

WATERING THE SOUL



COURTNEY PEPPERNEILL

Author of Pillow Thoughts

Here I was, and I was thinking about life
and how it can be demanding.

How there are just some days that feel worse
than others. That feel as though every moment
was made to make me feel less than I am.

What to do when
all the thoughts feel
all-consuming.

How do I go about my days when I
feel so out of place? When no matter how
hard I try, it seems far easier to hide?

And so, I thought of all the breaths I had taken
so far. Of all the steps I had already made.
Of all the memories I had woven, the dreams
I'd had, the hearts I had held.

And I continued
to think of these things
as I went about my day.

Because when the struggle feels like too much
and the day feels like I have swallowed the sun,
I remind myself of all the miles I have come
and the journey I have begun.

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There are some things you should do more of, like stop and watch the clouds go by. Release and let go. Follow butterflies. Laugh fully, completely, with your whole belly. Sit in the grass, out in the sun. Fill your space with the things you love. Inhale joy. All things to calm your heart.

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The hurt is not given to you
for no reason at all.
It is meant to be felt,
to be held, and to be released.

You honor yourself each time
you shed new skin,
breathe life into a new day,
by coming undone and
stitching yourself
back together again.

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But fireflies exist in the darkness,
and stars and the moon too.

Such wonder and beauty covered
in the dark, shining in the silence.

It does not matter if you feel joy,
or pain, or sorrow; you can find
wonder in the silence and
all the wisdom for tomorrow.

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The leaves do not stop moving,
even when the wind is soft;
a mere whisper, they still move,
much like our thoughts.

Our minds can be empty, or
our minds can be full,
and in both we are still worthy.

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There is a space between where you have been, where you are now, and where you are headed. And in this space, you will become afraid. Afraid of all your past mistakes, afraid of every step you take today, and more so afraid of all the steps you will take every day after. But it is in this space that you can truly grow. For the fear is simply part of the journey, and to walk the road is to walk alongside the fear.

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The trouble was I looked for myself in the places that had already washed away. I looked for memories that were not my own. I searched the seas and skies for someone else's story instead of acknowledging that I already had a story, and it was built into all the tiny cobblestones of my driveway, the red painted door, the picture frames hanging in my home. I could not disown my struggles or my fears, because they would always return. They were mine. I had to learn to live with them, in the way I lived with choice and fate, and, more importantly, I had to learn that the journey does not have an expiration date.

It was as though, all my life,
I had been standing in front
of a wall.

And on the wall, I had hung
many pictures.

And each picture was
of something I feared.

And over time, I no longer
wanted to look at the wall.

The wall was neither comforting,
nor inviting, nor particularly
pleasant to look at.
But it was not the wall's fault.

For by not taking down
these pictures of fear,
I had not left any room
for the pictures that
belonged there,
pictures of my hopes and
my dreams and my successes.

And so, if we are unwilling
to remove the fear,
we lose ourselves in the
what-if instead of the what-is.

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There comes a point when you
need to stop being so angry at yourself.
You need to stop the anger from
eating away at your heart.
You need to acknowledge that what
you knew then is different from
what you know now
and what you will come to know.

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But you need to stop punishing yourself for all the things you did yesterday, or a month ago, or over the years that have long passed. You cannot unstitch these threads, and you cannot undo the paths they ran. But you can look to new horizons and accept a new sun. You can be kinder to a past you cannot outrun and more patient with a future that allows you to carry on.

Just like the sun,
and how it travels
through the sky each
and every day,
from east to west,
the light takes a journey.

This is much like forgiveness.

You must rise every day,
and you must go through
the process.

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There is an art to letting go of all the mistakes and failures, to paint with forgiveness rather than regret. But sometimes I do not know what to do with all these doubts and fears; I just know that I cannot carry them with me. They will only weigh me down, and such burdens that sit on my heart, they drown me while I try to swim, and they break my wings while I try to fly.

When I returned home,
after months away,
all the plants in my garden
had withered.

There was nothing left,
only the soil.

So, I took my watering can
and began to water every pot.
I placed them in the sun
and made a wish on a blue
robin that flew by.

And slowly, they began to regrow.
For even if I could not see,
it had remained true that the roots
were still in the soil.

You can return once more too.
Beneath the surface of your skin
and under the worries of today,
you still have your heart and soul.
You still have your story.
All you need is a little patience
and a little love to regrow.

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There was nothing about you
that was ever wrong in the first place.
You were not made in error;
there is no mistaking that everything
you are was intended.
The night loves all of the moon
and her many phases.

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Life has been here, as old as the trees and mountains, as far and as wide as the rivers and the sea. And all that you are and how you exist is wrapped into the beautiful, intricate details of this earth. All the dusty roads and the colors painted in the sky, as beautiful and needed as every hello and every goodbye. When you walk these long roads to find the place you can call home, remember it is not about the distance but the passion in every step; it is not about the time it takes but rather your patience in finding yourself and forgiving your mistakes.

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I know what it is like to feel lost and apart from myself. To look at my life in front of me and think about what it may become and if only it would hurry and skip all the parts that will hurt. I know what it is like to lose people and dreams and hopes, to feel stuck and as though life is moving backward, not forward. I know what it feels like to feel empty when the rest of the world feels full. But every day that is given to you is a gift; sometimes it is just in the way the sheets feel after they have been washed, or a cup of coffee that feels like the best cup you have ever had, or the way the sun pokes through the clouds like spotlights lighting up a stage. Sometimes it is friends texting you goodnight, or a call from someone you haven't spoken to in a while, just wanting to check in. Sometimes it is the calmness of your heart after you realize a bad day is just a bad day, and it doesn't measure your purpose or how much you are a work of art.