

Savage Garden, Concrete Jungle

**A Chapbook to
Remember Me By**

FELIX GUZMAN

- Poetry Saved My Life -

Welcome to the Terror Dome

this city we call ours is being sold right
from under us, sleepless nights
had many I can say homelessness
doesn't make sense, the numbers don't lie

there is more money in keeping bodies
cycling in shelter than creating housing
when sleeping with one eye open
you can't be expected to feel a part of society
three hots, a cot, toothpaste, a bar of soap, toothbrush, towel, and a lock

welcome to the terror dome

if no one told you I'll do you the favor,
there is a reason some call the concrete home
it's a fight to breathe, to stay sane,
to not lose your humanity, a moment of silence
for whom you were is never enough,
the scars one takes wear in one's eyes even if smiling

many pathways are there to being without,
the journey to all blessings is never peaceful
having survived damn I feel blessed to be alive,
beautiful is the road looking going forward, meaningful
work is it work towards building community

the most vocal being the
hardest to be silenced
I am grateful for the bruises on ego,
and scars on heart, they provide the constant reminder

*we can do better we can do better
placing people over profits is the only way to be
as only when one can call a place home
can they truly ever feel free*

we can do better

I Can't Breathe

when soul orchestrates watershed
these eyes dimly lit broadcast foolishness
with everything I am, I wear my conviction well.

love and peace non-exclusive
ever at all being, I find freedom writing
lush landscapes to light. collectively
lost I won't ascribe to be, survivor of many
broken systems, *I can't breathe*

have said it enough myself to know my
truth doesn't align with the narrative
written in place of the words I'd write to life

flesh and bone soon dust and ashes
matters more as such leave never any room
for questioning of one's character,
optional is it to carry crosses of traumas
in every footstep taken now and after.

reality tells no angels walking among us,
until lungs no longer entertain breaths
what is written is the history taught to those
who survive away dream's death;

wanting is not needing, blood, sweat, and tears
are found to prop up every achievement
nothing are we ever. better is it steel heart
against hell than lose meaning to your being,
I understand freedom within reach always is still while caged,

born to light we know nothing until
taught the difference between night and day.

when living in the moment,
we are confronted by opposing viewpoints causing internal debate

do we worship sirens singing themselves
louder than peace or keep always the faith?

Brighter Burns My Light So

Broken but not forgotten,
alive I am not a ghost of my past
provided for as I need,
I who have nothing have as I asked.

My yesterdays now an eternity a ways
away from who I used to be
I believe, I believe, I believe
You merciful and loving,
blind never are You with how You love me

Brighter burns my light so because of You.

Because of You
brighter burns my light so.

Trace Your steps
through the darkness
I endeavor so always,
troubled but not wanting to refuse
another their peace. Away
You sweep every tear before
they stain the pillow of my cheeks
I... I who have nothing,
with the hell of old have made peace.

Brighter burns my light so because of You.

Because of You
brighter burns my light so.

what does it mean to be free?
what does it mean to be free?

For Status and Dollars

some things you never see outside
of the poverty in our communities
like two-parent households and doctorates,
while fathers blow in the breeze
without conviction chasing dollars
creating a deficit of self-esteem

reminder of better times present
in the emptiness within my green eyes
bullet shell casings, crack vial mosaics,
and Old English throw up
facts on facts no one is knowing anything when
the blue and whites show up

posted up fearing nothing with that
life-changer at the waistline
for status and dollars, denying sleep
overcome as they break night
never wanting to be one to choose
flight over fight ever since yay high
on the wakeup, some choose to refuse
see the truth in the daylight
for what it is, written in the blood spilt
from our every predecessor

some die wanting breath enter and exit
both lungs, more than lesser-thans
are we forever, best versions of
ourselves, it's best we build selves to be

tears and laughter the currency of
those lost to a broken man's dream
eyes tight from traveling where standing
ten toes down between schemes
and scams, what good does a heart
when for nothing good does it beat?

Savage Garden, Concrete Jungle

isolating in place this peace of mind is something unnatural
going through withdrawals are we all having gotten used to chaos
used to gunshots letting out in celebration and car alarms going off
used to cats in heat making sure the neighbors know what's up
used to hearing drunk man wisdom equal parts barbershop talk and fantasy

is love going to war in words with open hands deeply truly madly?
savage garden and concrete jungle same shit different name
better is it to burn bright than self-eulogize away inner flame

with everything evolving over time except water staying wet
in the darkness of alone, silence offers itself most viable of threats

where light in eyes has gone dim almost but not all the way
living is a conspiracy theory dream that isn't made to fade
and riots are the thoughts that corrupt my mind when broken
the bookending of me will be a sleep overcoming, when hopeless

without respite from whatever hell pains the heart beating within
an eviction on aspirations demand of me I preface my existence
right now with forgiveness, we aren't to prove ourselves in prisons
and jails with the mindset **do or die**, all told to only
do not pass go for forty dollars and a Metrocard

graveyards being mouths never speaking
their truth, dancing amongst the stars
is risky business not stopping for the tempo
to catch, though of flesh and bone
Gods to ourselves are we,
light and not one
and same, rooted in I declare war
meant for more than just breathing in
resistance until dust and ash,
free to write ourselves free we are.

write your legacy while you can

savage garden and concrete jungle same shit different name

Blurred Mascara

Your fire deserves to be stoked in cupped hands

when all seems lost of freedom
the revolution within you it isn't my right
to quiet or withhold from being given light
others have done that enough.

I'm nothing more than just not loving you as necessary

I don't want to blur your mascara,
my cross isn't yours to carry,
nor am I to cause you suffer any alone so harsh you break
and bend but still don't break nor bend
like water, because you are poetry for the soul.

I want more than what I can't offer you
to make sure you stay beautiful.

In my being broken, I don't need to break another
to justify my existence, it is only right
the *I love yous* you deserve I want you to receive.

Until my ego is soothed to a final sleep
stay as you are, my love being a prison
peace can't be bought nor is it sold.

Define yourself with every heartbeat
don't look to me for purpose, you are free
continue being the rose which from within the concrete did grow.

Do the Math

body bags and police tape
the giftwrap for the youths presented to the morgue
expiring prematurely never seeing
pipe dreams through while drifting toward
the indefinite with every breath taken
within lungs not knowing

forsaken before being born to life are they

devil lies in the details where money making
is the objective at all times,
all predisposed to prioritize death over light
no good can be expected come from
wrong is right to a can't-get-right
when asked *why do the things we do*
silence so deafening is overkill
overwhelmed by the fact
on the backs of black and brown was Rikers built

I choose to only speak love into others
everything else doesn't really matter
to no benefit is it shortchange innocence
for what only makes pockets fatter
at the expense of community and generations
that'll inherit the earth after
the flesh and bone our souls wear as
armor is reduced to dust and ashes,
shot in the dark is it escape the trauma
of poverty as school's never a viable option
where fathers are blowing in the wind,
statistics show hearts of darkness
are most likely having they
nine tenths of the law owning stomach touching back.

Being it takes two for a lesson to be taught,
when asked what is one plus one reply
without hesitation ***do the math!***

Almost Who I Should Be

three days removed from life,
eyes closed fighting off dreams
a blackout of otherworldly perception, nothing do I see
in the prison of death,
through cracks in windows entered the light
lungs starved of excess, sustaining as a machine provides life,
catching sight of angels when almost alive, I couldn't scream

*don't leave hold my hand please!
help me more than this be kind
don't let this become home
a goodbye forever gone unsaid*

to be more than a product of my environment I know I was meant

*sing to my traumas
soothe my convictions, I want not surrender
my tomorrows just yet,
I have a story to tell. I am someone's child remember.
without the opportunity to heal,
I can't ever than my past be better
don't let my loved ones live my broken promises in letters*

if I don't make it, that's the reality,
I don't wish anyone ever has to suffer
I wronged many; who cries for the little boy but only his mother
left to mend publicly to rediscover peace within grief

struggled for existence in moments wired by necessity
things change cruelly, I am here! trust and believe
everything in the world that's lost can be regained
my heartbeats to this are testaments,
I am almost who I always wanted to be

placing the necessary context around freedom's definition
are authors of textbooks, nurses, doctors, and the community.
thank you, you who stood vigil before I did as told **breathe, breathe**
thank you all beautiful minds thinking madness through with the vision
thank you who engage in orating true histories, conceiving wisdom
thank you to all who preserve always love's existence
thank you, thank you, thank you

The Caterpillar Not Turned Butterfly

the change into beautiful expected, instead
I choose cannibalizing myself in my cocoon, asleep
not dead nor aware enough to
understand the darkness isn't all-consuming
and breakthrough is awaiting once light pierces through

I wear hunger well
in fact, bone-deep, flesh becomes taut
and stomach touches back, heaven and hell
I endure graciously, lost to the touch of misery
right now, not a product of my environment
is it really self-defeating or fulfilling a prophecy?

a turn into butterfly was I meant
or drown in **piss and shit?**

the abyss of my lacking
as I gasp for purposeful breath,
I am as I was yesterday
a captive of my self-sabotage

world I am the result of all the hate you gave me
hiding in plain sight,
fuck/forget opening myself up
to a new twenty-four hours of light
and its lacking, I am staking a claim
to this nothingness.

I won't exorcize my demons;
instead, I will wage war with everything I am.

I won't fly off but bury myself while daydreaming
why? because it makes sense!

who am I you ask,
I am the caterpillar not turned butterfly!

A Eulogy for Myself

marginalized outside of social constructs.
labeled by default a throwaway
boxed in by my each and
every breath my lungs are choked out of,
pray always before I speak to refuse hell home
within heart I do, never be caged
will I be again, a eulogy for myself
are all tears within eyes while wide awake.

this life seeming a nightmare without end,
ash and dust all becoming
upon the death of what life
exists within body, needing and wanting
not synonymous, being told I'd never
amount to much I refuse ever stopping
until making reality the dream,
I am no more at all haunted.

prisoner of poverty
a lone cross I carry on shoulder narrow
the horrors of what I've experienced,
when one is lost to the light
no good is expected escape from lips.

warehoused in jails, prisons, hospitals,
and shelters I never lost me.

I strive always overcome grief to become
the best version of me there is to possibly be
giving life to the scars I wear as
armor providing reminders of peace.

standing with head to the clouds
find me when suffering hell defiantly
tragedies I'll keep as both
precedence and relevant point of reference
while seeing being humble as preferred
before going off breathless into the indefinite.

Reaching Through

further from forever than closer to
death being, both broken and lost
having been, being free there was no
peace when prison was my home

time far from forgiving, scars wearing
thinner on flesh no longer taut
more than blood and bone, bound by
melancholy and memories of old
while tomorrow lays on cusp of
breaking through, where lies a faithless heart
truth lives and dies, and hope holds court

in knowing to favor the dark
does more harm often than not,
with sleep existing behind closed eyelids,
shipwrecked are we all when standing alone.

better is it want to be adrift

knowing when we aren't our dreams
just yet, we sacrifice our moments
touching nothing of worth we need
still refuse being seen as just hopeless
we aren't our yesterdays forever.

to wait to move in slight measure toward
complacency betrays what tomorrow
might bring into all becoming. Over
vanity many have lost their true selves,
reflection being but a stranger

staring back in contrast to who we were
in the past, where I stand waver
I won't ever. Too many tears having
surrendered to light, colder I refuse to be

wasting breath is a privilege the dead don't have,
for them I live and breathe.

for them I live and breathe until I myself get free

Poetry Saved My Life

wearing smiles bought at discount
scarred from the traumas of yesterday
water for the concrete
tears shed in homage for those who from us did fade

broken but not forgotten,
lost from the light once before but found in grace
with clarity lent by life lessons
playing before insightful eyes, never be caged
again will the little boy within be
by anxieties placed by imposed definitions

shackled at the waist, wrists, and ankles
then and now still poverty proves most unforgiving

refusing to surrender, in no particular order:
to death, jails, institutions, and personal prisons
do not tell me what I can't become,
in my words I'm holding an inheritance of wisdom
all tomorrows measured never into the indefinite
without waging war will I die into

free to become my dreams in as much free to suffer,
can it be that it was all so simple?

through tears I have written,
of the light within the words that pour forth is evidence

quarter waters and Now And Laters,
my childhood plays before my eyes in reflection

poetry saved my life more times than I'd like to have endured,
for that I am grateful
I will eulogize poets past always
until I no longer breathe, and on that day so fateful

wherever home was and is,
I will walk carrying crosses of failed expectations
on shoulders narrow,
never wanting to be this strong, I won't be one of the nameless.

poetry saved my life

Burden of Proof

Candlelight vigils coloring the pavement
always a sorrowful shade of bright
its expected darkness crafted from the death
of innocence unmuzzled takes life
but never with such hunger, weak from
the sight of fresh blood once not now
it's too common. Never need madness escape
outward of any babe's mouth
but it happens all too often,
injustice from a cultural perspective textbook-deep.

Statistics don't lie but history does
from time to time after a rewrite, skin-deep
disconnect ever-present being
but no one cares enough to create the dialogue,
hurt people need not hurt people,
they choose to be martyred for the cause.

Blemished by default never, but by default
if you must take respective detour
to understand from a place of love
what's acceptable to deem Heaven. Meal for
the worms in the end all being,
buried by standing convictions sights unseen
truth be told all architecturally sound
can't honestly see it ethical sell dream
told everyone is in reach of. Questioned, all
not on the same time can only deflect
as the evidence is right before our eyes yet still
sold a different narrative by the press.

It's only right refuse see myself as refuse
as well as fleeced further of the truth,

I question if there is freedom behind bars

the burden of proof exists for both sides
of the argument
respective of one's character who does show and prove.

How You React to Pain is What Makes You

Knowing that catching fire in the
words of others is character-building and
truth lies in the details, I will always
wear my scars aloud to promote healing.

Water for the concrete tears suicide
leaping off precipices of eyelashes therein,
I refuse wanting to haunt another's heart with the
unresolved trauma I have within.
I choose to breathe life into the broken
as I'm morally obligated and much more

such work is more than what my narrow
shoulders should be capable to endure
but I still keep pushing the boundaries of
time, space and energy to move
how I do, living not from my ego but
for community always because I got to.

being born into poverty, I had a bit more
than some, for that I'm grateful
so I say live for yourself not for definitions
non-personal.

you ARE capable.

love yourself however you are as
how you react to pain is what makes you
when finding it hard to breathe internalize this:
living allows for a breakthrough!

not here to judge at all, never not too far
from the ground I am to think I can't fall
if I do that's okay because I appreciate
ground-floor opportunities as I do all
the rest. I am not all the wrong society expects
from me after giving its influence and judging me.

judged guilty, a church in the wild
capable of loving and being loved, I am not a beast!

Hennything Goes

stomach touching back to the point of asking me a
random passerby, *can I have what you are eating?*
tears in my eyes pool since it's a familiar feeling
but I've never had to ask someone myself, freedom
I have been without still I am human, nonviolently
I fought for my life to now eat honest meals at the table with policymakers,

every halo if there is one above the head is frayed,
and flickering like vigil candle's fire trying not to waver
itself out of putting what proves flammable in harm's way.

liquor stores, hair salons, barbershops,
nail salons, fried chicken "restaurants,"
bodegas/delis/corner stores and so forth,
nonfunctional stop signs at the crosswalks,
fast food spots turned spots.
see something say nothing is the philosophy,
religion, belief system, or lack thereof there,
no one kumbayas anymore the exploited exploit inequality
maybe in the same breath, they denounce it like
they don't have control of where their dollars are spent

don't run and tell that though, the good die young
is a saying for a reason, Hennything goes I said HEN **H-E-N**
as in short for Hennessy, evidently, it's a staple where
shenanigans come with bottle service, a test of faith
is every breath taken in the pursuit of purpose,
teaching bend within but refuse to publicly break
the presence of it encourages
they of poorest childhoods to seek community in the carceral state

where mostly the unashamed share the
same supervillain origin stories, just different faces, and names
where police aren't friends and can't ever be called
brother, father and so forth, while the sands of time ebb, we wade

in food desserts where the gospel of *can't stop, won't stop*
replaces *Jesus is the truth, the light, the way*,

overdue is change.

Civil Disobedience

wise am I to the truth in the eyes
always is our every trauma endured told
in the spirit of being civil, I refuse to
live my best life from a place of pain, home
is where the light within crowds the room
and lulls and lullabies darkness to sleep

never not my every childhood promise
I live in the flesh Martin's *I Have A Dream*
speech as it's gospel enough to hold as church
when without and with shelter overhead.
wherever collapsing being where the soul

achieves a momentary measure of rest
having or not nothing in pocket still
I'll rise while within lungs courses breath
until there's not, family problems, got 'em
a cousin not so distant is sleep to death
sharing the bloodline of royalty do we all
but in a grave, there can only be one

in reflection, just for today I understand
there is evidence of all good things to come
as long as I move forward with the Earth
as it revolves around the brightly burning sun
and choose to breathe life into those
who need to hear a reminder, *you are loved,*
you have value and you hold space,
your tears aren't ever shed in vain for as they
fall to the concrete they water the rose
desperate to through hell on earth make a way

a five second countdown to pay
homage for those behind the wall fighting to come home 1, 2, 3, 4, and 5.

thank you for holding space for who
aren't here - I once was one indeed - so
before I leave with love, if you remember
me for anything, let it be the next three bars:
our time being reflective of the outpouring
of the hopelessness within traumatized hearts
let us be light; civilized societies shouldn't need jails and prisons...

It Takes a Village

Before mothers' prayers suicide leap
from off the precipice of tongue
while spiritually anchored,
tell the world of all the pathways to redemption,

*Be forever nothing but
the solution for your community's problems
as never always are we tomorrow
the product of our environment.
Wherever holding space,
choose growth to forgive away old pains.*

Reflection before me when you're without
with wealth of tears in eyes pray
for the peace to understand regardless
of struggle, truth is lived always
as such change with time becoming
like water fluidly refusing to break.

Beautifully, better is it believing than
die prematurely in childhood dream
thought to be within reach

forget thinking in maturity
that you'll say ***I can't breathe***
enough to be present for those who'll be
innocently pitter-pattering after
us carrying the torch of the legacies
we're writing into being or lack thereof.

The scars worn on the flesh speaking
aloud for us, nothing being the sum
of all we are to be, silence shouldn't be
amplified to build the village back up.

In the same way, never should poison
into the minds of the youth be pushed
the stories of those we lost yesterday
unless knowing of injustice one should never judge.

When Breathing is An Act of Resistance

breathing is an act of resistance
the life-giver to revolutions coming and gone
the breath coursing through lungs promised not to another having
the undertaker of nightmares and conduit for all achievements
when all seems still, understand while we breathe
we move gliding through the vacuum of space

whether ten toes planted firm or taking flight in dreams
when distance grows between progress let us prepare

let us prepare to fail allow our fires to be reduced from
overwhelming, to diminishing, to entirely overcome

we are gatekeepers
we are the love others seek for them
we are shipwrecks but still discoverable
we are poets with fortunes in our eyes
 more than ever fathomable
we are our truths live aloud
we are the communities we want built
 for those to pitter-patter after us
we are the legacies we write to hold space for us in our absence

when all seems lost and gasping between cries,
look for correction in the words of poets past and present
to remind you
how to breathe when you want to give up

refuse to see yourself as nothing
at times to weather storm all to do is live
so live with the Understanding that
when all seems too dark to endure
breathing... is an act of resistance

No More Jails, No More Prisons

life being a series
of circumstantial highs and lows
I proudly shoulder
crosses on shoulders too narrow
nine-to-fives never had
much in the way of experiencing
found out the hard way
wish I didn't have to but I did
that identity and self-love
can't be found in anyone else

water might or might not be wet,
not my tomorrows just yet
sick and tired of trying to refuse
believing people equal shit, better
is it to internalize this
than to compartmentalize to stay off-centered

I don't even know how to
stay prayed up anymore, all I know is pain
I am committed going forward
to only cry tears of joy, unashamed

I want to know what freedom
feels like deep within, not just know the definition
wanting with everything I am
to know truly love without conditions
survivor of the war on drugs
which we all know what is the aftermath of
change not being able to happen
where there exists thought without action

a world with no more jails,
and no more prisons I want to truly arrive at
but how do we heal when
everyone wants to be America's Top Savage

I Am

nothing more than a
little boy's broken dream
walking unrealized
I am, wanting every tragedy
shouldered to become weightless, I
refuse to accept the blur before
my eyes that every tomorrow holds

grief wearing in reflection, heartbeat
in kind having highs and lows
two hands now failing to hold, I ask myself
did I ever know peace any?

when shipwrecked by melancholy
silence for good cause is deafening

shouldering truths alone that would cause
many a stronger man to fold,
poetry to me is like water to a fish,
it is only right that I write my wrongs

flesh and bone being before ash and dust
never my own death having mourned
with everything I am, I won't go into
any goodnight
gently without applause

She Wrote Poems on the Insides of Envelopes

pffft! pffft! pffft! a little scent attached to
remind you of hope, family, friends, and home
143, we miss you, here's a photograph
of better times, come back from war

scars can be given other backstories
showing the fortune you wear in your eyes
not everyone lives rank and file
always don't forget there is value to every life.

time calls on everyone to change so you
can be more than your every trauma

quotas filled up are by the broken dreams
bringing you where you are, commas
attached to numbers are never worth more
than your freedom. be fish in the water
outmaneuver the sharks, staying in light is
the only way to navigate the darkness
to the community-at-large be the change
that Sam Cooke said was going to come,

when you walk out forty dollars at
minimum on discharge by mandate, ***never run***
never will some live by that but run
after me to catch flight

together we are music
made from the moments that justified
our previous actions, highs and lows, a fusion
of emotional angst gone unresolved, speak
from a place of love from then on please.

for you I wrote a poem on the inside of
this envelope, when alone with caution read:

*you are the lifeline for those who
need never follow your path, lead with conviction,
understand yourself to be our world, your suffering
needn't be carried beyond of prison...*

With Tears in Eyes - For Kalief

Surely with tears in eyes you weren't able to walk
far and wide in search of freedom suffering so
anchored by an accusation. A fighter who never tired
I can't imagine all what you endured, the cold
of handcuffs known all light-consuming, money
talked and... we know the rest. Innocence lost,
brokenhearted, your world a world away were
unable to rescue you from such childhood haunts.
I write because you can't document what occurred
beyond what journalists know. Tried and true
a legacy of activism your death paved the way for,
many carry torches for reform because of you.
More than just your circumstances always, you
were never fool's gold at all. Made ash and dust
not of your own volition but due to breaking ground
in truths, turning the other cheek is too much
where you were, where you are is free of judgment.
Where you are, I am sure you know comfort
the change Sam Cooke spoke about is happening,
now if only everyone did more than wonder
what a world without jails and prisons would look like.

Violence solving nothing from every side
of a confrontation if we all shook hands in agreement
to disagree not one speck in another's eye
would one ever compare theirs against? You broke ground
with your last breath creating the conversation
for so long kept in darkness, *those without are
doomed to never have without any conciliation.*
We all sat at the same table from time to time, more
common is it now. The revolution is being televised!
With every stride I continue taking forward, more
and more, I realize now for nothing you did not lose your life.

Your legacy is eternal. They say only the good die young,
life being only one to live, in our hearts you live on.
While having breath within lungs, I will champion the fight
alongside of others to crown as kings and queens,
all the world's daughters and sons.

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