

SHE'S NOT HERE

One Decade of Transgender Poetry

ZAK LETTERCAST

SHE'S NOT HERE: ONE DECADE
OF POETRY

2011-2021

LETTERCAST

Copyright © 2021 by Zak Lettercast.

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, or by any information storage and retrieval system without the written permission of the author, except where permitted by law.

Some information has been changed or altered to protect the identity of any individuals who may or may not be mentioned in the poems or reflections in this book.

No part of this work may be altered or excerpted for reproduction or distribution in any printed or electronic form without express and limited permission from the author. Possession of this work shall not be construed as permission to further distribute duplicates of it in whole or in part. Please share and gift this book, but respect the efforts, rights, and intentions of the author.

www.ilettercast.com

First Edition: November 2021

She's Not Here: One Decade of Poetry

ISBN:

✿ Created with Vellum

Dedicated to Brigid.

Foreword

Foreword

I first started writing poetry in middle school. Faced with the wrong puberty in a house where I was not allowed to be myself, writing was one of the safest outlets for me. Unfortunately, as I got older my diaries held my more intimate, and thus more sinful, works. They were gone through and gotten rid of.

I was able to recover some of my poems from a USB drive I kept with me at all times and used on my high school computers. The limited space there was precious, so it's interesting to see exactly what survived the culling. A lot of it was just bits and pieces, but there were a few gems in there!

As a young adult on my own, I found little time to write poetry or fiction between the hours upon hours of hustling and house chores that made up my day to day. Still, when I did find a moment's peace, I poured my feelings out into hidden computer documents. I had a longstanding fear that my then-partner would find my art and demand its destruc-

Foreword

tion. Still, for all those that were deleted, or simply never written down, many good pieces survived and found their way into this book.

Now, inspired by the pandemic, nature, and my own healing journey, I have grown the courage to share some of my better work with you, dear reader. The poems contained herein are organized by theme. They are not in chronological order. Some of them are joyful, some are sensual, others are a glimpse into the sorrow, anger, and fear I have felt.

I cover topics like, identity, death, social justice, heartbreak, suicidality, reverence for nature and ancestry, and the beauty of intimacy. They are all my own work, inspired by real life events and honest emotions. They're probably not professional poetry, but I'm not even sure there is such a thing. I have made notes to accompany some of them, in order to add further context for the curious readers.

Poetry has continued to be one of my favorite methods to talk about my emotions, and to become better acquainted with my inner self. The primary focus here, and the reason for the title "She's Not Here: One Decade of Poetry," is to give you small glimpses into the journey I took getting to where I am today. I hope this book gives you at least a glimpse of that journey through my lens.

With that, I leave you to these songs from my soul, written between the years of 2011 and 2021.

Ocean Poem

SURGE UP TO GREET ME

Wet and cold against the gold
Roar and spit your brine

FOAM, SPRAY YOUR PASSION

Rise up a wall and curl in
Break upon yourself

TAKE ME FAR AND DEEP

Float me like plastic and fish
Past fault lines and shelves

ROGUE WAVES AND RIP TIDES

Deposit me like shell shards
Precious, worn thin, smooth

. . .

ZAK LETTERCAST

MOTHER, PUNISHER

Draw me in and cradle me

Throw me to the floor

I WILL FOREVER CALL YOU

Home

Reflection: Ocean Poem

FOR THE FIRST FOURTEEN YEARS OF MY LIFE, I LIVED IN California. We lived in a lot of different houses, but one thing was always nearby: the beach! The ocean was usually an hour or two drive away, and it wasn't hard to convince my mother to take us there. She loved to lay in the sun and float in the ocean while my brother and I raced through the sand, hunted for sand crabs at the waterline, and tried to catch the best wave with our boogie boards.

When we moved to Vegas, I felt so deprived of the salty momma we call the ocean. Every time I return, which is rare these days, I feel her embrace me, and it's like I'm coming home. I know I'll probably never live that close to the sea again, but I absolutely would if I could. I feel that water, especially salt water, has this unique quality that cleanses the soul.

There's a reason we gather at bodies of water for vacation. We want to be refreshed. We want to be nurtured. We want to be reminded that all wonderful things are most wonderful in moderation. We want to be shown that nature, however beautiful, can kill us, too. We want to touch that threshold, maybe even cross

ZAK LETTERCAST

into it for a moment, and go home bearing the marks from it on our hearts and our bodies.

Autumn Mauve

TODAY I MET A PURPLE TREE

Whose whispering leaves called out to me
Upon embrace she spoke gently
Of fondness and familiarity

ABOVE MY HEAD ON AUTUMN SKY

Her baring branches sprawled up high
Some dazzling purple aught my eye
And down to earth that sprig did fly

I LEFT A TREASURE AT HER BASE

In that brilliant seelie place
To appreciate her healing grace
And commemorate that holy space

Reflection: Autumn Mauve

THERE HAVE BEEN SEVERAL TIMES IN MY LIFE WHERE I HAVE BEEN homebound due to forces outside my control. Growing up, it was my parents. Then, in college, it was illness that kept me near bedridden. After that, it was the laws and brothel owners in Nye county who kept me under lock and key with all the other good little hoes. Then, after my divorce, anxiety kept me locked away in a gnat-infested condo with my cat and rabbit. Finally, in 2020, after I had started doing the work necessary to detangle myself from agoraphobia, the pandemic hit.

As someone who was terrified of becoming any degree of sick, it was my worst nightmare realized. I was already wearing gloves and masks to go out of my house prior to COVID-19's debut in the United States. When things started to get bad and we went into lockdown mode, there was little to do but wait inside. So I did just that. I moved from my condo to a house with two of my partners and our kid, and we hunkered down together. I did really well, probably due to the fact I was used to being locked up for weeks or months on end.

And then all of the sudden, I was not okay. It had not been

She's Not Here

okay for a while. I needed to get fresh air, I needed privacy, I needed time where my thoughts were just my own. So I started walking. Mask on, bundled up, I would walk for an hour or two each day, getting to know the trees and the cracks in the sidewalk. And that's when I met this purple tree.

Spokane Snow, Springs Storm

FAR ABOVE ST. JOHN'S AND MONROE

You are a falling flake of snow
Carried on currents in the gray white sky
Crystalized perfection, you float on by

DOWN TO EARTH YOU FALL

To concrete and soil's beckoning call
Through the air you flit and play
You let the wind guide your way

YOU LAND AND STICK, THEN MELT AWAY

Trickling on down the causeway
That infrequent sun warms the thawing grounds
And you are wick'd back up into the clouds

PAST DOUGLAS FIR AND PONDEROSA PINE

Traveling west beyond dormant rail lines

She's Not Here

Vagabond since days of old
The boom and flash are your harald

SLICK AND DENSE YOU MAKE YOUR WAY DOWN

From deep gray sky to stony ground
To caress verdant leaves
And to dampen jacket sleeves

TO COALESCE WITH COMRADES CLEAR

And muddy up the arroyos here
To bend branches and slide earth and race the
canyon wide
To remind you of your days on the sea, when you were
once the tide.

Reflection: Spokane Snow, Springs Storm

I NEVER PLANNED TO STAY IN VEGAS. I STILL HAVE PLANS TO leave. When we first moved here in 2009, I announced to everyone that as soon as I turned 18, I was going back to California. As it turns out, there was no way I could afford that -- still can't, probably -- so I made plans to roam for a while. I still have those plans. Staying put is a hard thing to do, and I think the rest of the Western world probably agrees with me at this point in the pandemic.

I also think the conditions of the pandemic have highlighted just how much was incorrect about what we're told is a "normal" life. We're nomads. We're travelers. We're nonmonogamous heathens. We're part of something bigger, and anyone who knows that would have a hard time staying put for decades on end.

One More Storm

AND WHEN HE CAME IT RAINED FOR DAYS

The Earth, so parched, could not gobble it up fast
enough

She tried to swallow but there was more, and more,
and more

And she drowned in it

AND WHEN THE FLOODS SUBSIDED AND THE DAMAGE WAS DONE
and clay paved the streets

The mountains swelled against looming thunderheads
A breath of fresh air snagged in their throats, anxious
and thick

And they choked on it

AND THE HELPLESSNESS OF THOSE FOURTEEN MONTHS RATTLED
the door

It hummed in the distance, a blinding flash bouncing off
basin walls

ZAK LETTERCAST

And the roof was patched with garage sale tiles
And none of them knew if it would hold out for one
more storm

Reflection: One More Storm

THERE IS A LOT OF INEQUITY IN THE ADULT INDUSTRY. Millionaires get rich by taking 50-80% of our hard-earned pussy-money. They discriminate against trans people and fat people and disabled people and anyone who isn't pale enough, on the grounds of protecting their bottom line. They refuse to make necessary fixes, like broken windows and washing machines, or when they do fix those things they cut corners. Up until recently, they'd lock us up, and take our medication and car keys so we couldn't just leave.

So I shouldn't have been surprised when the pandemic hit, and the doors were shut for fourteen months, and none of us independent contractors could legally do our work, and the government had a clause that said sexworkers don't qualify for assistance, that the business owners turned a blind eye to the suffering of their contractors. But I was surprised. And I was sad. And I went to work when the doors re-opened, and I saw that they made some improvements to the property, and I made a couple thousand dollars, and then the Delta variant hit hard enough to reinstate a mask mandate.

ZAK LETTERCAST

And then I went home. The doors stayed open. The masks stayed on. Business owners stayed rich. The rest of us wondered if we'd survive another year.

Twenty - Twenty Vision

NEVER WANTED TOUCH

Or believed in God
But here I am
Praying
Hands pressed together
Like I've never
Felt

INVISIBLE BARRIERS HOLD

Us to our promises
Six feet thick
Masks
On our faces like
When we were
Kids

BUT THERE'S NO

Candy, tricks, or treats,

Only daily defeats
Atrophy
Hungry mouths and bank
Accounts gaping and
Empty

THE FIRST TIME

In days, months, years
Emotions seep up
Forlorn
Long distance isolated
Muffled laughs
Conceal

DO YOU FEEL

Afraid to take in
The smell of roses
Anxious
Tears and runny noses
Afraid to even
Cough

CAN WE HEAL

New phobias and wounds
Strokes and emergency
Rooms
Strikes and castle sieges
Closed parks and
Beaches

. . . .

RUN THEM OVER

With your car, pig
Push us all
Off
Your social media and
Kill us with
Legislation

TIME STOOD STILL

But bills did not
Two-hundred forty days
Without
Rain and without rent
How can we
Live

COVID BLANKETS IN

A parking lot and
Front Line Workers
Sick
Strangers come together despite
Personal Protective Equipment
Deficits

LINE YOUR POCKETS

With ventilators and promises
Half spoken sentences
Blood
In your eye where
A splinter sits

Festering

IT MUST BE

Better than red hat
Fanatics with guns
Thugs
Hiding beneath white hoods
Iron crosses worn
Proud

HOW TO APPEASE

Any crowd, any mass
Of ejaculators whose
Christ
Came to them from
An orange tree
Pruned

BIG HOUSE WITH

A lawn, a wall
Unscalable while we
Starve
In your streets like
Urchins and peasants
Cold

WHO CAN AFFORD

To eat when we
Can't afford to

Breathe
Every customer at work
With their nose holes
Out

TRAFFIC HAS RETURNED

No way we can
Learn when we
Earn
Less than living wage
But experience pays
Right?

ALMOST ONE YEAR

In but will it
Actually end with
Vaccines
And herd immunity and
Your liberty over
Mine?

BREATHE DEEP AND

Spread your blighted seed
Heaven forbid we
Decriminalize
Weed or sex or
Anything other than
White

. . .

NO YOU SAY

“Might is right! Majority!”

Except when the

Majority

Is the minorities all

Banded together against

You.

I Listened

I LISTENED FOR THE FAINT TRAINS

I listened and my ear did strain
To hear their voices say my name
As I listened for the trains.

BUT NO COMFORT COULD BE FOUND

Nor did train horn sound
Only gloomy silence was around
As I listened for the trains.

I HEARD THE SOUND OF COOING DOVES

The sound of hope, of peace, of love
And hoped for more than just hope's sake
These doves would leave hope in their wake--
As I listened for the trains.

Reflection: Alone, Panic

THE NEXT POEM IS ABOUT ONE OF THE FIRST PANIC ATTACKS I remember having in Vegas. I am placing the reflection before it as a trigger warning for the reader. If you do not wish to read this graphic poem, please skip the next two pages.

My room was this ugly yellow color that gave me really bad anxiety whenever I was in it. My mother and I were at odds. I had no means of expressing myself except through poetry, because asking for help was too emotionally risky. So I suffered, alone, in the damned yellow room, until it passed.

I would have many more like that. I still do, sometimes. The difference now is I have a support system, people who will understand and can help me cope with all the feelings. I don't recommend reading this poem if you are prone to anxiety or panic attacks because you may find it triggering.

Alone, Panic

SHUDDER

CAN'T

Breathe...

PACING, EACH STEP A

Reassurance of

Insecurities

Titanic heart groans and

Creaks in its descent

Broken and jagged and quick

Iceberg cut to the final breath

TUNNEL

VOMIT

ZAK LETTERCAST

. . .

THE FEELING OF SICK BUTTERFLIES AND ANGRY BEES

That never want to leave your cocoon

TIMBER!

GRAVITY GROWS AND THE GROUND RISES UP

Salty drops from half-closed eyes

Yellow room

Floor is an ocean

So faint now

Heartbeat

Soul

YOU WILL NEVER BE

Whole

Comprised of

Spasmodic sobs and

Giddy gasps

And

Not a thread in between

THAT SEA DEVOURS WALLS

Corrupted

They dissolve

Shelter gone

Atmosphere crushing in its

Behemoth existence

She's Not Here

Gravity from all the stars pulls
In every
Direction

NO SOUND IN SPACE

Panic
Alone

Reflection: Ghost

THIS NEXT POEM IS ABOUT A DISSOCIATIVE EPISODE I HAD IN HIGH school. I am placing the reflection before it as a trigger warning for the reader. If you do not wish to read this graphic poem, please skip the next two pages.

Have you ever had a moment where life feels so surreal because it's being colored by the pain and anxiety you're feeling? It's hard to be yourself when you're guilty and shamed and scared out of it. Eventually, you feel like a living statue, surrounded by other statues, all moving through space and time, destinations designated by classroom bells and rote memory.

I wrote this in the hallway waiting for chemistry class. I really only remember the feel of the cool brick becoming warm on my back as I leaned there, scratching away at my notebook so I could type it into a word document on my USB drive after school on the ROTC computer. I don't remember much else about that day, everything just felt imaginary.

I would have that feeling many times in the coming years, and, in fact, already had that feeling quite a few times since childhood. Derealization and depersonalization are common for people

She's Not Here

with anxiety, depression, BPD, C-PTSD, and PTSD, as well as those of use with gender dysphoria.

Ghost

TIME STANDS STILL

Or maybe it is I who stands still
While the people fly by me in a whirring lackluster blur
And I linger in the moments of ages passed
Trapped in a suspended animation while the world
continues around

I feel like a ghost floating through life without a sound
I am separated by invisible walls of indifference
The white noise of the world rings like static in my ears
And I feel myself numbly wandering in this space in
between consciousnesses

With tears
Frozen
In my heart



Cycle

REINVENT THE WHEEL

shatter it shapeless trying
never roam again

Reflection: Cycle

SOMETIMES, WE FIND OURSELVES STUCK IN A CYCLE WE FEEL powerless to stop. I was really, really good at breaking relationships. Or, at least I thought I was. Turns out the relationships were already not great to begin with, but at least I got some good poetry out of it.

Whenever I am questioning whether I actually had a hard childhood or if I'm just "too sensitive," I look at the string of relationships I had, platonic, romantic, or otherwise, during and after the time I lived with my parents. They were all a mess. There was not a single healthy one. Some were salvageable, but most were not. We don't just attract bad people into our lives. We model what we see growing up. We pursue what is considered "normal" for us. We behave in the same ways we've observed those around us behave time and again.

Looking at my life in its entirety helps me validate that my struggles are not my fault, but that I can choose to make better choices. I may have been conditioned to be receptive to manipulation, but I don't have to continue choosing to be around manipulative people. I may have been forced into a codependent

She's Not Here

relationship with my parents, and witnessed them being codependent, but I do not have to choose codependency. I can choose healthy boundaries, productive conversations, and clear, effective communication. And I can absolutely pass those on to my kid.

Invitation to Oblivion

A MAN LIVES AT THE END OF THE LANE

He sits in his house in the silence
Eyes like headlights and the patience of a crane
He sips tea from his cup in the dark

AT FIRST YOU CAN'T SEE HIM, HE'S SO FAR AWAY

You toddle past his house, unawares
Soon you wonder what he does inside all day
You peek between the cracks in his blinds

YOU GROW TO FEAR THAT SILENT OLD MAN

Haunting eyes peer back from the dark
The urge to run away as fast as you can
How fast must you go to escape?

LIVING ON HIS PORCH YOU LET GO OF THE FEAR

It tugs on your sleeve sometimes

She's Not Here

He cracks the door just an inch more each year
But you never go inside

ONE DAY THE DOOR OPENS WITH A LITTLE SQUEAK
A gaping mouth waiting to swallow
Endless nothingness echoing free
All up and down the sidewalk

God Dressed as the Devil

I'M THE BIGGEST SECRET

Your worst fear
Fetishized, cradled, held near
Until I remind you
Too much
Of
Yourself

I'M THE BADDEST VILLAIN

Your best friend
Sanctified, treasured, so dear
Until you remind me
That nothing
Good
Lasts

NO ONE WANTS ME

I'm an idea
An ideal
A concept
Not real

AND I'LL NEVER FIT IN

A perfect box
A normal family
A society
Or heaven

AND IT DOESN'T

Matter
How much I
Love
How deep I
Connect
How far I
Go

THAT RIFT

Between us
Will grow
It will
End and
I won't
Even know

. . . .

ZAK LETTERCAST

UNTIL
It's
Too
Late

AGAIN

Reflection: God Dressed as the Devil

DID YOU KNOW THAT YOU CAN USE BEING TRANSGENDER AS A divination tool? Yes, I'm serious. Once you come out as transgender, you will know exactly who your real friends are, who was fetishizing you before you came out, who is fetishizing you once you are out, and who only cares about you for your gender identity. Chances are, you already knew a lot of these things beforehand, but just in case you didn't, coming out will make things painfully crystal clear. And it will continue to be clear with every person you meet as to where they stand in regards to "the whole transgender issue." By the way, if they call it that, run.

It can be hard for transgender people to come to terms with our personal identities, let alone share that with the world. We're constantly bombarded with things that "those transgenders" are supposed to be. Are we evil, or are we angels? Are we breaking the gender binary, or supporting it? Do we have to pass to be valid? What if we pass, but we're just ugly? Why do we have to be fetishized to be acceptable? Are we men and women, or something else entirely? And why does it matter to anyone but us what's in our pants, or if we've had "the surgery?" Why does our salvation

hinge on committing to the flesh vessel we were forced to live in since birth? Why does “science” and “biology” and “medicalism” only matter if it supports outdated notions and fallacious mental health diagnoses?

Why don't you just see us for who and what we are: people?

Awful Gospel

I

GO ON AGAIN

Go and pretend
This is the end
End of the world

TRY HOLDING HANDS

And hourglass sands
You already knew
You were slipping

OCEAN COMPASS

You chart the stars
Sing along to
Siren songs

. . .

ALL THE WHILE

Pretend with a smile
Don't know where
You are going

2

YOU ARE THE LOCUST

Come round in late summer
When

CROPS ARE READY TO YIELD

BUT OTHERWISE

NEGLECTING THE FIELD

SAID "BE THERE FOR ME WHEN I SAY--

"Yes I want to leave someday--

"But don't you dare--

"Leave me!"

YOU MAKE A NICE CRUNCH

Under my boot

When

. . . .

She's Not Here

I SPEAK GOD'S AWFUL TRUTH AND
All you want is sympathy

YOU AND YOUR PLAGUE
Deep in my sea
Martyr ships trying to
Traverse me

UPSET WHEN I TOSS YOU
Into the fray
When I hiss and I spray
And when my gales go away
And you
Tell me "pick up the pieces I'm broken!"

YOU WERE BUSTED BEFORE WE EVER MET
Before you ever set foot on my sands
Before you ever held my hand and

I TRIED TO PROVE IT COULD BE DONE
Connect the dots and make it one
Nice cohesive painting but

ORION'S BELT WILL NEVER OUTSHINE THE MOON
And anatomical hearts are messy

. . .

AND HERE WE ARE

Screaming
Voices lost
In the wind because
It doesn't really matter
What we say
We've already begun our
Sinking

“STILL SEAWORTHY!” YOU INSIST

As we take on water and list
And our keel is at the top of the ship
Capsized
--And you want to keep sailing?!

NAVIGATING WITHOUT A COMPASS

You threw it out but I know the stars
I've seen all the routes and I know all the answers
And you pretend you don't know where we are

CAREENING

Off
The edge

TEETERING

At
The end

. . .

PROCLAIM

“Yes, this is fine!--

“Lovely and divine!--

“Here--

“On the edge of the sphere!”

4

BUT YOU DON'T WANT IT LIKE THIS

But you want it like this

And you want it to be

How it was before

Only more

DIFFERENT

AND

DRAGGING DEAD BODIES

Is no way to get around

It just holds you down and

None of this is profound

SO HOW

. . .

IS IT I'M

THE ONLY ONE

WITH ANY KIND OF
A mind

TO USE ON SOLVING PROBLEMS WE ALL KNOW EXIST
You want to pretend you don't know what it is
I
Can't
Make
You
Want
To
Live

I CAN'T MAKE YOU NOT
Kill yourself over every
Tiny
Stupid
Sea urchin
Every
Barnacle and
Mussel
And God forbid the fucking locusts
You are the swarm
So take what you want
And

Leave

AND IF YOU NEED TO BELIEVE

It's really the end
The end of the world
To treat yourself like a
Real human girl
And build yourself a brand
New boat for one

THEN YES

WE'RE TEETERING ON THE EDGE

And I'm about
To push
You
Off

AND THAT

Is
God's
Awful
Gospel
Truth

Reflection: Awful Gospel

RELATIONSHIPS ARE HARD. ROMANTIC, PLATONIC, FAMILIAL... sometimes you just want to throw in the towel. And usually, that urge is correct. If I had a dime for how many times I looked over my shoulder at past relationships in both relief and sadness, I would not be considering taking out student loans to finish my degree. I was taught that relationships have to be difficult or else there's something wrong. You have to be fighting, and I mean really fighting, or you're just not doing it right.

Mothers and daughters? Have to be at each other's throats. Husbands and wives? If you haven't given a backhanded compliment or pitted one of the kids against your spouse this week, there's definitely something wrong there. And God forbid you get a divorce. Splitting up means giving up, and that is never the answer. God put you two together for a reason. You have to make it work, no matter the cost. It wasn't always spelled out directly like that, but, yeah, that's the gist.

As it turns out, disagreements are part of a normal, healthy relationship! But feeling invalidated, feeling silenced, feeling trapped, or having spite toward the other part of your relation-

She's Not Here

ship? Nope, not normal. Not healthy. Not. Good. But I went through all kinds of trials and errors to learn this lesson the very hard way. And knowing when to say goodbye is one of the hardest parts. Sticking to your boundaries after you say goodbye? Well, sometimes that's even harder.

Scarlet Spectre

A FIERY HAUNT SCREAMS EMPTY AT ME

Wiley star-crossed curses burning my skin
It bubbles and blisters with anger and sad
Recounting all of my sins

LIKE YOU NEVER HAD ANY

Nothing can be fixed or brought back
I buried you years ago
Your coffin on Maple Street, that ugly old shack

OH WHAT'S THE POINT ANYWAY?

I buried me too
Under crimson snow and broken words
Memories are only cheap melted glue.

PLEASE DIE AND NEVER COME BACK!

She's Not Here

You, lonely, rancid, rotting ghost.
You never listen. You never did.

Kate

SOFT

Your fingers taste like
Nicotine
As they brush against my
Lips

SMALL

Skin stretched taught
Smooth
As you brush past me in the
Hallway

LAY

With your tongue down her
Throat
Long hair tangled in your
Hands

. . . .

She's Not Here

PRESS

Your back against me
Now
Breathy sigh laced with
Champagne

SATIN

Sheets keep us warm and
Hungry
Bells chime an end to our
Ecstasy

NAILS

Bit down to the quick
Reaching
For a future far away from
Her

Reflection: Kate

INTIMACY IS A BEAUTIFUL THING. OR, WELL, IT CAN BE. SEX WAS A crucial component to me learning about who I am as a person. When my virgin self was accused of being a slut in high school, and then I was sexually assaulted, I decided to throw in the towel on the whole “waiting until marriage” thing. I needed to reclaim ownership of my sexual identity after it had been taken from me in a variety of ways -- by my parents, by bullies at school, by my ex, by God. So I started experimenting.

Over time, I learned how to give pleasure in the most expert of ways. But, as I later found out, I was using sex as a tool to disassociate and not have to deal with all the things inside of me that I was running from. My gender identity, sexual orientation, personal interests, body dysphoria, kinks, relationship needs, were all neatly tucked away and hidden when I was with a sexual partner. Then I got into the sex industry, and everything changed.

At first, I was doing the same as I had always done. I catered to whatever my fans and clients wanted. But my fans and clients were much more openly kinky than my real-life playmates, and I got to really explore the things that actually interested me. I

won't list those here, since family and friends are likely reading this, but suffice to say I learned what I liked and how those things corresponded to my gender identity, etc., and the tables turned. I was demanding clients who suited my needs instead of the other way around.

Finally, as I began my transition, I was able to gain the confidence to carry that same honesty and authenticity into my personal sex life. Sure, it is more vulnerable this way, but it is also more real, more exhilarating, and so much more fun!

A Boy With Kinks

NEVER THOUGHT HE WOULD WANT WHAT IS IN FRONT OF
him now

A bed of roses and a bottle of alcohol
-free champagne
Time has passed and we've changed somehow
And it all feels strangely
-the same

THE HOT AND THE COLD

-he had with her
He didn't know I wore her skin
And I'll never know
-if he's really sure
It's always been me within

IDIOSYNCRASY DRAWS US IN WITH UNRELENTING WEIGHT

Two prodigal sons
-in a binary pair

She's Not Here

Circumnavigation in a push-pull figure eight
With love and kinsey scales, we know
-that all is far from fair

A WRANGLER WITH HIS OWN KNOTS AND ROPES

Speeding toward the shiniest story
-on an Odyssey but I'm Patroclus
A bundle of knotted guts and hopes
-my Achilles is his hubris

ALONE IN BED AFTER

He rests
-and thinks
About being sure
About a boy
-with kinks

Reflection: A Boy With Kinks

THE REAL RUB, OF COURSE, THAT COMES WITH SEX DURING AND after transitioning, is helping your partners understand what that means for them. It also requires a great deal of honesty with yourself. As an AFAB person who was basically trained from birth to appeal to and serve straight, cisgender men, I tend to attract that type. Yes, even after being on T for two years, I have former partners who are still not sure if they're entirely done being with me because, even though they're straight, they really, really want to enjoy this trans boy.

What's cool about that whole situation, though, is that trans people are at this unique point where we can help break down compulsory heterosexuality. I have several partners who knew me prior to my transition, who swore up and down they were straight, until they realized that it's really okay to not be straight. They got comfortable knowing that their relationship with me, a transgender man, is still a gay relationship, and that's okay. Sex is a powerful drive, and it's incredibly useful for opening minds and showing new points of view, especially to defeat transphobic and homophobic mindsets.

I am not, of course, saying to go out and do this on purpose. If

She's Not Here

it happens, it should happen naturally, without any sort of agenda. What I am saying is that it's beautiful when people come to the conclusion that it is not mandatory to be a monogamous, heterosexual, cisgender person. It's okay to explore. It's okay to like different people than who you were told you had to like growing up.

Hold Me Close, Virginia

LIT A FIRE

Within me
Denim between
My thighs

SOFT CARESS

Controlled power
Button pusher
Whispered sighs

SCENT PERMEATES

The fabrics
Pheromones sing
My high

TOUCH THOSE

She's Not Here

Intimate places
No one can know

Reflection: A Blessing

HAVE YOU HEARD OF THE PHRASE “GENERATIONAL CURSE?” I WAS introduced to this concept at an early age. Based on what I was taught, a generational curse is a fate meant to befall at least three generations of a family because of one ancestor’s actions. Each of the generations suffers a little less than the one before it, but a lot of the same problems still occur. A whole range of things can be considered a generational curse, like alcoholism, abusive tendencies, poor parent-child relationships, and illnesses.

Whether it's a curse, a learned behavior, epigenetics, or something else, I have yet to decide, but I know all about the curses my family has had to endure. I was subjected to them myself, until I decided to break the cycles of abuse that had become that family’s normal pattern for relationships. I was raised Christian, taught to believe that the only fix for a generational curse was to pray and ask God to lift it. If He didn’t lift your curse, you were meant to suffer for some undisclosed, Divine purpose. I think my ancestors believed that, too.

Despite parting with the church, I do have my own spiritual pursuits. I receive dreams sometimes, primarily from ancestors and other spirits, usually with messages for myself or others. One

She's Not Here

of the most profound and vivid dreams I had actually allowed me to visit a very sacred space, where many of my ancestors live. A lot happened, but the primary event was that I had a very long conversation with one of them, whom I've never met in the physical realm. This person told me that they love me, they accept me, that I am forgiven for the wrongs I had done in the past, and that I am moving forward in my life with their blessing.

I woke up literally weeping because I felt the true meaning of that dream in my very soul. A weight had been lifted from me I didn't even know I was bearing. The curse was gone. Immediately, I had to write.

A Blessing

UPON WAKING I WAS GREETED

By the scent of apples nigh
By the sight of fruit aplenty
By the vast and starry sky
As we walked along the byway
And bathed in Saturn's light
We greeted a great many
And felt forgiveness' might
The grove itself was planted
Seeds scattered purposef'ly
One must take a wandering path
To reach their destiny
By the windows in that great hall
The Universe did pass
I bore witness to that realm
Through portholes framed in brass
I listened with intention
To the gentle words you spake
To the overarching blessing

She's Not Here

O'er generations in your wake
Upon parting I was greeted
By healing in my heart
By the greatest sense of gratitude
By family, home, and hearth

Final Word

I WISH YOU THAT SAME SENSE OF FREEDOM, THAT SAME BREAKING of curses, that same confidence to be yourself and command respect wherever you go. The past ten years have been such a long journey, I'm hoping for an uneventful 10 after this. As this book enters its final phases, I am celebrating two years on testosterone, an official name change, and, at last, top surgery. My kid just came out as transgender, as well, and I hope with all my might that his journey is so much smoother than mine was. I hope your journey, whatever it is, is smooth sailing from here on, too.

I can't lift your curses, but I can encourage you to break them. It's okay to be yourself. You don't have to be stuck. Not in your hometown, your religion, your family, your relationship, your body, not anywhere. You have the power to be yourself, by yourself, for yourself. I wish you luck. I wish you a healthy support system and the willingness to learn and grow within that support system, so that you all can hold each other up and point out all your strengths and abilities.

I wish you the strength to tackle the world alone, and the comfort of knowing you don't have to.