



Fierce Grace

A Journey of Awakening

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*This book is dedicated to Daniel Ingram for writing the book that
blew my mind and for helping me pick up the pieces afterwards.*

Introduction

After years of spiritual deep diving, my soul caught on fire. I left everything in my life behind to follow this thread. I was taken on an adventure of suffering that went infinitely further than I possibly could have imagined.

I wrote this book of poems during an inconceivably intense time on my journey and published it in September 2019. I was in a deeply altered state of consciousness for the months and years leading up to its release; I now live here.

This is the first piece of content I shared on my journey and it embodies my passion for the crossover between shadow work and contemplative practice – how people need to include the full spectrum of being in order to wake up to their true nature and the true nature of the Universe.

When people have space for their realness and shadows to emerge within a container of fierce love for themselves and others, it becomes possible to live from a place of freedom, joy, truth and love.

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Magic Moments

Dedicated to ALisa Starkweather

Tears that could flood an ocean
Laughter reaching the corners of the cosmos

When I looked into your eyes I saw Universes
Who knew it was possible to feel like one too

Introduction to Meditation

The first time I meditated
A young guy lit a candle
And told us that if we stared at it long enough
It would show us our souls
Like the bacteria that show up
Only under a blue light

I thought it was bullshit
And zoned out for most of the time

It turns out I had visited new parts of myself
And on the way back I accidentally knocked through a dam
That had been holding back a reservoir of grief

I lay in bed and cried for four hours
I didn't understand what had happened to me
Or where these emotions fit
In my understanding of who I was

I needed someone to hold me
And tell me that these parts were welcome, too

The Windows to the Soul

I had always been afraid of the intimacy
Of looking into people's eyes

I was not ready to bare my naked soul
When there were parts of myself
That I could not bear to look at

Suffering

I had no desire to look inside
With a false hope of experiencing moments of peace
My body was too full of unspoken history
Awareness only shone a light on pain and misery

I started transforming myself
When someone showed me
That there is a way out of the suffering
That the way out, is through

They gave me a safe space
To finally scream the words
That had been buried for so long,
Releasing myself from their weight

We Are Not Separate

When my dad drank himself into a stupor
And needed rescuing, again
I finally told him this would be the last time.
I would not let myself drown pulling him out of the water

I carried his pain and mine
Until he drank himself to death
And it transmuted into one big well of grief.
These are the moments where you feel
That we are not separate.

Hopeless

There is liberation to be found
In the worst thing happening

You can be the best possible version of yourself
And still get fucked by life
There are no guarantees

Sometimes we just need to show up to the shit show
And let it all in

Knowing

'You don't know,' the patriarchy insists
Through our laws, our science, our history

Daring to channel the unprovable
Got you burned at the stake
Or cut into tiny pieces
Scattered into dusty corners

It was easier to accept
Than open my heart.
A miserable truth,
The patriarchy lived in me.

Cracking through the hard-shell of resignation
I found a predator
Festering in the shadows
And let it loose in full daylight

I spoke those words aloud to myself in disgust:
'You don't know'
Burning and severing,
I was afraid that I would destroy myself

But the destruction could only reach
The part of me that was afraid of it
Once that was gone,
the predator was nothing

When the fear was destroyed
I remembered that witches and goddesses
Know how to rise from the ashes
And stitch themselves back together

And when they do, they join in the chorus:
We know. Our hearts know.

Heart-Opening

When my heart remembered that it knew

It started firing laser beams from my chest
That were designed to cut through bullshit

And sending searchlights through my eyes
To find people's souls

Intuition

I awoke in the night
And felt the pull of the moon.
Peeking out my tent,
Was not enough.

Letting go of control
Leaning back into the will of I don't know what
I travelled across the grass
Knelt on the ground and prayed to the Earth.

It wasn't done with me yet.
Taken on a journey. Stopped.
My forehead was drawn to the floor
At each of the points of the Compass

'I can see you,' a predator high above me leered.
The fear took my breath away.
And then I laughed in its face
Before returning to my tent to sleep

Confidence

'Carry yourself with the confidence
Of a mediocre white man'

Is easier said than done
When your opinion is valued less
Than someone who knows half as much as you

How many times have I doubted my experience
Because I knew they wouldn't believe me
How many times have they dismissed my beliefs
Because they refused to entertain
That someone like me
Could see what they couldn't

Possibility

What if the purpose of meditation
Is not to shut your mind up
But to allow it to open
Eventually exploding
Into the place where
It doesn't exist separately from anything else

This is the message that changed everything:
Dare to let yourself imagine
That enlightenment is possible for you

Allowing

'I got into meditation when I read that it can
Make you feel like you're on magic mushrooms'
Was the first thing my ex-partner ever said to me
I thought it sounded cool

Ten years later he leant me a book about awakening
That finally helped me feel ok enough in my own skin
To sit down in stillness for 10 minutes at a time

Weird and wonderful experiences during meditation
Were not only allowed
But a sign that you were paying attention.
I stopped repressing what was there
And trying to fit into the mould

Colours and shapes appeared behind my closed eyes.
Just the tip of my finger was so full of bizarre life,
I stroked it along the arm of the chair
And tears of overwhelm sprang to my eyes

Learning

Renovating the house
I was embarrassed to play the podcast
About awakening
While the electrician was there
But he walked in on me painting the kitchen
And it felt too late to turn it off

It changed the conversation between us
We started talking about life
And what stopped us finding peace.
Searching for what is true
Doesn't have to be complicated or secretive.
Listening to relatable people
Say what they reckon about spirituality
Opened the door for us
To look at things in a different way

Surrender

Even when equanimity arrived
There was no peace in it for me
More space for a pointless slog where
Nothing was worth holding on to

There was some liberation:
I no longer cared
For putting on a sunny face
When I felt grey on the inside.

I lost interest in sex
And the idea of getting anything done
A girl in a coffee shop told me their wi-fi was broken
And I lost my shit.

Without resistance
Anger was given free reign,
Bubbling up
Through vast open space

Passion

When you stop faking what makes you happy in life
You make space for passion to start an uprising in you

Guided Loving Kindness

Girls are taught to be caring
Before all else

Which means that
When we grow up to be women
We will swallow our hurt
We will be soft to those who undermine us
We will bite our tongues
Holding in the truth about experience
Rather than say something
That risks upsetting someone

When you have been made to believe
That other people's feelings are your responsibility
You do not need to be taught loving kindness

When you have been told the only way to protect yourself
From the pain of being a woman in this world
Is to perfect the art of kindness
Then the best thing you could hear is
'Sometimes you need to be cruel to be kind'

Music

We sat in the meditation hall
My ear drums vibrated
And soft piano notes
Floated into my mind

It was the violin that
Pierced my heart
And sliced it open
Compassion poured out
Into the field;
Feeling for a friend's suffering,
The struggles they had endured
Tears rolled down my face

'Listen to what your heart has to say'
We were invited
'I'm tired' mine said
So I took it to bed

Kundalini Energy

Intense visualisations appeared behind my eyelids
Tigers, buddhas, snakes
Always only one of their eyes visible
Through the murk
The room started spinning
Like I'd drunk a whole bottle of wine

Even after the bell had rung
I stumbled up the stairs
The room rocking from side to side
And sat down to soup
That I could not face
While I felt like I was riding a ferris wheel

'Try putting your feet on the earth
And grounding'
Energy shot up my spine
Every cell in my body pulsing with golden light

Who knew meditation
Could be such a turn on?

Joint Inquiry

The three of us
Looked into each other's eyes
I'm feeling nervous, I shared
This broke the ice.
Speaking the words
That described my moment by moment experience
I began to open up

The doors broke under the pressure
Unstoppable laughter burst out of me
I tried to regain composure
Which only made it worse
By now waves of giggles
Were spreading through the meditation hall

'Thank fuck for that. It was all getting a bit earnest'
A girl in my group whispered to me.

Afterwards, I thought I needed to explain myself
'It felt like the energy inside me needed a release.
It wanted to connect with others.'

Then I realised that real laughter
Is the best spiritual practise there is
It is one of the only times
We let go and ride the wave of delight together

The Best Advice

'Never let anyone tell you
That this is not important'

Meditation Retreat

Ducks sitting in a row.
Listening thoughtfully to instructions,
Open and soften, arrive in the moment, let go.
How many times can one person
Say let go in the space of a week?

Walking back and forth
As I shed armour and melted old structures.
'Losing the boundary between my foot and the earth
Feels overwhelming', I shared
'Trust', they reassured

I opened my heart and let go into it
The space where there is nothing and everything
Where there is no ground to catch us
Where we fall from one moment to the next
With joyful abandon

In this new state, the environment confused me
My heart couldn't make sense
Of the way my mind was being treated
I was taken out of the meditation hall
And put on gardening duty

My heart wanted to find a way to connect
So it picked up some gardening gloves
And carried me into the hall, during a talk
I waited until the end to give the teachers the gift
'You've lost your mind,' they told me.

I thought that was the point.
They tried to snap me out of it but I couldn't relate
To the fear that was driving them.
My soul had remembered that we are at home
And exactly where we need to be
We just need to show up and give a fuck

'You need to leave. You are having a mental health crisis.'
Trapped in the mind's cage
They couldn't meet me in the depths of the moment.
I felt for their suffering and left calmly.
Hearts are unshakeable
When they remember to be here, now.

The rejection left a long, messy scar
Across the masterpiece of my heart.
May we all be free from suffering
And the causes of suffering, it cried.

Reckless

They call me reckless
But why else are we here,
If not to fall in love with life?

If wisdom is holding yourself steady
Stopping your soul from dancing with reckless abandon
Then let me choose joy over wisdom every time

Core Processor

I used to think that the Universe was a brain
Trying to work something out.
The more I thought about it,
The more it made sense.

Processing our daily experiences
On the cloud of our dreams.
Solving the puzzle of life
A series of neurons firing like 0s and 1s.

I was afraid that if I stopped thinking
It would shut down
Or at least this component would fail
But I did it anyway
More tired of a life in black and white
Than afraid of death

Something died.
The brain let its last spark disappear down into the abyss.
It only took a moment
For the flames to start ravaging my body
Burning away everything I had thought was true

That tiny spark
Had floated down to the cavern of my heart
And landed on a bonfire
That was laid thousands of years ago

The fire was uncontrollable
It had been withheld for so long
And it was hungry to reclaim what it knew belonged to her.
The eruption scared people, it didn't compute.
They hadn't realised yet
That there is no truth,
No puzzle that needs to be solved
Just starlings. And stars.
Dancing with an uncontrollable passion for life.

Loneliness

Is there anything more powerful
Than loneliness of the spirit?

Reaching its shadowy arm
Down your throat to the bottom of your being
And beyond

Its touch turns things to dust.
Not the rich story-filled grit of the earth
But the grey dust of death

It disintegrates stories and joy
Into air-bourne particles
That float away
Homeless, loveless

Retreated from Society

I walk through the fire
And let it burn away the resistance
I soften into the river of my soul
And let it rip away the self
My heart breaks
And is flooded by the ocean of suffering

The cycle repeats
Surely, this must be the bottom
I cry out in agony
Only to surface once more
Somehow simultaneously lighter, freer
And holding unfathomable depths of compassion

The Flames

Welcomed into the flames.
As a punishment? I wondered
Skin was seared off
Layer by painful layer

The wild wolf emerged. As a rite of passage?
It howled and thrashed
Trying to escape the flames.
But that too was burned away

Only ashes remained
And the scorched, fertile earth
Absorbing the blood of the wolf
And the tears of the girl.

It's a gift, I realised, the only gift that anyone needs.
Don't tell them what's in the box
I remember you saying
Or they will never open it...

Home

'Emotions are just visitors
Let them come and go.'

Who resides here then?
The lonely heart calls.

Love pops up one morning
Only to be gone by noon.

Is it too much to ask
For love to move in
And make my body
Its permanent home?

Rapids

I gave up believing that I needed to be here or there
This way or that
Life picked me up
And threw me down the rapids

Doubt was gone
But it didn't remove fear, or pain, or heart-ache
It churned them up
In a series of frenzied trust exercises

'Trust me!'
The Universe demanded
I was pulled across the rocky riverbed
And held underwater

While the shirt was pulled off my back.
I crashed through the surface, topless
Gasping for breath. I laughed uncontrollably
At the joy of cool water on bare skin

'Of course! Of course you wanted to show me this.'
And I wonder where next..

The Archetypal Realm

Sometimes it feels like the conductor of the story
Is sticking its middle finger up at you
It looks on and laughs
While the organs of your soul are dragged across the desert
'Doesn't she know? They don't actually belong to *her*'?

'Fuck you' I think
While I fantasise about pulling off your fingernails one by one
'Don't you know they'll grow back?'
I'll ask, over the sound of your screams.

Time

A glimpse into a different world
Where events are peppered through time
Jumping back and forth
Or perhaps everything is happening at once

Time travel is an enticing myth for children
And adults who want to relive and revive their stories
Regrets are so compelling

Would we change it if we could?
Deep down, at our deepest depths
In the place where we are all connected
This is what we want.
For this moment, this story, to play out.

I look back and I wouldn't change it for the world.
Or maybe I would, maybe I will.
I sprinkle my past with forgiveness and kindness
And just like magic
Release myself from my present stuckness

The grains of sand drop through the hourglass,
But they aren't collecting anywhere
Our location is not static,
It is the fall that is sacred.

Divinity

The Universe lounged
Basking in its own glory
Chemicals reacting throughout its body
It enjoyed the Samadhi.
Sparks appeared like fireflies, bringing the void to life
And creating a mandala of Divinity

Chemistry

Separation and collision
Cause reactions
That bubble through space-time
Softly tickling the cosmos

When couples sit near each other
Their heartbeats fall into sync
This is how the Universe
Falls in love with itself

Create an epic story of your existence; collide with life
The Universe wants to lounge around in bed
Having poetry read to it
And enjoying great sex

The Wave and the Particle Walk into a Bar

Creativity needs an audience, especially a joke
One person delighting another
By ending a story in an unexpected place

We think that the Universe is made of soulless equations
But why else would it be possible
To collapse the wave in an unpredictable spot
If not to amuse the Cosmos?

Soul Mates

I don't believe that soul mates
Are restricted to romantic love
Or that you only have one
Or even one at a time

My soul wants to fall in love
With as many other souls as possible
Friends, partners, colleagues, heroes
They are all potential soul mates

Listen carefully enough to your heartbeat
Your soul will let you know
When it is in the company of another
That delights it

Some people measure the success of their life
By the amount of money or status they have amassed
For me, the marker of success
Is how much time my soul is hanging out
With other souls that make it happy

Bargaining

Forget everything you have conceived about enlightenment
It will not be a graceful ascension into pure light
If there is one thing I have learnt about waking up, it is this:
It is usually the one thing that you don't want it to be

You don't end up a hero conquering the story
You end up a peasant tying yourself into the messiest of knots
While navigating the midsts of uncertainty.
Occasionally you will hit upon a moment of pure bliss

Where you suddenly realise
You have been carrying a heavy weight
That you can put down
But mostly you will wrestle and bargain with yourself

So afraid to let go of the one thing
That you believe offers you some hope
Or some certainty, or some reassurance
That you are not a bad person

You will beat yourself to a pulp before you let go.
You would rather die.
And that is what you must do, let that part of you die
So that you can be reborn

Lighter, freer and more able to surrender to the moment

Building a Human

A mess of cells
Wrapped with neurons
At least one part bacteria to one part human.
Mix with plenty of water.

Each piece is sensing
And responding, at its own rate.
Weave channels throughout
For hormones and impulses to travel
To and from the extremities

Specialists gather in the centre
A hive of activity
That keeps things ticking along

Hearts set our intention
Brains present us with options
Guts make decisions
Bodies carry out actions

Do not believe it when they say
You are defined by your thoughts
Our minds may be dirty
But our hearts are pure
And our guts know what we need to do

We are not here to get it right
We are here to have fun and grow

Threads

We weave threads of silver and gold, blindly
Hoping to prove our worth, by dazzling someone
With the brilliance of our creation

We snatch other's threads
And throw them back into the crucible
So that we can weave them exactly how we wanted

We don't realise,
We aren't here to weave. We are the threads.
We're here to feel the gentle joy and the brutal tug
Of rising and falling, travelling under and over.

Let go of the illusion of control
Feel the rub of thread against thread
And open yourself to the satisfaction
Of being an inextricable part
Of something bigger than you

Jealousy

We feel like other people's shining
Makes us look less brilliant
What if no-one notices me next to their glow?

The truth is that their light illuminates us
Exposing our light and sharpening our shadows.
We are shown our extremities,
Which we normally hide so carefully from others

We long to be a sky full of stars.
We are drawn to the light like moths.
We are afraid to see ourselves for what we really are;
Soft mammals endlessly navigating
The space that falls between the light and the dark

Rape

The unthinkable.
A place our mind is not allowed to go
Never mind our words.
But our actions,
They go there.
We all know someone who has been raped.
Mother Earth, for a start.

We cordon parts of ourselves off
In the hope that they will never be entered
But it doesn't work like that
Dark alleyways
Remove accountability
The more we resist our thoughts
The more they remain a part of us
Festering in closed fists
Oozing out in ways we don't understand

Letting the light in
Is easy when it's parts of ourselves that we love
But what about those dark, rotting corners?
I opened my palm
And held what was there up to the light
Fantasies and fears of raping and being raped
I was afraid that letting the light touch them
Would make them more solid
More likely to manifest

The light seared away judgements of good versus bad
And my heart cracked open
Feeling for all those whose bodies have been claimed
Force-fed powerlessness
It poured fuel on the fire in me
That knows what it doesn't want
Dampened for so long by society's expectations
Of what a woman is

The paradox of grace
Is the more we allow the darkness to surface
The lighter it gets
Increasing our capacity to act
With clarity and courage

Shadows can disappear
Thoughts can be free
It is our actions that count
I let myself think the unthinkable.
My no is clearer as a result.

Overflowing

Power grabbed, judgements formed
She stands on the scorched earth
Ignoring the pointless wars raging around her
She walks amongst the soldiers
Not caring which side they fight for
She sees the wounded child inside
And allows the ocean of her heart to overflow

She urges them not to fight
In a war that destroys
The very thing they are trying to preserve:
Their humanity. And their dignity.
It only takes a moment of vulnerability
To put down your weapons and listen
They cannot bear the thought
So they go back to the front line.

Most people would turn their heads away at the shit
That oozes out of their battle wounds
She knows that the worst wounds are invisible
Hatred, fear and shame
Pour out in a toxic cocktail of despair
But it doesn't stick to the kind of love she radiates

They paint her as a victim. It's a compelling image:
Stood in ruins, blood spattered across her face.
But she is not a marketing campaign, she is a woman
and she chooses fierce love, again and again.
Lay down your weapons
And come and rest a while here, she invites
If you stay long enough
You may forget why you were fighting in the first place

Soul Mates II

Humans have such a strong desire to classify;
Trying to understand who we are and where we stand

We stick ourselves together like lego bricks
Our block fits neatly onto our romantic partner's block
We place our block into the hierarchy at work
We build little structures with each of our friendship groups

But souls don't work like that; and neither do humans, really
Occasionally when we feel at home with someone
We get a glimpse into a different way of existing
We are no longer blocks, but marbles

When we allow ourselves to show up in our fullness
We are faced with the slightly terrifying prospect
That we can't define each other as easily as we'd hoped
But the sound of two marbles knocking against each other
Is immensely satisfying, whichever way they collide

There is a charming and elusive type of relationship
That can shift gears through the friendly, the familial
The romantic, the conflicting, the creative and the ineffable
Without needing to settle for too long in one place
Or classify itself

Being in the presence of another soul
Sharing this sense of freedom
Reminds us that we don't need to judge or define each other
What we really need is space in which we can show up
And allow our marbles to move, in all our different ways

This is the only way we can learn
who we really are and what is truly important

Hell

Go to Hell, but keep moving when you get there
And you will come out the other side distilled
Take care with whose invitation you accept
There are different routes through the abyss.

Justice stands at the gates of Hell
Deciding who will enter into the fire;
An adventure of suffering,
A punishing route to the transformed self.

Balance knows it is incalculable
Too complicated for one person to hold.
A group sat around a fire
Telling the stories that help each other
Travel their inner journey,
That's Balance.

Hell feels different
When you experience it this way.

Space

We need space to heal
And get in touch with our true nature

Sometimes this means physical space,
Retreating to a meditation centre
With no expectations on our minds or bodies,
We can allow ourselves to settle into a state of peace

Or it could be Space
Being reminded that we are exactly where we need to be
In a Universe of exploding stars,
How could we possibly feel anything other than pure wonder?

But it is so easy for humans to get stuck
Feeling like we are broken
Most often the only way to see
Anything other than a hateful mess
Is for another human to create space for you
To give you their undivided presence
And to let their heart silently communicate
You are worthy
You are seen
You are welcome,
As you are

Things That I Believed

We are constantly making sense of experience.
In order to open our minds to new ways of looking
We have to be willing to get a little lost
Society would call it psychosis, I prefer creative thinking

If we see ourselves like children
Playing to learn about the world
We are able to hold our beliefs lightly
And laugh at how ridiculous we are

In the spirit of humour and open-heartedness
Here are some things that I believed:

I hung out with people in my head
For days at a time
Thinking that they were meditating
And connecting telepathically at the other end
The world was going to end.
The Universe was going to divide into six Universes
Ruled over by six meditation teachers
And connected by rainbows
Men were going to be able to get pregnant
Or a bunch of them were going to be wiped out
Someone I admired was the internet
Someone I loved was my destiny
Some enlightened people
Could inhabit other being's bodies
People who voted for Brexit
Were going to be beamed into outer space

There were 10 dimensional ways of experiencing the world
I just had to build more concentration to get there
I was going to have to die
And, hopefully, be resurrected
Enlightened people were divided into warring factions
Who battle for power by recruiting meditators to their armies
I was responsible for healing several people from afar
And could send them dreams across the world
My heart was a garden
That could hold other people's consciousness inside it
This was somehow the key to a better future,
It was a nice place to hang apparently.

Every time my fixed ideas dissolved
And another layer of perception was peeled back
I got closer to the realisation
That it's not about ideas

We aren't here to get it right
We are here to learn to love
Courageously and fiercely
And that is how the collective heals

Sanity

I lost my marbles for a while
Did you find them again?
Sort of.
They were crushed
And scattered through the Universe
Like stars

Strength

Don't fuck with someone who writes poetry
They may appear soft and malleable
While they are in front of you
But once you have retreated
They will unleash a power that is stronger than any person
For the heart's knowing knows no bounds
It can permeate the walls that men fail to scale or demolish
It will destroy you, not with violence
But with the unrelenting force of kindness and compassion

Clarity

Did you hear their hearts?
They fall so quickly
Into weighing it all up
And seeing how they fair.

They will appreciate
Your clear blue eyes
For seeing them as they are

The Universe's Poetic Licence

You may think that I am being poetic when I say

I felt laser beams shoot from my heart
I sent lightning bolts ripping across the sky
I shot fountains of energy through my skull
I got cats to purr using my energy body
I learned how it is to be an entire Universe

But this was my literal experience
Truth does not exist external to us
It is not held in a scientific database
It emerges from our relationships
With the world and each other
A human heart is capable of filling with so much magic
Let yourself fall into the mystery
And be amazed by life

True Nature

The true nature of reality
Is that there is no one true nature
Every part of your experience
Is as valid as every other part

Find the people that feed your soul
Be fierce in the fight for wellbeing
Open your heart and mind to change
Tell your story bravely

This is how you become the creator
Of a truly joyful life