letterbox. So I'll be starting Poems by Post in a couple of days.



May 14

I woke earlier than I wanted to and there was no getting back to sleep, so I made my first chai and took it back to bed so I could listen to Sugar Calling. This week, Cheryl was talking to Billy Collins and, as has been the case for each of these episodes, I found myself feeling so soothed by their conversation. The simplicity of somebody sharing the view they're currently looking at. Words they wrote, or comfort they found in the words of

others. Memories that stay with them. I think these are things that matter. What we notice. How we witness the World. At least they do to me.

I've had some requests for poems since my post yesterday and a couple of unexpected donations. This kindness feels like a lump in my throat and tears behind my eyes. Language has limitations and even though I try to convey thanks and express gratitude, I still feel as though I miss the mark. How do you fully thank someone for noticing? For caring? I'm not sure. Maybe by loving harder and sharing whatever comes your way. By showing up to make the art and offer the words. And hoping with your whole heart that somehow it's enough.



May 15

Today began with a poetry podcast from The New Yorker, closely followed by an email from our landlords which suggests I tempted fate with my recent words about compassion not being a spreadsheet of things owed.

Sometimes there are indeed spreadsheets and expectations. Even when we cannot leave the house to make the money to

meet those expectations. Even when the soundtrack of the past two months has been sirens on top of sirens and the empty echo of streets shut down. Even when.

All the feelings were floating around my body. Trying to find space to be felt or hide. In our hallway, I walked past our art display of postcards from Judy Chicago's *The Dinner Party*. I found myself picking up the one from the first line: And then all that divided them merged.

There are things I want to believe. And there are things my body knows. There are phrases I hear that allude to this time as something that equalizes and brings us together.

And even as I see our experiences merging into a pool of something that has never been, I still see hands reaching out to cling to all the things that always divided us, willing those divisions to stay in place so that we might not all be in it together, after all, but quite separate in our struggle.



May 16

I can feel the weight of something close to depression crawling over my skin. I couldn't sleep last night, the room was stifling with the sudden temperature spike. We won't turn on the a/c until we absolutely have to because we're trying to prepare for what's still to come. And nobody knows what that looks like.

When I was laying awake at 4am, I thought of how tired I'd be today. And then I wondered why that mattered. For the next few hours I had the same thoughts on a loop. What changes if I'm tired? What's the point of any of this? What difference does anything make?

I want to talk about this in real time. Not at a later date when I can take the meaning or the message from the shitty experience and then profess to have some kind of wisdom because of it. I feel a bit depressed right now. In this moment. And I don't have answers. Just lethargy and a body that would quite like to crumble for a while and not have to hold any of this.

We have a meeting with our landlords later, in the hallway at a safe distance. We've been preparing what to say and every now and again I almost want to laugh, or cry, at the absurdity of it all. The surreality of prepping for a conversation based on expectations from Before is the strangest thing.



May 17

As I was sitting on the bed, drinking my Sunday morning chai, I noticed how the top of my thigh was pressing against the bedcover, making my skin papery like crepe.

If you Google “papery skin on legs”(as I did) you’ll find expert fixes and Derm-approved ways to get rid of this “side effect” of aging. I

was simply looking for the word I couldn't think of (crepe) but of course the World would prefer my shame.

The first thing I thought of when I looked down and saw this new texture on my body was "Oh, so I'm here now". Followed by a memory of my grandmother and how my child's mind had categorized her into a very, very old person, which of course is relative.

I'm thinking of the ones who went into the hospital, a few blocks away from where I sit now, ravaged by a virus that doesn't seem to discriminate, and wondering if they cared for a second about the smoothness of their skin. Or if they just wanted to be able to breathe and live and have more moments in their body to do the things they loved most.

I'm thinking of how strange it is to see these changes to my skin, showing up like little surprises, unwelcome and unwanted but also quite remarkable because I'm still here, breathing and living in a body that might just have a chance to do more things and be stamped with all the markings of a life lived.



May 18

Monday has found me feeling like I've been hit by a truck, thanks to a handful of hours sleep at most and perimenopausal hormonal surges.

Once again I'm back to playing the guessing game of wondering if my period will come or if this will be the fourth month without it. Who knows.

I've been working on a mini project with Leon and today felt like a good day to do a little more of that. Creating with him is quite the experience. We almost always squabble and we almost always end up laughing.

Today's session was one of the laughter ones and it felt like a little injection of medicine for my too-tired veins. These have been some seriously heavy days for all of our hearts. I hope we can each claim at least a few moments from each day where we're able to return to what's good.



May 19

The thoughts floating through my mind as I take a 10am bath.

Sometimes I find it harder to be met in the space of someone trying to understand an experience they can't fully, or ever, comprehend, than not to be met in the space at all.

I'm not entirely sure why that is, because willingness tends to go a long way with me. I think it's because empathy can sometimes come with a presumption of shared understanding. And that's not always the case. The specificity of an experience is really the thing that brings the heartbreak or the victory or whatever the emotions are. It's the detail. And it's not something we can skip over.

I'm thinking of the times I have (and still do) make those presumptions, too. When my desire to join someone in their experience, in support and solidarity, has been greater than my actual understanding. Be it grief, or discrimination, or chronic pain. Such a messy imperfect path we all walk.



May 20

In two days I'll be leaving to pet sit for a few nights, working off payment for a previous booking. I have mixed feelings about going. Pure excitement about spending time with the pups who I've missed beyond measure, merged with trepidation about being on the subway and back amongst other people, albeit as safely as possible.

We went to the store to get curry powder today and there was a long line of people wrapped around our block. They were queuing to be tested for COVID-19 antibodies at the CityMD. I have mixed feelings about this, too. There's still so much we don't know about this virus and it feels as though confirming a person's potential to ward off infection is an invitation for them to behave recklessly. Would someone with the knowledge that they may be safe still take as many precautions to protect themselves or others? I'm not sure.

It's the 141st day of this year, this project. Hours shaped in expected and unexpected ways. None of them making any promises about what the next ones will hold.



May 21

I've been binging on Normal People on Hulu after seeing my love Jessamyn post about it and it kind of just swallowed me up.

Irish accents are home for me. My dad is from Tipperary and he hasn't lost a hint of his hometown even though he's lived in London for far longer than he ever lived in Ireland.

I grew up surrounded by an Irish community. My dad's friends were mostly Irish and many of my friends at primary school had at least one Irish parent. There will always be something about the songs and the lilt of voices that pulls me back in an instant.

One of my earliest memories is being on a boat to Tipperary when we went to visit my Dad's family. There was no money for flights. I remember the rocking sensation from the boat bobbing up and down.

It's also true that there's a lot of conflict and complexity tied up in those memories, too. There was a lot of absence. A lot of isolation. A lot of alcohol. And it was home. It was home. All the things are true.

But how do you explain a childhood in words? When it's never really words but snapshots of time and lyrics that stay with you. When it's scent and taste and fragments that still find their way to you decades later.

I'm drinking chai on the bed, getting ready to leave tomorrow, thinking of how wild it is to be in New York, and London and Tipperary all at once. I wonder if we ever really leave the places we're scattered in. The ache of living is so real.



May 22

My first time on the subway for two and a half months. It felt so strange to travel somewhere again. Mercifully I was able to travel at a quiet time and this helped to calm my anxiety at least a little. I cannot imagine what a packed train would feel like.

Not everyone was wearing masks and it's hard not to interpret this as a sign of indifference. Traveling around NYC has always come

with an extra layer of stress, and now there's even more to consider. Is that person too close? Am I too close? Did I accidentally touch my face? What if more people pile on at the next station?

Exiting the subway at 86th St and seeing Central Park again could almost fool a person into thinking everything is ok. The trees look exactly like they did on any other spring day, in any other year. If you gaze towards the sky you can't see the masks and for a moment it's all so easy.



May 23

It's ironic that on the first of these few days spent by Central Park the rain has come and interrupted plans for a little more outdoor time. But I'm not complaining.

I woke early this morning and the fog covered view from the window showed me a mystical city that could have been from

another World entirely. Sometimes New York is not New York and I love it just the same way.

The humidity is hovering at over 90% (Lord, help my hair) but the apartment is high up and there's a coolness in each of the rooms. No subway for a couple more days means I'm back in a bubble of easily being able to maintain distance. I'm back in (some sort of) control over what happens in the next moments and there's no fear of someone getting too close.

Leon and I spoke for a long time this morning about this next phase of adjustment and what it feels like to occupy the space between what was and what will be. As we were speaking, the pups I'm caring for were curled up by my feet and on my lap, blissfully unaware that anything is different. These are the constants that provide the most comfort for me. Animals, rituals, small moments I can give myself over to and trust in their ability to hold me.



May 24

My booking was cut short by a day and I'm now back home in Queens. The subway was quiet and the platforms were mostly deserted, but still I'm exhausted from the mental energy it took to go to the next borough and back. Even with very cautious measures in place. Even with zero physical contact with my clients. Even with a mask and gloves and sanitizer. I wasn't really

prepared for how overwhelming it would feel. And I'm not sure when that will become more manageable.

I'm trying to reconcile the names of the dead printed on the front page of today's New York Times with the images I've seen on Twitter of reckless groups of people gathering without safety precautions. How in holy fuck can this be okay in anyone's mind? I want to cry at the unfairness of irresponsible people putting others at risk but there's a numbness that's descended over me. A horror at what I'm seeing. Everything is moving too quickly. I'm not ready. We're not ready. It's the first time since moving here in 2014 that I've wanted to leave America.



May 25

I was finally able to get the meds I need for the ulcerative colitis flare up I've been having. I have mixed feelings about taking them, but I want to be able to support my body during this time and not make demands that it be different. I think self-care comes in many different forms and this is one way I can show up for myself right now.

Being in a body is such an individual experience. No two are the same and yet we are so conditioned to seek answers outside of ourselves, trusting that another person holds all the wisdom we need. When it comes to making choices about my health I try to always be guided by my intuition first and foremost. That's what informs any consultations with medical professionals. They have their own knowledge and experience to bring to the conversation, but so do I.

I'm lucky to have a doctor who listens and holds space. Since the pandemic hit we've also found a local pharmacist who has been supportive and communicative. In a system that is often painful to navigate, these are the kind of interactions I appreciate enormously. Feeling seen and being believed make a huge difference.



May 26

Sometimes I just come and sit on this mat with all my unknowing. I don't even move. I just drop down with all the weight of everything that doesn't make sense, all the things I have no idea how to navigate and I simply stay still.

There's little mirrors scattered throughout each day. Chances for us to see ourselves as we are. To notice the tendencies we have. The ways in which we show up or turn away.

There's so much I want to show up for right now. Truth. Art. Kindness. Witnessing our lives and holding space for our stories. There's so much I want to turn away from. Old systems that serve the same demographic. Greed. The cruelty of a World that condemns those it won't give chances to.

Tension in the city feels high. We're in some kind of limbo land right now. Lockdown is still officially in place but there's more bodies spilling out into open spaces than before. The first wave of fear has already been forgotten by those who want to embrace the summers of old. The quietness of the pause has been replaced by the noise of those who are eager to return to a style of living that is known and familiar.

We're all having different experiences and I'm not sure that there's room enough for the mess of us all, trying to find space amongst the millions to breathe. To be. To become.



May 27

I moved on the mat today, Carly Simon's Coming Around Again in my ears. My body eased in gratitude for the stretches and the song.

Today I have tired eyes from being awake between 3am and 6am with too many thoughts swimming around. I kept trying to settle

into sleep but my left side was complaining with sciatic pain and then there were some old stories thrown in for good measure.

Eventually I took a breath and interrupted the flow of self-reproach and comparison. I gently, but very firmly, reminded myself of all the things I've chosen. Not the times I've suffered or struggled directly (or indirectly) because of others. But the times I've faced a situation or a system head-on and made a very conscious choice to say "No. Not that. Not for me." Which has often led to a lonelier or rockier road than the popular path traveled. But damn, if I wouldn't make that choice every time.

So today's mat movement was more confident and assured, even with the tiredness. Even with the pressure of a World that constantly asks us to show up for conformity and reject individuality.

Later in my practice, Quiet by MILCK came on and it felt so affirmative. I truly appreciate these deep feelings of knowing that sometimes come to find us, sweeping aside any doubts.

Finally, after I'd finished my movement, I sat quietly and called in the women who came before me. The ones who also had to make hard choices to live a life they could name as their own. I asked for their support and protection. For their company on the journey. I am not religious, but this is one of my forms of prayer. Circling with women. In heart. In person. In spirit. In reverence and joy and gratitude.



May 28

I'm a big believer in the solitary moments that we can claim as ours and ours alone. And I've never needed them more.

The daily line for the City MD clinic still wraps itself around our block. Masked faces standing six feet apart. Waiting, waiting, waiting. Now there's another line for another clinic that stretches past our front door. More masked faces. More waiting.

The new neighbors on the next block play cricket every day in their back yard, yelling to each other constantly. The man in the next building comes out onto his balcony and shouts random things at nobody. He throws trash at the roof of someone else's garage. Another man who lives opposite us sits outside in his front garden, smoking and playing music too loudly. My anxiety climbs higher with all the racket and I can't help but think, for the thousandth time, how much male noise I have to filter out each day.

NYC isn't a city designed for 8.5 million people to stay in their homes at the same time, all the time. We're usually moving. In transit. Working to different schedules. Coming and going. The flow of us is the only way to temper our intensity.

But there's still no moving anywhere, at least not just yet. My winter security blanket has departed and it feels as though there's nowhere left to hide. No place to cocoon. Except maybe the bath at 5pm with Dolly Parton coming through my headphones telling me it's a rich man's game, no matter what they call it.



May 29

We're continuing to help our landlords with their grocery shopping. There's no longer any lines to get into the local store, but offering this assistance is a way to show up in community and give support, so the arrangement still stands.

One of the local pharmacies that has been in the neighborhood for 45 years may not be able to re-open. Nearby, there's workmen

preparing empty premises for a new Starbucks. The landscape is shifting and slowly we're starting to see who and what has survived this pandemic, so far.

But even in the midst of a virus that people claimed would be the great equalizer, we still see the same old patterns played out. The same horrific lack of value placed on the same endangered lives.

Typically, after black murders by white hands, there's a lot of white noise as outrage and anger merge with our rush to assure everyone that we are, of course, good white people and not part of the problem. Sometimes we speak of the fact that we don't see color and we treat everyone equally, whether they are black, white or purple (such statements are wildly inappropriate and damaging). I, too, used to race to make the same assurances and share the same outrage. My learning these past few years has taught me to listen more and not center my own voice in the wake of an experience that wasn't mine, and never will be.

I've spent the last few days contemplating the ways in which I'm complicit in this latest round of death and brutality. Observing. Reading. Signing petitions. Donating. It isn't enough and that's something I also have to sit with. There's no hook to let myself off of. It will never work like that. None of it can be tidily put to one side at the end of the day. Nor the week. Probably not even the lifetime. There's only more learning and unlearning to come, with no praise, recognition or room for fragility. And how lucky I am that I have the breath in my body to do any of it.



May 30

I've lost count of exactly how long we've been doing it, but I think around 5 years ago I said to Leon that instead of just saying "I love you" before bedtime, we should also begin each day with those words. So we started doing exactly that and saying "Morning baby, I love you soooo much" as our first greeting. If one of us is away we say it by text or phone call instead. We say it even if we've argued or one of us is in a bad mood. It kind of re-

centers everything. Brings us back a little. And I don't think for a minute it's something exclusive to being in a couple. Starting the day by sharing love for anyone or anything can lift a mood or a heart.

I have a lump in my right breast that has been agitating me for a couple of days. Something showed up on my mammogram at the end of last year and they scheduled a six month follow-up. COVID-19 came along and I couldn't easily get to the clinic, but I finally have an appointment for next Thursday. I think it's probably benign. I've had lumps show up before and my breast tissue is definitely changing as I get older. But I also have a mother who's had breast cancer twice, so I don't take any chances.

Today I'm trying hard to find slivers of sanctuary. Moments to take a deeper breath and be intentional with words, actions and love.



May 31

We've always talked a lot to one another. Two and a half years of long distance taught us how to communicate. And even though the time apart was difficult and stressful, I'm glad we were able to strengthen that particular skill because it's remained one of the strongest parts of our relationship.

All my closest friendships are this way. People I can talk to about anything. Like my old housemate in London who I'd bump into in the kitchen when we were both making tea and then suddenly it would be two hours later and we'd be deep in conversation about planetary activity or the intricacies of human behavior.

I like to be around people who have a willingness to meet one another in the depths of a moment, an experience, or an emotion and not turn away. With or without answers. With or without assurances. Just committed to being there. Witnessing. Knowing or not knowing. These are my favorite humans.

It's the start of summertime, and none of the living is particularly easy right now. Leon reminded me today that this is a time of year often hardest for people with depression and I suddenly had a flashback to ten years ago when some friends were going out in Brick Lane for the afternoon. It was one of the first really hot early summer days but all I could think of was how I couldn't cope with being in a crowd of people who were all feeling joyful and celebratory when I had no capacity for any of that because of the crushing anxiety in my chest. People don't make much space for sadness in summer. We're "supposed" to feel happier because the sun is out. But for some of us it can feel too illuminating. Like we've got less cover to hide under. It's a lot to keep in a body.

Today, we're over here, making space for all the feelings and all the emotions. There's been some shutting down and some opening up. Some texts and phone calls. Some deep unease and uncertainty. Some hope. Some planning. Some escapism. Some very human messiness.



June 1

After chai. After stretching on the mat and easing out tenderness and tension. Words that flowed freely from a prompt on the first day of Bryonie Wise's Human Is What We Are series. Paying attention. Staying present. Understanding (a tiny bit more about) when to listen, when to speak. Safety changes everything.

Our landlady downstairs has now been diagnosed with COVID-19. She had to go to the hospital for treatment on an unrelated matter and they routinely tested her on arrival. She spent a couple of nights at the hospital so she could be monitored but she's home now and hasn't shown any physical symptoms.

We've been very careful at home since the beginning of lockdown, particularly as we share an entrance with our landlords. Even when we help them with groceries, we've still been keeping six feet apart and avoiding touching the same surfaces.

Still, it's strange to know the virus has made its way into our house, despite all of us trying to remain vigilant. We also can't overlook the possibility that Leon or I could have contracted the virus ourselves and unwittingly passed it on, exceedingly careful as we are. The irony is that our landlady was tested two weeks ago and was negative. This really highlights that testing merely verifies whether you have the virus at the precise moment of taking the test. It doesn't mean you can't/won't contract the virus even minutes later.

It's the first day of June and there's so much we know and a great deal more we don't know. About viruses. About lives. About all the experiences that are ours and all of those that aren't. I'm thinking about the capacity of a human. Or a moment. Of how fragility can show up in a multitude of ways.



June 2

My period arrived yesterday. It was so strange to see it after all these months (five, to be precise) that at first I thought the blood was from the ulcerative colitis. Then I remembered the breast tenderness and Sunday's tears. The extra bad insomnia and the surge of creativity. Ha. Here we are once more.

Today, I woke feeling drained and numb. An overload of hormones and news. I laid awake from around 330am until 630am with period cramps, sciatic pain and all the thoughts about all the things. An emergency alert came through on our phones last night, a city wide curfew in response to protests over police brutality on black lives. The pattern is always the same. Looting and violence are highlighted as reasons as to why a movement should not be supported. The value of corporate property deemed more important than human rights. Human lives. Memories are short and suddenly nobody remembers Kaeperknick's weekly peaceful protests and how he was repeatedly attacked for being, a phrase I have come to loathe, "un-American".

This morning I had my third phone call with Jena to go through my poetry manuscript. I wasn't sure if I was going to be able to focus, for all the reasons mentioned above. It feels as though everything is impacted by what's unraveling around us (and I firmly believe everything should be). Still, I miraculously found myself feeling lifted and re-inspired. Ready to get back to work. Ready to open up a little more and hold back a little less. I was reminded all over again of how much creativity and connection matter and the ways in which medicine can come in different forms.



June 3

We walked down to Target this morning. Even though our neighborhood is opening back up, there's still some items we can only get in the larger more commercial stores. I have conflicting feelings about this. I wish we could purchase everything from small local businesses, especially now. Mostly we find ourselves managing a balancing act of supporting the independent stores scattered closest to our apartment, but also purchasing other items in the larger stores where we can often get more choice and better deals.

As it turned out, there was no shopping at Target today as when we arrived the mall was being emptied and the stores were being boarded up in anticipation of another protest coming through.

We'd walked a mile to get there but I didn't really care about that. We have to get used to being inconvenienced to pave the way for what I hope will be a wave of important change. A day interrupted can never be more important than lives lost.



June 4

We took the subway into Manhattan today to get to the clinic for my follow up mammogram. I've never seen 34th Street so

deserted. There's always a line of people waiting to get into the Empire State Building. Ticket touts are usually out in full force and I can't remember a time when I haven't had to weave in and out of the mass of tourists spilling outside Macy's. But this morning it was just us and a handful of other people. It felt as though we had the city to ourselves.

It was a relief to find the clinic was also almost empty other than one or two other patients. But even with all the safety precautions the staff were taking, it still felt strange to have the examination carried out and to be in such close contact with another human who isn't Leon. It's hard to remember how freely we moved around one another Before.

I ended up having two sets of scans as the reviewing doctor asked for additional images after seeing the first set. Within ten minutes I was told that everything seemed stable but they'd like to check again in six months.

Afterwards we walked to the East River and met our friends and their pup, my much loved fluffy buddy, Bobo. I've been caring for him for almost six years and I usually see him every week day. It's been 92 days since I last saw him and being reunited, even briefly, brought me incredible joy.

As we were in town we popped into TJ's on the way home and picked up some of the foods we've really missed. Dark chocolate peanut butter cups, British crumpets, bittersweet pound chocolate with almonds, unsweetened cranberries and fresh peaches.

We ran into another few people we know in the neighborhood and there was time to catch up and chat for a little while. Faces we haven't seen for months, still only partially visible with masks, but still familiar and so very welcome.



June 5

Friday came with high humidity and broken sleep for both of us. Today there's a more muted mood in our apartment. There's been a lot to digest and process this past week. Sometimes the body needs time to catch up with the mind. Sometimes the mind needs time to quieten and rest. A pause to gather energy before beginning again.

We spoke for a little while about a friend who's going through a hard time and how we could best be there for them. We also spoke about what it means to have the capacity to offer support and how that capacity can be a fluid changing thing. How the desire to help isn't necessarily the same as the desire to fully commit to helping. Because sometimes the path is long and our energy or resources can run low. Does intention ever really matter if our impact misses the mark? I'm not sure.

There's a weariness in the air. Brooding clouds that want to give way to the storm that's supposed to be due. Even with the higher temperatures I took a too-hot bath. I'm ready for thunder. For the sky to be loud with anger. I hope it comes.



June 6

I remember when I had the first injection to help ease sciatic pain last year. The doctor told me how tricky it was to get lasting relief because it was the kind of pain that shifted around a lot. I've thought about those words a lot since last spring. It's true. It does shift around a great deal and its intensity has a large range too. Today it's settled in deeply on my left side and is bothering my

right side too. It's hard to explain the mental exhaustion of chronic pain to anyone that hasn't experienced it.

I'm also acutely aware of the ways in which I myself am unable to fully comprehend experiences that I haven't personally been affected by. Such as racism.

Today I had a long text conversation with a white friend from England who had read Leon's Facebook post and been shocked by it. It made me realize how much work I have to do. How many assumptions I had made. How I thought I'd already been having these kind of conversations but how there is clearly still a huge gap of awareness from white people in my immediate circle. And how this is very much my responsibility.

Part of my listening this week has included tuning into 1619 podcast and paying attention to each sentence said. If I notice my mind wandering, I rewind and play the segment again. I don't want it to simply be another box I check as self-congratulatory activism. It has to be something I absorb as fully as I know how. Something I stay present to. Something that will help me identify the holes in my own Good White Person story and help me to stop reinforcing my own complicity.



June 7

My period went away for a day or two and then came back. My body feels crunchy tired. There was a welcome breeze on our morning walk and the drop in humidity made everything feel a little less weighted.

I saw there was a Twitter storm over some comments J.K. Rowling made over the term “people who menstruate”. She’s

considered to be a TERF (Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist) by many. It's something I'm paying attention to. Something I know a little about but am far from fully educated on. In these kinds of conversations I'm interested in who's got center stage and who's being sidelined. Who holds the power in the room, now and historically, and why. I'm interested in language and noticing when and where I find my own levels of comfort or discomfort.

Tomorrow, NYC will enter Phase One of reopening. I'm wondering what the new shape of the city will look like. How we'll feel as we re-emerge. What we'll try to bring with us and what we might forever leave behind.



June 8

I was finally able to get to the post office this morning to send a couple more Poems by Post. I belatedly realized that Monday morning might not have been the best time to go as there was a line of people ahead of me and I instantly worried it was too busy. But then I realized it wasn't actually a long line, it's just what we consider to be "busy" has now changed considerably. I used to

wonder how long I'd have to wait in line - now I wonder if it's safe to do so.

Later in the morning we started to make some adjustments to the working spaces in our apartment. There's two of us trying to work on laptops and we only really have one desk. Because we both usually move around a lot this hasn't really presented an issue in the past. Even when lockdown began we were still managing to make-do, perhaps not anticipating that three months would slowly roll past. Now, we're trying to figure out what makes sense in the short term and also think ahead to what the long term might look like. It's hard to even write that sentence and take it seriously. How can any of us know anything anymore?



June 9

I notice how a change in profile picture on a social media platform gathers compliments from people who won't comment on my other update. The one about the work we have to do as white people. Even a brief return to Facebook tells me nothing has really changed. Isn't this how we always react to discomfort? Ignore it. Pretend it's not there. Hope it goes away. Someone else's problem is a beautiful thing.

How much of our time is spent supporting fragility? Eggshells. Tiptoes. Compartmentalized conversations because we're not sure who has the capacity for what. We invite excuses before they're even made. Our complicity has us scurrying like cockroaches, desperate to run for cover. Scroll past. Didn't see it. Not meant for me.

There's a woman I'll never meet, far in the future of a time I'll never live to. She's trying to understand why we smiled in the other direction as Black bodies gasped for a breath they couldn't take.

I don't know what to tell her.



June 10

This morning we helped our landlady back from the grocery store again. She was able to get some kosher hot dogs that she hadn't been able to find since lockdown began. I think most of us have a renewed appreciation for many of the things we might have taken for granted up until very recently. Things we'll likely take for granted again.

The line of people waiting to be tested at the medical facilities on our block is part of our new daily landscape. It's still a strange sight to open our front door and see the row of masked faces. I'm ready for it to end.

I worked some more on my book today. Constantly switching between standing, sitting and laying. Hoping I'm stretching enough in between.

I saw a tweet that someone wrote about how they couldn't understand the passivity of those who still can't bring themselves to address a human rights issue. This is something I'm struggling with deeply.

Leon and I spoke earlier about how there's really zero room left for relationships that aren't able to withstand transparency of values. There's no comfort in a silent circle, no matter what the size.

History is here in front of us, asking us to choose. I keep thinking of all the people from the past who were once asked the same thing. To make a choice. To stand for something. Alice Walker's words roam around my mind: "Activism is the rent I pay for living on the planet." And I wonder how many lies a person has to tell themselves in order to justify inaction.



June 11

When I think of other people working from home I always imagine a beautiful corner of their living space, perfectly set-up, dedicated to whatever their craft may be.

I now have three corners in our apartment where I work/write. They're all in the bedroom and none of them are perfect in any of the ways.

I have to switch position regularly in order to manage the sciatic pain. Laying is usually the easiest and least painful position. But writing this way is much more difficult.

Today I attended a Whiteness at Work virtual training from Desiree Adaway and it was a relief when I realized it was in webinar format (as opposed to being a Zoom style meeting) so I could listen but still feel free to move around as needed.

I'm thinking of how many systems we have intentionally set up to specifically accommodate the needs of those who stand to reap their benefits. And how, at numerous times, I've helped prop up the rigidity of these systems, both when they've served me and also when they haven't.



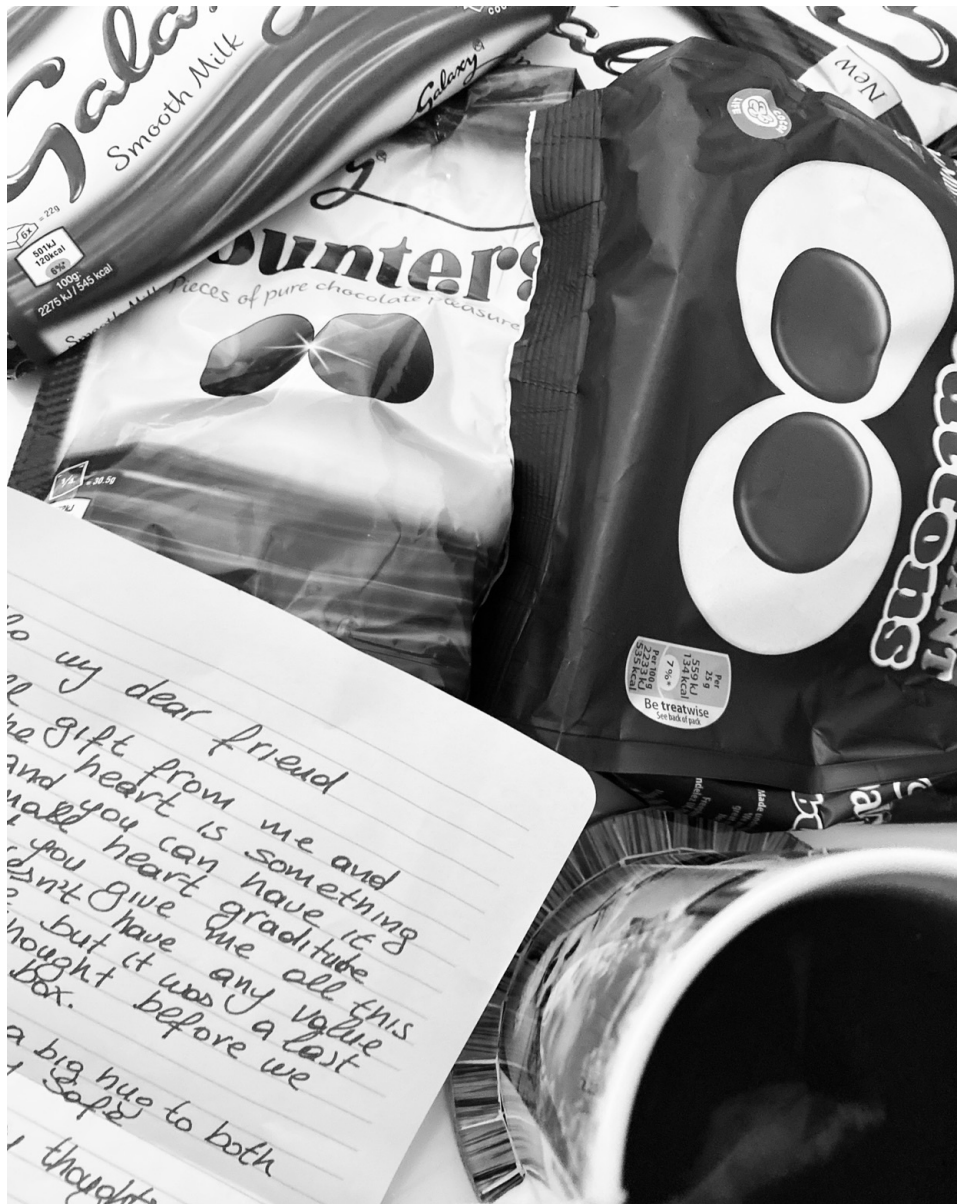
June 12

I was sent this picture years ago by someone who used to read my writing back in the days when I was sending submissions to publications. We connected online and one Christmas I received a box from her, full of beautiful gifts, including this treasured piece.

I remember falling in love with it as soon as I saw it, touched both by the gesture and the way someone else had seen me so clearly. Because the words and image (to include a teabag, no less!) truly felt made for me.

Today I've been shuffling around slowly, not managing to do much of anything. Last night was hours spent trying to get comfortable and after finally getting to sleep, being woken by a nightmare that made no sense but left me feeling weird and exhausted.

My friend Jessamyn said on text earlier this week that she was noticing she didn't want to dedicate her time, attention or energy to anything that isn't really real. I smiled when I read it because this is what I've always known of her, consistently, ever since we became friends. And it's one of the things I love most about her and my close circle. We feel deeply. We find small talk stifling. We live for creativity and the kind of change that looks and feels like justice. And even on the days when nothing gets "done" and we have few, if any, answers, we're still true to what's real and utterly unenchanted by everything that isn't.



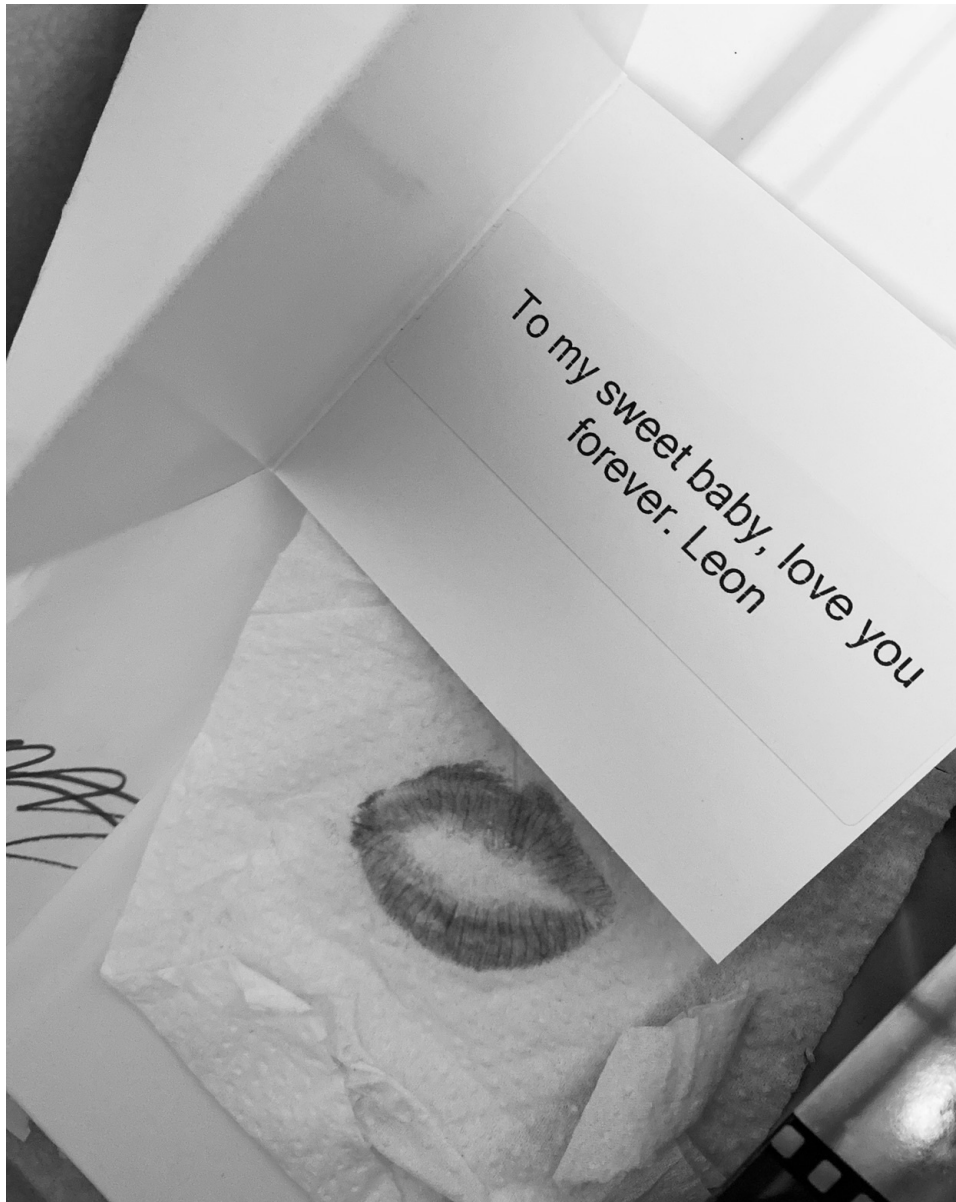
June 13

Today began with a morning walk followed by opening mail that felt like the best kind of love. A dear friend living in England sent us a bounty of British chocolate and it was a delight to receive.

The monotony of these days is wearing on me right now. I'm beyond grateful to have an amazing partner who makes everything easier, whether it's years of long distance, weeks away

with work, or months of quarantine together. Somehow we pull through it all. But even so, I miss a great many things. The pattern of each week is so similar. I'm not used to it and I find myself wanting to break away and run to the next place. Still with him by my side, but just to see another landscape would be so incredible. One of my dreams is to have a cabin in the woods or a place close to the ocean. Somewhere to escape to.

But for now we're here. And we have some really great chocolate and a really amazing circle of friends. So even though there's a whole lot of longing going on in my heart, there's a whole heap of gratitude too.



June 14

I've been using our memory box as a makeshift riser to put my laptop on. It's where we keep mementos of our time together. Photos, cards, ticket stubs, letters. Souvenirs of what we've built and what we believe in. From time to time we open it up and look through our memories.

I haven't opened it in ages but today I lifted the lid and smiled as I saw a piece of tissue I once blotted my lipstick with. It must have been 2012 in London. Leon was there at the time and he pocketed the tissue and kept it.

I really know very little about what happens next. In our lives. In this World that's breaking wider open in all the ways. But I'm noticing all the little threads of ordinary that bind us together and keep us connected to what's good and real and true.



June 15

I made an appointment to go back to the pain management clinic in Astoria. The one I went to twice last year for epidural injections to help shift the sciatica. As soon as I scheduled the consultation I felt dread flood my body. I remembered the packed waiting room, the rows of pained faces, the two and a half hours before I was seen, the haphazard approach to treatment and the residual feeling of being one of far too many cattle.

I didn't really want the hassle of trying to locate another clinic and having to jump through the endless amount of hoops that seem to be synonymous with healthcare and insurance. But intuition told me to look for somewhere else and cancel the original appointment.

I'm so glad I did. Today's consultation was a completely different experience in every possible way. It made me realize how often we brace ourselves for battle when it comes to navigating healthcare. And how, when there's no battle to be had, there's space for breath and ease and something that feels like a shared understanding.



June 16

Someone who has followed my writing since 2015 and reached out on multiple occasions to tell me how much my words meant to her (and recently requested a Poem by Post) unsubscribed from my circle and unfollowed me on social media.

Consent is important to me and I encourage people to leave spaces that don't feel like a fit for them anymore. I definitely

wouldn't appreciate anyone blocking the door when I was ready to leave the party. Also, I don't generally track these things. People come and people go. This is part of the fluidity of life and living.

And still. It's impossible not to notice who no longer wants to be in the room when the conversation centers lives that don't look like theirs. When uncomfortable and inconvenient truths are being acknowledged.

People leaving doesn't surprise me. Fragile things crumble with startling ease, even with the slightest of pressure. I suppose my surprise is really more along the lines of, Who did you think I was? Who did you think you were following? This is far from the first time I've been specific about what I stand for and what I'll never hide behind.

Some things I know for sure:

The World is changing.

There will be many more uncomfortable realizations.

I have much more work to do.



June 17

He spent most of the day on a virtual conference with Adobe 99U. I spent most of the day writing about a life I lived before I met him. It's so strange how Worlds can collide.

Just before COVID-19 hit, I had planned to join a women's writing group at Pen & Brush. But then lockdown was put in place and in-

person gatherings were no longer an option, at least for the foreseeable future.

As with most things, the circling happened online instead and each of the group had the option to submit work and/or offer feedback.

I submitted a personal essay and I received some favorable feedback from different women. It was nice to read but I had a feeling of being unconvinced. Later on, another piece of feedback was forwarded to me and the reader commented that my essay was well written but too general. That I had withheld *exactly* what happened.

Sometimes words land in our body with such a deep sense of knowing it's impossible to ignore them. They see us, these words. They see all of us. And there is no hiding.

I can't remember the "good" feedback. But this I have held close. Not as a means of reprimanding myself, but as a reminder of where I still need to coax myself.

Today I wrote about hard things. With specificity. And still there is some holding back. Some layers not yet stripped away.

I'm grateful to be in a space where it's safe to do this searching. With a human in the next room working on his own creative journey, both of us coming together every so often for tea, or a hug, or a shared knowing of this being the hard work we have chosen.



June 18

I'm really at a point where I most want to share the photos I like least. The angles that don't flatter. The reflections that make me shudder a little inside. To not have the swift chaser of words that often follow. Like beautiful or brave or other labels I don't want to be defined by.

Sometimes it's enough to be fully in a moment with myself and not ask that it be anything else. A quiet way of witnessing what is. Maybe, too, a little mourning of what won't be again.

But there's also relief. Because I know the energy that goes into protecting a thing we don't want the World to notice. Secrets and shame empty us. Every piece of what we have is taken up and wrung all the way out. It's exhausting to only ever show This Side and not That Thing. I'm tired of being that kind of tired.



June 19

This image, Leaving Selma, is one of the ones we keep on our vision board along with other quotes and photos that remind us of who, and what, we care about and where we want our focus to be.

It's Juneteenth and I'm thinking of the work ahead. It's 2020 and these are days for me to continue learning. To put myself in the

path of conversations that people who look like me might not want to have. Days to communicate to those same people that if you want my time, my energy, my attention, if you need me to notice you then you'll have to acknowledge this thing first. This space you want to skirt around, skate around and sit with your back to. This history so deep and wide and cavernous it might take your breath away, except we're not the ones under threat. We never have been.



June 20

Leaving to go to Central Park for a few hours meant running through a mental checklist of things I'm sure I didn't used to dwell on for so long. I found myself wondering if I've forgotten how to do this. But then I remembered it's not a forgetting, rather a replacing. Old ways with new methods.

On the handful of occasions we've used the subway since March we've been very lucky to have almost empty carriages. Granted, we deliberately travel at times when we're more likely not to be amongst too many others, but it's still a surprise to have such space.

We found a quiet part of the park and Leon listened to Chase Jarvis' Creative Live for an hour or so. I tuned into Reni Eddo-Lodge's podcast, About Race. We sat next to a tree with more wisdom than we have and I marveled, as I always do, at how much beauty there is in texture and how many stories every living thing holds.



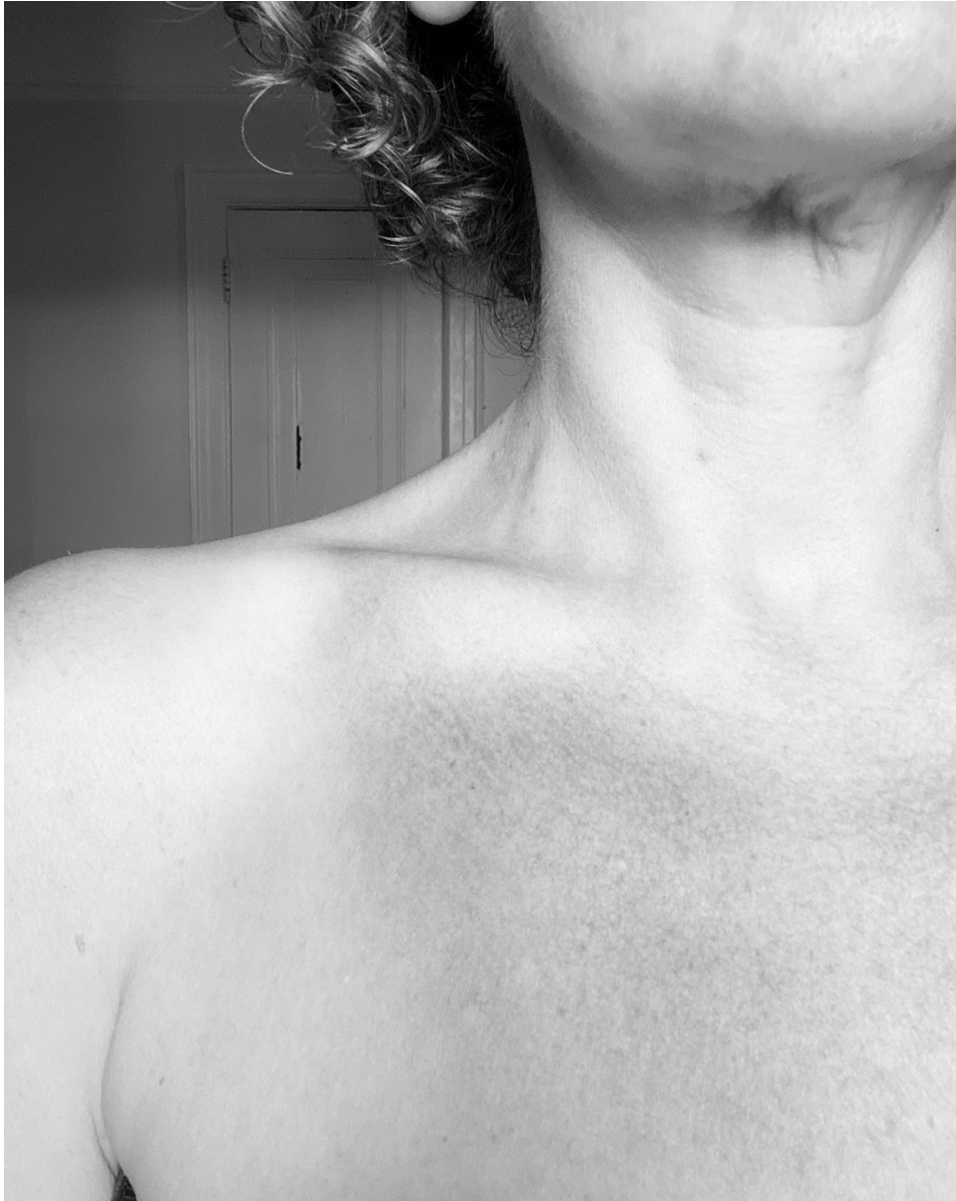
June 21

We escaped the apartment for more park time today. The subway was almost deserted once again and most people traveling on it were wearing masks. But in the streets and in the park there's such a mixture of behavior.

Some people are carefully social distancing, others congregate in large groups. Some people are mindful of space when walking

past, others come too close. There's a lot of people wearing masks on chins as some kind of strange token gesture that doesn't make much sense to me. I keep thinking of a tweet I recently saw where the writer said how wild it was to see people suddenly decide we're no longer in a pandemic.

I'm thinking of the multitudes of our human experiences. The ways in which entitlement shows up. What it feels like when others make choices for their own individual comfort but neglect to consider the impact on a broader circle. How loss and grief can inform fear and anger. How I love this city with all my heart and how I also want to run into the woods and be far from away from its occupants.



June 22

Texture is one of my great loves. Tracing my fingers over raised surfaces feels far more vital to me than the monotony of smoothness. I adore images of peeling paint or objects that have rusted over. I love seeing ridges that have some kind of story. Grains that speak of something deeper and truer. I detest the superficial. And yet, when it comes to my own body I'm still trying to make my peace with its appearance.

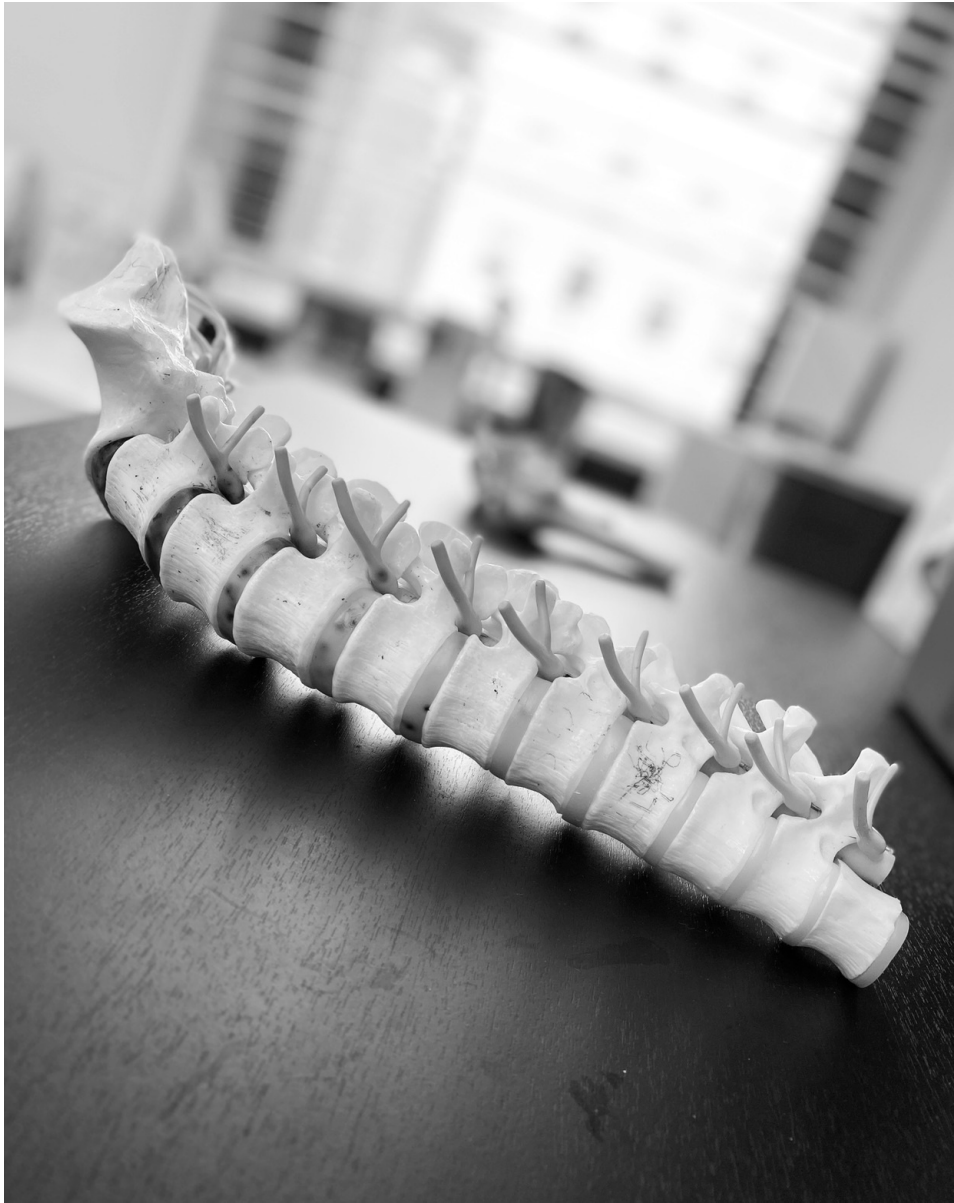
My skin has changed so much this past year. And the changes continue. Slackening and softening around my neck. Lines and grooves finding their way to my face. I know I've spoken of this before. It's just that I keep wondering when this will cease to take me by surprise. I'm still at a stage where I find it startling.



June 23

I had to return to the pain clinic today for an EMG to see if there's any nerve damage resulting from the sciatica. Once again it was a really good experience. The staff were communicative, professional and respectful. They seem to really care. I'll be heading back there tomorrow for an injection and there's no feeling of dread about it.

Afterwards I got to see my best friend, Bobo. I've been missing him beyond words and it was wonderful to have some cherished time with him. We sat in the shade for a while with water and a treat and I told him over and over how much I love him. We've been buddies for almost six years and he's been there through so many of my ups and downs. From sharing joyful news with him to crying in his fur, he's seen it all. It just feels really good to be reunited.



June 24

Laying down at home after today's injection. Last year it took a couple of weeks before I noticed a reduction in the pain but it was worth the wait. It helped a great deal and, more than anything, it saved my sanity. I'm optimistic that this time around will also be beneficial. The procedure went well but I'm tired and my words are feeling quiet today.



June 25

I was thinking this morning of how creativity truly cultivates trust. It asks us to believe in the process and have faith in the outcome, no matter what the path looks like. It's a deeply personal journey, whether we share our creations with the World or not. The audience size becomes irrelevant because it really boils down to two beings in the room: you and your art. There's no validation that can be sought outside of our own inherent knowing. It's the

most intimate relationship I've ever had. The most held I've ever felt.

Today has mostly been about softening edges, sitting (and laying) in moments of discomfort and seeing where I can surrender a little more.



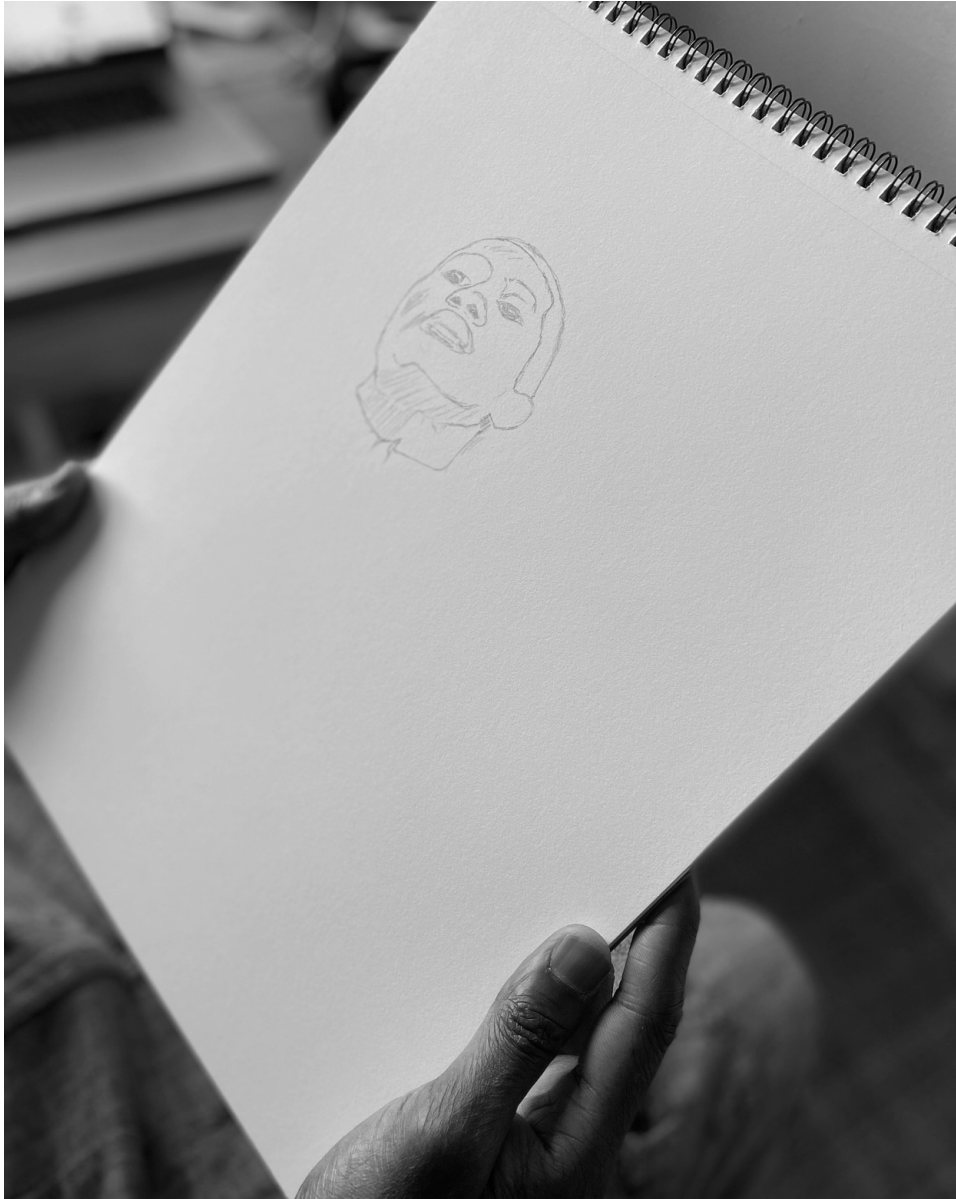
June 26

Being back in the city is a strange feeling. Like something has been sucked away and we're all a little more lost than before. I've been thinking about identity and how much of who we are is influenced by our environment.

There was an argument on the bus and another one on the subway platform. Tempers and temperatures rising. We are the same as we've always been. And we are changed. A thousand fluid truths merge in every moment.

This time last year we were preparing to road trip across California. Booking accommodation. Mapping out our route. I can still summon up that feeling of excitement. The anticipation of meeting a place for the first time.

Now, he's just brought in a glass of wine for me and I'm messaging a friend while he works on a presentation. The fan is blowing warm air around the bedroom and my Stand Up app has just issued an alert to remind me it's time to get up and stretch.



June 27

He's been saying for a while that he wanted to start sketching again. For himself. For a different creative expression. For therapy. For all the reasons art offers us sanctuary.

The air these days is full of humidity and fireworks. Sometimes pain finds an outlet in the sky. I remember when I used to sit on her rooftop at sunset and watch the city sink into nightfall.

It's almost six years since I left London and sometimes I forget that certain phrases aren't used here until I come across them again.

I'm thinking about what July looks like. The biscuit base of a lemon meringue pie. The way it's never too hot for tea. How the rain has made a painting on my window pane.



June 28

We escaped to the park again today. It's really one of the few open spaces accessible to us, and even though it requires a subway ride, it's worth it to have bare feet on grass and eyes on a blue sky rather than a screen.

We met a client-friend for a while and I was able to spend a beautiful hour reuniting with her pup. I usually look after him whilst she travels for work as a TV producer. But the future of shows looks different now, as do so many other things, and my once full pet sitting diary has two tentative entries for the rest of the year.

This morning I spent time reading and listening to Sheree Mack on Patreon. Her work on Black bodies in nature is so important in ways I can't fully articulate. And I think that's because it's not my place to do so. It's not for me to describe or validate. It doesn't require approval. I just really appreciate being able to witness her truths and learn something from them.

There was music in the park, ice cream when we left, and thunder when we came home. A heady blend of everything.



June 29

Summer storms and rain running a river on the paving stones below. The clouds were heavy and full of thunder but now the light has flooded the room again like a reclamation.

I feel a sense of sadness for something I can't explain. I feel a sense of hope for the same reason. The multitudes we hold. Like centuries. Or seasons. Or stories that weave in and out of ours.

I think I'm scared of everything slipping away before I've made it matter. Before I've taken the moment and turned it into something that counts. Even when I know that no life can really be lived or measured this way.



June 30

I distrust a lot of spiritual spaces. I find them stifling. Like being smothered with something silencing and asked to embrace the experience, even though it feels entirely unsafe. I distrust people who find sanctuary in such spaces.

I've never been able to understand or accept the idea that "rising above" (bypassing) unacceptable circumstances is somehow a

sign of superiority. I find it neither interesting nor special. I find it entitled at best and violent at worst.

There was once a time when certain things mattered to me and I find that those same things hold little or no appeal now. Like the size of an audience or external validation. We're led to believe that these are solutions to problems we may or may not have. They're not.

There was also a time when I perhaps wasn't as aware of how much specificity matters. On a recent post I mentioned in the comments that people generally smile and applaud vague statements about freedom of choice and inclusivity. But when I specify my support of abortion and when I am crystal clear that Black Lives Matter, suddenly there's an uncomfortable silence. It's no longer a "safe" post to like or engage with.

I absolutely do support abortion. I absolutely do believe Black Lives Matter (matter being the very minimum). I support sex workers. I support trans lives. I am here to learn more about experiences that aren't mine. Experiences I'll never have or ever be at the center of.

My work, my words, my creativity and my humanity are not separate from my beliefs. I do not want anyone to selectively cherry pick pieces that feel safe and then sidestep the rest, pretending not to see. We cannot only have the conversations that are comfortable. There is too much at stake.



July 1

I wrote a poem about something and I had to take myself back there. To a time in my life where something shifted. Where I parted ways with old ideas and people who wouldn't accept me. Where I made space for anger to speak in the ways She needed. Where beautiful new air came rushing in and I took big gulps of no regret. And as I wrote today, my body remembered then. There

were goosebumps on my skin and the soft hair on my arms stood up. This is what turning towards truth feels like.



July 2

The humidity feels far higher than the 43% the weather app claims. There's an intensity in the air that seems to be more than just heat. I feel as though something is waiting to erupt.

There were more people on the train today and many more people on the bus. An older man sitting in the seat close to where I was standing on the M15 asked me if I was “over this crap” yet. I assured him I was indeed over it. And also this is where we are.

We spoke for a while as the bus traveled downtown. He said he rides the buses to get out of the house and move around at least a little. His hips were bothering him when he was stuck at home. He said that the virus was far from over and noted that the recent protests had seen many people not wearing masks and compromising safety. I reminded him that the protests were necessary and if police officers didn’t kill Black people for no reason then there wouldn’t have been anything to take to the streets about.

Later, I lined up outside Trader Joe’s, hoping my shoulders weren’t burning in the shadeless street. Along with the groceries I picked up peanut butter cups and marshmallows that I love but rarely buy. I think this is my nod to July 4th, a holiday that’s never felt like mine. But perhaps that’s true of all the American holidays. I’ve never really known how to embrace them, much less claim them as my own.



July 3

We had to buy a vanity mirror with a light around it because if there's one indisputable change we've experienced in our forties it's that our eyesight isn't what it once was. I've noticed even more of a decline during lockdown. So this is where we are now.

Today marks six years since I came to America. Six years since I stepped off the plane in JFK, light with the relief of being here

after almost two and a half years of long distance and our first year as a married couple spent living apart. I had no idea what the coming months and years would bring. I thought I did, and I smile as I think of that naivety now. Nothing would unfold quite as I expected. But even if I could go back and tell my almost-forty year old self what laid ahead, I know nothing would have stopped her from getting on that plane.



July 4

We spent the day looking after Riggins, our much loved fluffy buddy. We picnicked in the park and the humidity was low, the breeze soft and welcome. There was jazz music and not many people and it was one of those afternoons where the city seemed as though it was taking a deep inhale and a much needed slow exhale.

Yesterday, I posted a note to our fridge door to remind us of the Native land we're on and the indigenous people it once belonged to (Lenape and Canarsie tribes).

Today, I'm thinking of how different people have different experiences when it comes to named days and celebrations and how necessary it is to notice why.



July 5

The peaceful refuge of the park. The quiet company of trees. No pressing need to be anywhere else or do anything differently. These are moments we've gifted ourselves with this Sunday.

Thankful for space and time. For being able to place bare feet on soft grass. For tiny butterflies that land close by and remind me to keep noticing all the life and beauty still left.



July 6

It was supposed to be an afternoon of thunderstorms but they never came. There's a heat fog hanging heavily over the city and I

am longing for the sky to break open. I have sciatic pain and period pain and at 3pm I finally gave into both and tried to nap, but sleep never came either.

These are strange days of ordinary. I have a feeling of déjà vu but I'm picturing a dusty barren patch of land instead of NYC. When I try to grasp more detail the vision slips away.

The breeze is picking up and the light has shifted. There's a rumble in the distance. Maybe the sky wants to speak after all.



July 7

I nearly missed my stop again because I was writing poetry in the notes section of my phone. It's where everything I write first

begins, first breathes. I used to do the same on the tube in London. Lose myself. Give myself over to the flow of creating, the meditative stitching together of something that wants to be said. I think this is a holy thing. The only way I pray. One of the few things I truly believe in without any reservation.

In Target today someone approached me and asked me to buy her a top. She was too close, wearing no mask, a little frantic and not quite so coherent. I declined, apologizing. I told myself if it was food she wanted it would be different. And then I thought of how moments like this are sometimes captured on video and we watch them from the comfort of our homes and we make judgements on the person refusing to help, or the person asking for help and we decide we would do it differently. Maybe we paint ourselves as the hero or the savior of the story. And maybe it's true, or maybe it's not. Maybe when it comes to the three second window where we get to make a choice we'd not quite know how to react either.

Later, when I stood in front of the mirror at home I noticed that the crepe texture which has crept onto different areas of my skin is now also present under my arms. And how I once imagined that a person in a body that has reached this age of lines and less-elasticity would somehow have more answers and wisdom than I do.



July 8

A couple of weeks ago I had to have a biopsy on a mole that had changed shape and color during lockdown. I'm still waiting for the results, but yesterday I spoke to Leon about how, when I was waiting to be seen by the dermatologist, I was left alone in the treatment room for around 5 minutes. Time enough for me to observe the full reel of clinical treatments playing on the TV screen on the wall in front of me. It was mostly about Botox,

fillers, collagen and chemical peels. Almost all the services advertised were geared towards retaining youthfulness. All the models featured were women.

I find it incredibly jarring that my options as a 45 year old female are to opt for procedures designed to hide the crime of aging, or to grow old “gracefully” (which is something I never hear suggested to men).

Essentially I am expected to conceal, cover and erase, or else behave in a manner whereby I exude elegance and sophistication as I accept my fate with the utmost dignity.

The first option is a never ending marketing ploy and the second option is an extension of the Nice Girl whereby women are asked to commit to a lifetime of polite compliance. These are not really options at all. Certainly not for me.

Where are the spaces for us to simply tell the truth? To sit with the discomfort of what it means to be in a changing body without people rushing in to offer fixes, reducing our experiences to superficial issues that require solutions? Why are we still so unable to just say a thing and let it hit the air and be received, not remedied.

I’m here in this space to be brutally honest about what is. And I hope one day the World will make more space for what’s real.