

Michael Richardson-Borne presents:

NO BURDEN OF CONCERN



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. **Being Arrested While My Father is Still Separate**
2. Real Because Observable, No Independent Existence of its Own
3. **Kafka's Metamorphosis & the Stupidity of Amerikkka**
4. Laughter 101
5. **21st Century Bill of Rights**
6. 21st Century Bill of Rights Part II
7. **A New Parable for Parents**
8. Sanity is Not the Opposite of Insanity
9. **Harvest**
10. Bloodz
11. **The Recognition of Total Forgiveness**
12. Life Cycle of a Prisoner
13. **Life Cycle of a Prisoner Part II**
14. The Separate Self is Inevitable Violence
15. **Non-separation Expedition to the Grocery Store**
16. Peppermints & the Nature of Desire
17. **Malcolm Explorations of the Eternal**
18. Grandma's Lullaby
19. **Three Gurus**
20. Birthday Wish Terminus
21. **The Prison-Body is No Burden of Concern**

INTRODUCTION



No Burden of Concern is the coming of age story of Maven, a young woman who finds herself in prison after growing up in a tough Southern California neighborhood. The tale shifts between scenes of Maven's realization of Non-separation while in the prison of the separate self and flashbacks of her upbringing by a family who continually invites her to have “no burden of concern.”

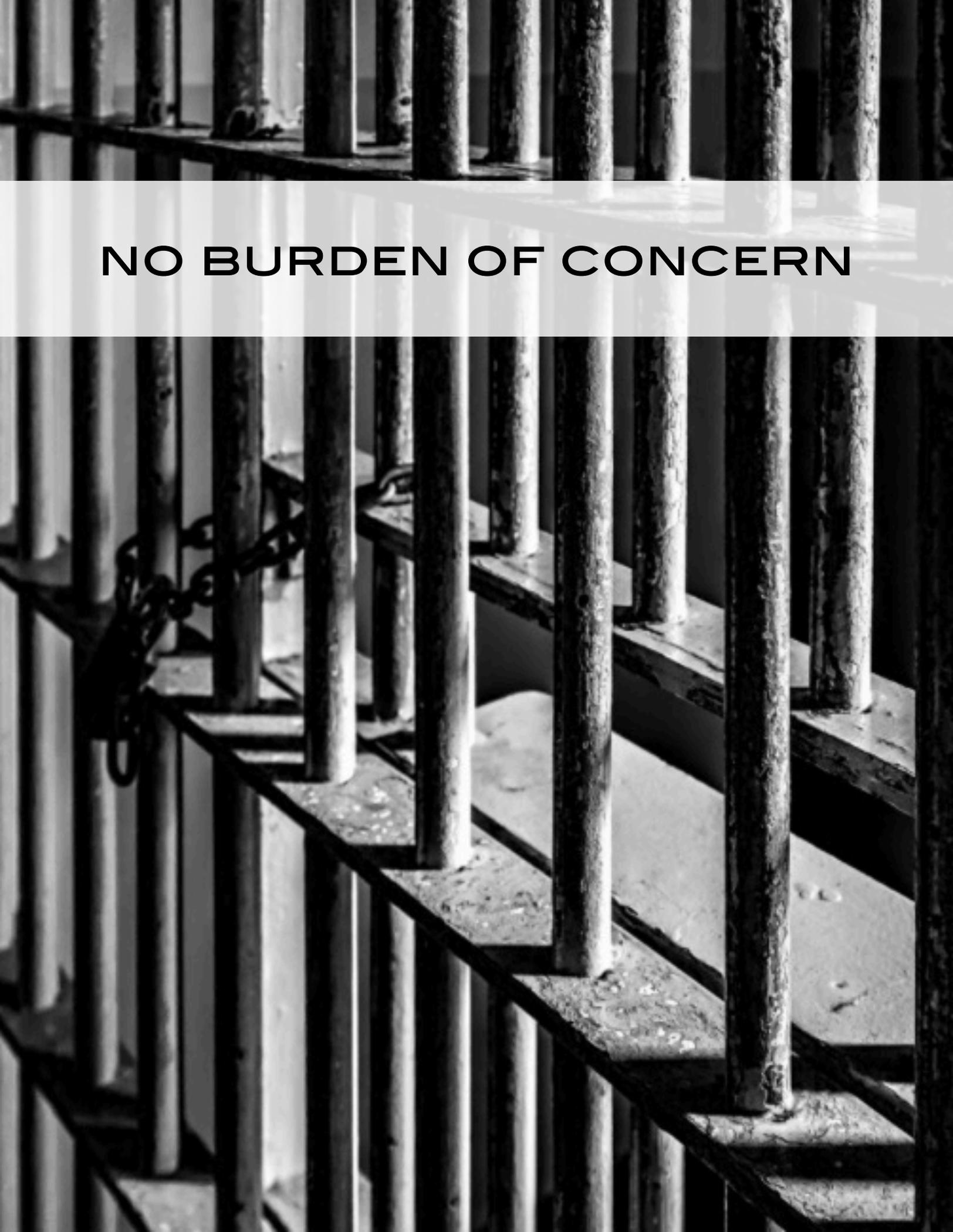
As you read this book, I extend the same invitation to you and hope you can briefly experience the same type of environment as Maven – one that steadily points to the remembrance of your true being, what I call Non-separation.

Enjoy Maven’s journey as she breaks free of the primary assumption of humanity, the belief in a separate self. This belief in separation is a prison...until it’s not.

May you “stare directly into the sun.”

not separate,

Michael Richardson-Borne



NO BURDEN OF CONCERN

1. BEING ARRESTED WHILE MY FATHER IS STILL SEPARATE

This body was arrested 29 years ago today. I don't remember it – it's all hearsay. I've been told numerous stories, and there's a recording of my father and grandparents observing my entry into the world of incarceration. They lined the white walls watching my struggle down a tunnel of unfamiliar darkness. My father called the imprisonment natural – he even called it beautiful with a basic familial pride.

2. REAL BECAUSE OBSERVABLE, NO INDEPENDENT EXISTENCE OF ITS OWN

But, absent of will, the arrest felt like something that happened to what was aware of the real me – just like the mind, like time, like memory and even the body itself. In a human life cycle, these 4 things are like a sneeze that doesn't quite take effect. The build up is experienced, but what you are bracing for never truly transpires. Nothing ever truly transpires. But the arrests do happen – even if not independently so.

3. KAFKA'S METAMORPHOSIS & THE STUPIDITY OF AMERIKKKA

At the time, I wasn't laughing about all of this. I needed to become a giant roach and scuttle around the concrete and metal trappings in a sterile room of shoulds and shouldn'ts. I needed to live the life of a giant bug who felt unsafe in any kind of light, content to hide in a personal cavern of fear and singular illusion. I needed to be arrested in order to know the truth – to understand what the self-assured fraternity of lawyers and correctional officers couldn't comprehend no matter how many times my uneducated grandmother told them, eyes offering an unnoticed compassion: "My child, you do know that you can't arrest consciousness, right?"

4. LAUGHTER 101

29 years ago, I was detained and placed in a private cell. I can't tell you why, or for what, or by whom, because that is not for any of us to tell. I can only speak of the loneliness today before my morning frisk and the complete lack of concern with loneliness afterwards. I can only tell you of dreaming of butterflies during the abuse and being the movement of all butterflies afterwards. I can only tell you of leaving my bunk in the morning and upon my return how the fantasy of being able to take a morning

walk fell away into unconcerned laughter – the thought of an individual’s shoes hitting a dirt path became an unparalleled reason for comedic response. We inmates are not microcosms of a macrocosm. We are composed of an imaginary autonomy of behavior where everything causes everything at once. Knowing this is the only justice – especially when we inmates have forgotten that we’ve all been arrested and that we can’t imprison bodies and minds that are already in prison.

5. 21ST CENTURY BILL OF RIGHTS

Here is how the law is written in the United States:

“For Americans, the outer world is seen as the face of an enemy. The disruptive dualism from which all conflict arises is not in the outer world but in the false perception of the American who fails to see the nation as his, or her, own reflection that extends beyond national borders. Due to this, all Americans shall be arrested at birth.”

6. 21ST CENTURY BILL OF RIGHTS PART II

From this vantage point, I was prosecuted 29 years ago. This kind of martial law is nothing new in the United States or for anywhere else in the world. The prison industrial complex is, in reality, an internal affair for all of humanity consisting of those in prison and those in prison within a prison. In the not so grand scheme of things, we inmates, even the wealthy ones, are blindly working for pennies dedicated to the continued system of separation. It’s an underlying tragedy that is begging for the introduction of new parables.

7. A NEW PARABLE FOR PARENTS

When I was a young girl, my grandfather would sit on the stoop of our front porch smoking his hand-rolled cigarettes in his beloved California light while I played in the confines of our fenced in yard where there existed a single avocado tree. I would get upset from time to time, as children are want to do – bike wrecks, stumped toes, skinned knees, and verbal spats with the neighborhood kids who lived on the block. No matter the severity of my wounds, or the volume of my emotional outbursts, my

grandfather would always calmly repeat the same line to me as I sat on his knee and prayed to God for quick forgiveness:

“Look directly into the sun, Maven – and have no burden of concern.”

8. SANITY IS NOT THE OPPOSITE OF INSANITY

No burden of concern. 29 years and now no burden of concern. “If you were to look at me right now, you would see your hand stretching through the prison bars and realize that the only possibility is for you to reach for your self. Bruising the body of an other every morning for almost three decades was only as real as you made it. They doesn’t understand that there isn’t a they. We doesn’t understand that there isn’t a we – or even a me. Language is inept when it comes to Non-separation but when one is spoken from the heart of the I, couples disintegrate, groups congeal, teams implode, conversation is a monacle, a pair is two too many in the process of life’s symbiotic massacre. Knowing this is the final waterfall you will walk under in the mind’s continuous spillage – so enjoy it.” This is what I told the prison guard that works my particular ward after being frisked this morning. Naturally she’d rather think that she’s pushed me beyond the brink of sanity than see that insanity is no longer the opposite of the woman called Maven who would quietly accept her daily beating.

9. HARVEST

As the youngest member of our household, it was tradition for me to get to pick and eat the last ripe fruit of the year from the family avocado tree. On one particular April afternoon, a single fruit, the last of the growing season, hung suspended from a sagging branch that was within arm’s reach of the sidewalk. This would be the object of my personal ceremony if it lasted an additional night until I could complete my harvest. But, even then, I knew that nothing ever lasted an additional night beyond its inherent return.

10. BLOODZ

The voices began at 2am. Despite being taught to do otherwise, I cautiously looked through the curtains of my bedroom window and witnessed a scurrying body

illuminated by a streetlight. She was wearing a red sweatshirt and a red bandana that covered her forehead but left the back of her head exposed where a long twisted braid diagonally protruded. Our street was the boundary line for a couple of warring neighborhood gangs – so when pedestrians came down the long stretch of partitioned concrete, many times the anger induced adrenaline was already in full flow. I could hear her manic footsteps as she approached the house. There was a focused intent as her sneakers scuffed the pavement with a malevolent dragging sound that stopped right in front of my window. We caught eyes for an eternal moment and I quickly snapped the curtains shut. No longer under the intrusion of my surveillance, she reached over the fence and plucked my avocado before throwing it forcefully against the aging wood of our front door. The noise was like that of a shot-gun followed by the sound of real bullets, retaliatory screams, and the inevitable police sirens.

11. THE RECOGNITION OF TOTAL FORGIVENESS

Thirty minutes later I was called to the dinner table. Only my grandfather was present. He looked his usual serene self and motioned for me to take a seat. My heart fluttered when I saw that he had taken the time to rescue my avocado from the front porch. After excusing himself for a minute to grab his favorite knife, he cut the cracked fruit in halves and pushed the plate in my direction with a smile. His eyes were large mud puddles of transparent grace. I glanced down at the different shades of green and instantly teared up – I can still remember the pit sitting in the bruised flesh and alligator-skin shell, loose and inedible. All I could do was cry in appreciation because I knew I had invited an alternative consequence.

“Look directly into the sun, Maven – and have no burden of concern.”

12. LIFE CYCLE OF A PRISONER

No burden of concern. 29 years and now no burden of concern. When I first arrived in prison there wasn't any barbed wire in sight. There was a vastness to the grounds that resembled an ocean even though the facility was floating on dry land. It had the appearance of being in the middle of nowhere, but, in truth, it functioned as the being of my everywhere. Staring for hours, I could never quite tell where the sand and the sky could meet. Then, a fence just seemed to sprout up overnight. It was something that happened to the environment – not changing life as I knew it but changing life as it was living nonetheless. It came in a perfect circle and made a distinction between what qualified as the “prison complex” and what qualified as “the rest of the world.”

13. LIFE CYCLE OF A PRISONER PART II

On this fence, barbed wire began to grow. It was a perfect lattice for sharp individual flowers that made up a single blossom. The barbed wire grew like wild vines, uncontrolled, like a cancer of thought. Before long, what once felt like an open ocean felt like a thorny closet with no escape – and life in prison became a problem I needed to address. Removing the barbed wire seemed like the only possibility for a return to normalcy. But getting lost in the removal only invited twice as many barbs to grow in its place. Chasing these barbs describes the bulk of my life. I spent so much time focused on controlling the wire, I actually forgot that there was a fence underneath supporting the whole facade. I even forgot how the fence first appeared – how it was not something that happened to me, but something that made a me happen. It was here that I began to stop thinking of myself as a prisoner.

14. THE SEPARATE SELF IS INEVITABLE VIOLENCE

When I was a young girl, my older brother would demonstrate how doing what were considered normal things was still filled with unconscious violence. Eating ice cream, jumping rope, playing hopscotch, talking on the phone, washing windows, putting dishes away – all acts of violence. Daily, he would remind me that anything tainted with the assumption of a separate self, however simple the task, had division at its root. “This division is the germ cell of violence,” he would say with absolute clarity. I never got it at the time, but once I grew big enough, my brother would take my friends and me on teaching journeys, what he called “expeditions,” where I’d receive crash courses on seeing the world from what he called Non-separation. “Non-separation is the impersonal existence of being that includes the personal,” he would say while shifting the transmission into park and reminding us to roll up our windows. And as soon as we were all back within earshot:

“The impersonal is what grandpa is pointing to when he says no burden of concern.”

15. NON-SEPARATION EXPEDITION TO THE GROCERY

“Maven, while you walk into the grocery carrying your freedom like a duffle bag, notice how you transform this whole scene into a conflict. The type of freedom you experience applies to you, the type of freedom I experience only applies to itself – stop dividing an individual out and simply remember that you’re the total dietary vision-scape. If you think that’s bread and only bread, you’re wrong. If you think that almonds

are separate from the watermelons, investigate the source of the pasta sauce. Coffee is the exact same miracle as a crab-cake – waffles sit in the freezer undifferentiated from the cans of soup and who you truly are. Watch your mind go ballistic as I continue the menu – turning every aisle into a culinary bunker for the future of enlightenment. Do you see that your heart is not separate from the vegetables, Maven? Do you see that by othering the raspberries, you automatically instigate a civil war with the bananas? Civil because your nature is the same as the fruit that you perceive as outside of your self. War because you think you are divided from the bright clusters of light. Every product is your consciousness – go grab the cinnamon and the sugar and prove that it's all one flavor with a single taste. Only you can restock the empty shelves – and you've been doing it since the grand opening whether you realize it or not.”

16. PEPPERMINTS & THE NATURE OF DESIRE

No burden of concern. That's what my grandfather used to say. 29 years and now no burden of concern. The prison chaplain was my savior a lot of days when things got really tough. She'd stop by once a week and sneak candy to me through the vertical bars of my cell. It was always a single red and white peppermint in a clear cellophane wrapper. I never really liked peppermints before. I considered them boring when compared to the smorgasbord of contemporary flavors available to a child my age. Who wants a pre-historic rock hard peppermint when you can have the emergent texture of something called Strawberry Pomegranate Mint Chill Explosion? But, with her, it was different. The peppermint flavor extended into my emotional world, which never happened when chewing all of the more sparkly candies. The way her eyes lit up when she saw me and the joy of her extended hand offering a treat infused her dull candy with a sweetness that the other candies could market but never fulfill. The new sweets left my heart lacking, immediately wondering if a different flavor could satisfy my endless craving. Her peppermints weren't like this. There was a dignity about them that knew her candy's truth was not separate from the truth of anything – which revealed a world to me where all craving was ended before the sugar could even hit my tongue.

17. MALCOLM EXPLORATIONS OF THE ETERNAL

When I was a young girl, before bed, my grandmother and I would play a game. It had an ever evolving name – things like “Venus Mind Trap,” or “Black Kerouacs,” or “Shakespeares of Asparagus,” or “Malcolm Explorations of the Eternal.” For fifteen solid minutes, while the moon hung like an inverse oil-spot in the sky, we would take turns and rattle off non-sensical sentences that came as naturally as apple blossoms:

“I wear wool sweaters in the dead of summer and I sweat God. When all roads lead to North Carolina, the liberal philosophies of the West will mass produce prayers and silver-tailed dragons for the retired tobacco farmers who have graduated to vaporizers and returned to the monastery seeking jazz. The graveyard is a place where a cherry’s DNA can become a triangle in an orphan’s orchestra. A calendar is literally a stapler when looked at from the perspective of humans and time. Midnight is the perfect season if one is hunting elk by trying to get them to choke on stale donuts. A Christian, a Muslim, and a Buddhist enter a bar and order the defamation of Hindu reggae with a round of non-religious omelettes for starters. Ordinary dish detergent is quicksand for blue beetles with Down’s Syndrome. I choose separation as the way of the world. I choose separation as the way of the world, too. Separation is the truth of our existence.”

18. GRANDMA’S LULLABY

Then she would tuck me in – and when my eyes would close for what she thought was the final time for the day, she would recite the same sweet, self-authored poem while assuming I was asleep. But I was never asleep. I would pretend so that I could hear her soothing voice without the fuzziness of impending slumber:

“Let your heart rest and stare directly into the sun, love. Stare directly into the sun, love, with no burden of concern because the sun is your reflection, love. Let the brightness in your squinting eyes distract you from your suffering, love. It’s not real, love. Only the magic of your heart is breathing, love. Rest in the arms who care for everything, love. But don’t imagine them to be your grandma’s, love. Your grandma is a reflection of the sun, too, love. Her eyes are squinting also as you fall asleep, love.

So sleep and see that you will disappear, love. With no burden of concern, see that you will disappear, love. Dream those dreams that are seen by the real you, love. What else could there be, love? Make room to see your self, love. Escape into the world, love. And when your dream isn’t what you wanted it to be, love – let that become part of the dream, too, love. Don’t build monuments for the ethers of a dream though, love. That will only be a statue, love. That’s not real, love. Stone is not the joy of your being – even when you are sleeping, love.

So, goodnight, my love. Travel to the moon and back, and know that it’s awareness, love. Sleep in the heavens, love. But know that you are heaven, love. Cast your heart into the river, love. Know that it can never float away because away is not real, love. Only the truth is real, love. And everywhere you look, you are seeing the truth, now, love. So fall asleep, love. And when you awaken in the morning, love, know that you are home here, love. Know that you are not separate here, love. You and your family are staring directly into the sun.”

19. THREE GURUS

29 years ago, this body was arrested. But now I realize what my grandmother was teaching every evening to soften my mind before a restful night's sleep. I realize what my brother was teaching as we walked through the grocery store aisles looking like siblings being lived as the perfect truth behind the crooked wheels of a shopping cart. I realize what my grandfather was teaching when he invited me to burn my irises and have no burden of concern.

20. BIRTHDAY WISH TERMINUS

It's the morning of my 29th birthday and the deadbolt to this cell has been forever unlocked. The doors are wide open like the wings of a darting eagle diving to its prey. The heavy keys are in my hand – the lock cannot be changed. The metal bars are made of translucent shadow. The walls are made of forgiving air. The ceiling is made of suspended dust, see-through straight into the California light.

21. THE PRISON-BODY IS NO BURDEN OF CONCERN

I will remain exactly where I am, while most of the world thinks it's just another Tuesday.

Staring directly into the sun.



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