

# **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 Hennesy, 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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