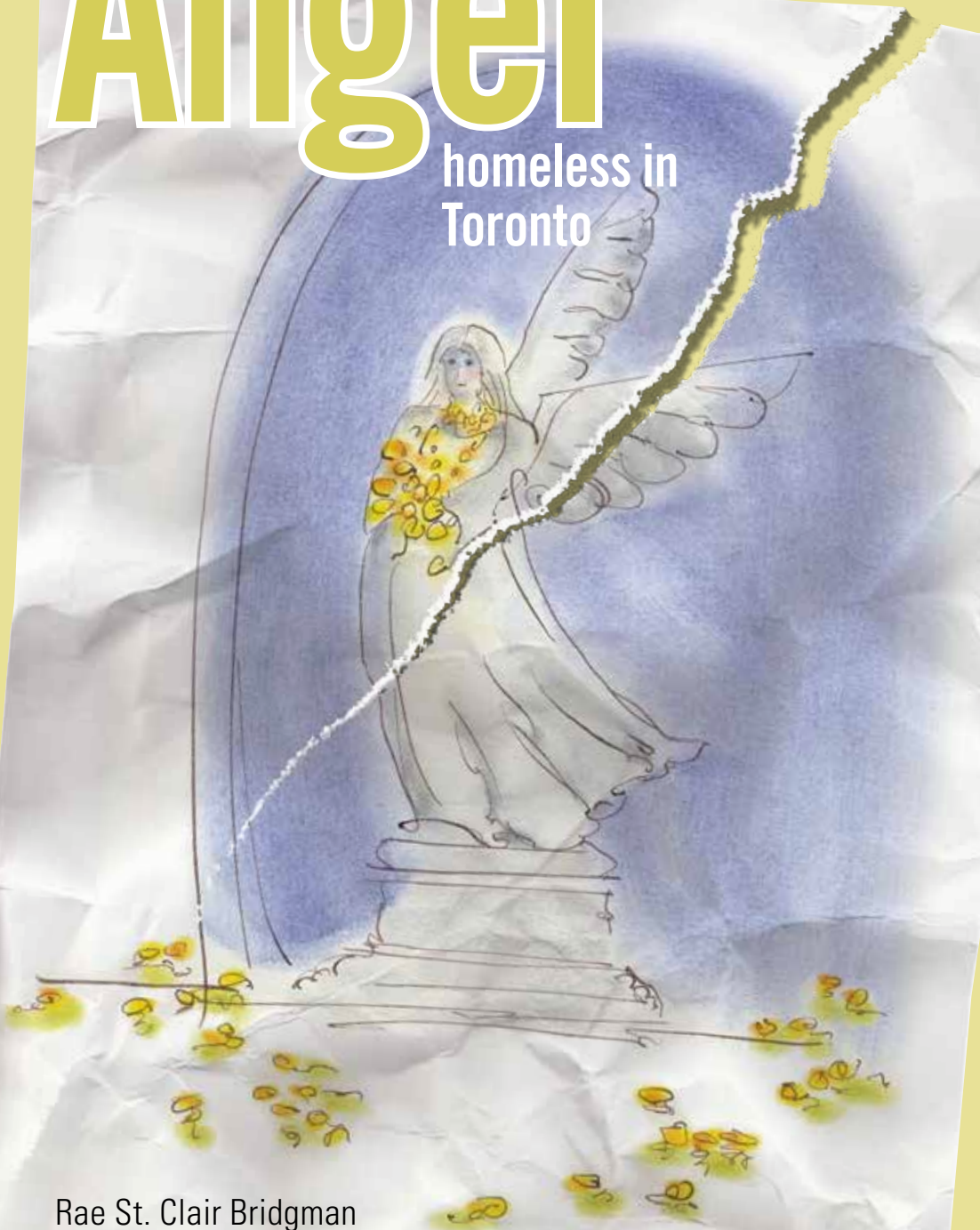


# Angel

homeless in  
Toronto



Rae St. Clair Bridgman

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Toronto

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*Angel* is inspired by the lives of  
women street survivors in Toronto

This story is dedicated to those who have  
died on the streets



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1

## scar



have this scar on my forehead  
hair covers it up  
but when I swim  
which isn't very often  
everyone's lookin' at it  
I know what they're thinkin'  
know exactly what they're thinkin'

they're whisperin'  
won't ask  
too scared

what's that on her head

it's a scar stupid  
I know it's a scar  
but how did she get it  
you ask  
no you ask  
I said it first

they don't wanna know anyway  
it's obvious



no one has a scar like this unless  
go ahead  
yeah someone's tried to  
kill me

girl you must be here for some reason  
that's what I keep tellin' myself  
you must be here on this blessed earth  
for some reason

gotta be a reason  
why you're still here

could as well be dead  
or worse  
livin' like some jellyfish  
swimmin' around  
lookin' for somethin' to eat  
like a lot of people do

2

## once upon a time



once upon a time I was born

Toronto's where I'm from  
this is home  
don't know if it's where I belong  
but this is where I am

a lot of places in this world  
buy a ticket  
get on a bus  
head out  
got money  
it's a free country

maybe Montreal  
got a friend there  
heard it's nice  
maybe some day

so yeah I was born

she was born

all you can say about that

no baby quilt  
no teddy bear  
no lace curtains  
no music box  
no pink  
no pink

rock-a-bye baby on a treetop  
wind blows  
cradle drops  
nice thing to sing to your kid

cradle drops  
no more baby  
no more song  
no more  
no more

it's the back of a bus for me  
everyone's hackin' and coughin'  
moanin' in their sleep  
grindin' their teeth

the wheels go round and round  
you want to get off but  
you can't

they stop get a coffee  
everybody looks  
as if they're wishin'  
where eggs over-easy  
slop off the edges of the plate  
edge of the world  
no centre no more

they stop get a coffee  
somebody gives them to my mother

a bunch of dandelions  
the sun is shining on your little angel

that's what I imagine anyways

dandelions are weeds  
that's what they say  
they pesticide 'em to death  
pull 'em out by the roots of  
their little yellow heads

go ahead kill 'em  
you're only killing yourself  
goes around comes around  
outta sight outta mind  
comes and bites your bare behind

small suns  
braidin' a gold crown

sticky bitter stem  
some old man he told me once  
s'good for warts

ghostball swine's snout  
lion's tooth cankerwort  
blow the puff make a wish  
eat the root  
you'll piss in your bed for sure

seeds gone  
floatin' off God knows where  
what's left  
little bald head  
all poked with holes

all's I got  
my name

my mother gave me  
everybody's gotta have a name  
or you're not real

all's I got  
    my name  
and this scar on my head

colicky cryin'  
alcoholic and colic  
bad combo

don't know where she is now

## somebody's mother



it's my son's birthday today  
 he's a rape baby  
 he's three or four  
 maybe he's five now  
 gave him up  
 right after he's born

picture in my wallet  
 never show it

eyes like dark raisins  
 dandelion fluff hair  
 skin smooth like inside a shell

he'll never know who I am  
 he'll make his own story

don't know my family  
     no one  
 maybe I'm standin' right beside 'em  
 maybe that guy with the red shirt  
 maybe that woman  
 cut lip and a bruise  
 maybe them  
     don't know

can't carry on the stories  
if you don't know the story  
behind the stories

can only tell my own story  
my son he'll do the same

you know those bag ladies on the street  
one near Spadina and Bloor  
livin' by the church  
bags wrapped in rope  
whole street it's her living room  
her kitchen her bedroom  
she won't come inside  
she says they'll get her  
if she comes inside  
she won't go with them she says  
you gotta wonder who them is  
until one day you understand

she says she's born in England  
she's born again on the boat goin' over to Canada  
then she lives in Sri Lanka and she's born again  
she's been born lots and lots of times  
maybe she's the storyteller  
you get to thinkin'  
what if I really am bein' born  
again and again

stop to help those bag ladies  
struggling with their stuff  
ask them if they need help  
it's the right thing to do  
they need help gettin' across the street  
I know them

this one woman she lives  
on a bench at city hall with  
two pink suitcases matchin'

diaries in the small one  
they're all tied up in yellow ribbon  
her writing it's all thin like spider legs  
she writes everything down  
everything that ever happens

she's a lady  
shiny nails nice jewellery  
you wouldn't know  
you'd hardly know  
    she's livin' outside  
she's like some tourist  
watchin' people  
watchin' all the wild things they do  
she likes livin' outside

don't wanna be in some shelter  
with a bunch of crazies

she's carryin' around a whole library  
only all the books are written  
by one person

don't know where she is now  
no vagrants allowed  
no drifters  
no beggars  
no panhandlers

she doesn't drift she doesn't beg  
    she's a writer

the business type he says  
rude things about bag ladies

I turn to him  
he looks shocked  
I'm talkin' to him  
can tell he's squirming  
his eyes are darting around



he's tryin' to escape  
the situation  
hopin' he can get rid of me with a loonie  
can see it in his eyes

he walks away real quick  
like I'm crazy  
he's tryin' to  
escape his own guilt  
like it's somebody else's problem  
when really  
he should be doin' something

they get this scaredy look in their eyes  
like they already know what I'm gonna say  
but they don't want to hear me say it

they wanna run home  
forget they ever saw someone livin'  
on the street  
someone carryin' everything they own  
holdin' it tight 'cause  
someone'll steal it

this is somebody's mother  
in fact maybe it's your mother  
maybe it's your grandmother or your auntie  
or maybe  
maybe it's your sister  
your cousin  
your neighbour  
maybe it's your ex-wife  
and if you don't watch out  
it'll be you

why are you makin' fun of your own mother  
why are you makin' cracks  
know nothin' about  
you can't see the person  
all you can see is the bags

no matter  
how many soup kitchens  
how many churches  
how many reports  
how many homeless  
how many newspapers  
how many movies  
how many marches

I want to make those ladies feel  
you're still wanted  
someone remembers you  
we still remember

you can be yourself  
true to who you are  
what's good about you  
    not what's misunderstood  
take the good and the misunderstood

maybe you won't leave anything behind  
to be remembered by  
doesn't mean  
you don't live  
you don't love  
you don't hope and dream

maybe it's 'cause  
maybe I'll turn into one of them  
if I don't watch myself  
that's me  
that's me pushin' that shopping cart  
plastic bags hangin' off  
every which way  
that's me carryin' all my stuff in a suitcase

I wake up  
    one day  
I'm not gonna do this  
don't want to be doin' this  
it's like one of those things

something happens  
somebody dies  
you wake up  
you say to yourself  
    enough already

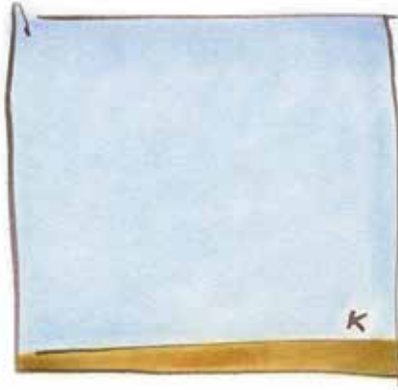
no big explosion  
no big revelation  
it's a quiet thing  
it's  
    I'm doing this

you hit  
    bottom  
nowhere else to go

but I keep bumpin' into walls  
you can't do this you can't do that  
I'm turnin' back into something  
I don't want to be  
    again  
        again  
            again

problems don't stop comin'  
problems don't take holidays  
by the time I solve my problems  
there are just more problems

## hidden heart



when I'm a baby  
 they put me in an orphanage  
 big stone building lotsa windows  
 brick wall so high  
 you can't imagine climbing it  
 then I go to this school with nuns

the doctors say I'm unadoptable  
 basically the same thing as unlovable  
 your own family don't want you  
 no one else will ever have you either  
 'cause someone tells them  
 she's unadoptable

no room for you  
     anywhere on this planet  
 at least that's the impression  
 what do you do when you're told  
     you're unadoptable

those doctors  
 whoever they are  
 they're the ones who decide  
 they have the power  
 they sign all the forms

did they ever talk to me  
ask me what I thought

look at me  
I'm still alive  
did they think I'd give up and die  
make it easier on everyone  
    give up and die

then they won't have to fill out  
no more forms for me  
close my file  
don't ever have to worry about where to put her  
    ever again

no where's she goin' next  
no legal responsibility  
'cause she up and died all by herself  
they didn't even have a chance to  
give their permission

it's easier for everyone  
all you gotta do  
sign here on the dotted line

they'll let her into heaven this one time  
speed her on her way  
    nothin' left to say  
    get out of my way

I'm sick all the time  
in and out of hospital  
it's my kidneys  
they're infected  
my feet swell up

no one'll ever adopt me

at school they put me in the blue room  
whenever I do something wrong  
spend hours in there

can't remember  
tryin' to forget

can't remember  
here and there

flash into my mind  
like a slippery fish  
flash  
    gone

I'm all alone  
walls so thick  
you can't hear any sounds  
there isn't no windows  
can't tell if it's night or day

stone sandpaper walls  
stale bread  
bed  
not much else

someone scratches a  
    letter  
corner of the wall  
behind the bed  
near the floor  
where no one can see it  
    only I see it

K

play this game  
Kay's my new friend  
we talk all the time  
have tea parties  
she likes five lumps of sugar in her tea  
we eat cookies the marshmallow kind  
covered in chocolate

they never allow us to eat those at school  
but Kay likes them  
    a lot  
she gobbles them all up

Kay don't be greedy  
one cookie at a time

make up stories  
read to Kay  
she reads to me too

long spelling contests  
let Kay win most of them though

she's a cry-baby  
if I don't let her win  
she cries and cries  
no stoppin' her  
she kicks and screams  
they come runnin'  
take her away

sometimes the nuns they let us  
have a dictionary sometimes  
Kay and I play dictionary

close your eyes  
open the dictionary  
    anywhere  
point your finger  
keep your eyes closed

no cheating  
you opened one eye  
saw you peeking  
no you didn't  
yes I did  
I'm not gonna play with you any more  
    if you cheat

'cause I saw you  
it's not fair  
you're tryin' to trick me  
bet you want me to lose  
don't you don't you  
can't fool me  
I won't be friends with you  
no more

open your eyes  
read the word  
other person spells whatever word  
your baby finger touches  
your baby finger

pick a word  
leafin' through the book  
find a word  
guess the meaning

I'm laughin' so hard  
my sides hurt

take all the letters in the word  
make new words

Kay's name backwards yak  
it's true  
she's yakkin' and talkin'  
no tomorrow

Kay and I we laugh for hours

that's when she isn't cryin'  
sometimes she cries so much  
she can't stop

how can she have that much water inside her  
I swear she can fill a pail  
with her tears



she bangs her head  
against the wall  
that's the worst  
I can't get her to stop

## blue room green room



I collect words like people  
 collect stones  
 when they go to the beach

carry this dictionary in my pocket  
 found it on the sidewalk  
 there are words in here for things  
     you'd never think there'd be a word for  
 dot on the i  
     tittle  
 I kid you not

takes me a long time to figure out why

why I can't sleep in the dark  
 why I sleep door open  
 why I can't sleep

count backwards from one hundred  
 whatever else stupid thing they tell you to do

it isn't until  
 I go back to Children's Aid  
 big stack of papers frayed corners  
 flippin' through faded ink

tryin' to understand  
in the spaces  
in between all the words  
what they write about me

date number name born  
allergies medications notes  
please see attached  
custody order  
author concludes  
follow up  
not  
not  
no

and that's when I really understand why

punished  
punished  
punished

you can make a lot of words out of that one  
nude hips  
pushed in  
shined up

so this is the room I'm in  
    the blue room  
old yellow papers  
yellow like groundhog teeth  
they don't say how long I'm in this room  
in there more times than not  
Kay and the tray of cold food  
but Kay she doesn't care

if the light's on  
it's like something's watchin' over us  
guardian angel  
nothin' will happen if that light's on

then I have foster parents  
they're gettin' paid  
I'm like a job for them  
yeah I'm their job  
I'm a business opportunity  
they're the only parents I have  
at least the closest thing to parents

I'm sick so much  
in and out of hospital  
spend more time  
in than out  
needles and tubes  
I'm a pin cushion

middle of the night  
someone's wailing  
end of the hall  
shoes  
squeak  
fade

pee only keeps so long in a room  
no getting away from the smell  
sour  
even when they take the bedpan away

who's ever in the next bed  
sneezin' coughin' moanin'

want to go home

this green light  
street lamps comin' through the windows  
shadows 'gainst the wall  
gettin' bigger and bigger  
they're gonna swallow you up

want to go home

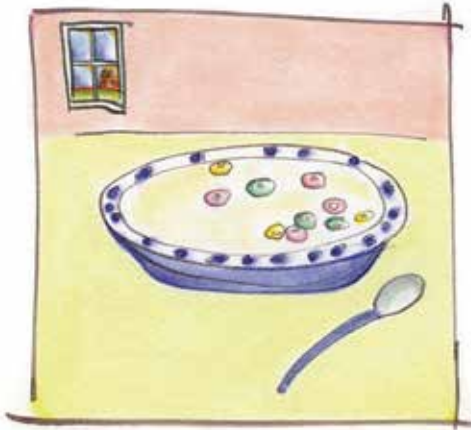
day break  
trolleys jolt  
dishes clatter  
shadows slink off

want to go home

other kids in the room  
soon as I get to be friends with one  
their bed's  
    empty  
like they were never there

want to go home

## nothin' ever changes



Children's Aid Society has the power  
 they've got a God-given right  
 'cause I'm a crown ward

yeah I'm wearin' a real crown on my head  
 a dandelion crown  
 everyone does what I say  
 they bow low  
 Your Majesty this and Your Majesty that

wardship means plain old hardship  
 they pick you  
 up out of any place  
 do whatever they want with you

all they need is a piece of paper  
 stamp it date it sign it  
 they got that piece of paper

without a piece of paper  
 you're nothin'  
 nobody listens

listen to that voice  
 my foster mother

get those wretched weeds off the table  
how many times do I have to tell you  
    don't pick the dandelions  
bet your hands are all sticky now too  
go wash your hands  
right this instant

I'm eatin' a bowl of cereal  
mindin' my own business  
watchin' the dandelions in the cup on the table  
picked 'em this morning before breakfast  
but their heads are droopin'  
they're closin' up already

if I hadn't picked them  
let them grow  
the way they were supposed to  
they woulda been happy

phone rings  
put my spoon  
    down

you don't swallow  
so you can hear everything  
    heart  
    thumpin'

yes she'll be ready that's fine  
not long to pack her things  
no problem I understand

no I don't understand  
or maybe I do

fly falls into my bowl  
legs wavin' around

climbs out  
    falls back in  
pick it up with my spoon  
put it on the table  
soggy wings

even if you're halfway happy somewhere  
nobody asks you  
do you want to stay  
first you're here then you're  
    not

pack up your clothes  
say goodbye  
where's your toothbrush  
no time to cry  
look under the bed  
see if it's there  
go outside and play  
they'll be here soon  
it's not good-bye  
don't worry  
you're comin' back

but you never do

they come get us  
Kay forgets something  
runs back inside

come back Kay

I try to tell them

they leave her behind  
yank my arm  
suitcase in the trunk  
see Kay's face in the window

never see Kay again



they throw you somewheres else  
sink or swim  
fly or die

you'd think they'd tell you why  
you'd think there'd be some reason

they just want to fill you up  
more paper  
it's more proof

it's all like it or lump it  
gotta do exactly what they say  
if you don't like it  
they won't support you  
no more

for your own good  
we love you  
God loves you  
don't expect  
something for nothin'  
what's a little freedom for a bowl of cereal

you can't complain about nothin'  
beggars can't be choosers

we're takin' care of you  
world doesn't revolve around you  
you should be thankful that  
there but for the grace of God

scream inside my head  
I'm no beggar don't go tellin' me  
can can't do

they write it down with their fancy pens  
write down what you're tellin' them  
as if writin' it down  
will change things

so that's how you feel  
then what happened  
that's hard to believe  
we'll look into this  
    straight away

arrangements can be made  
sorry to hear that  
we'll see what we can do  
now you're quite sure  
you're not makin' this up  
of course no doubt perhaps  
certainly definitely absolutely  
we'll see what we can't do

scream inside my head is gettin' louder  
she's really not listening

you're thinkin' about the argument  
with your husband this morning  
the kids wouldn't eat their cereal  
what should we have for supper tonight  
whatever else people think about

you're starin' at that piece of paper on your desk  
you're starin' at your pen  
you're starin' at the desk  
the telephone  
the floor  
the ceiling  
the clock

goddammit you're lookin' at the fly crawlin' on the wall  
more than you're lookin' at me

and you're writin' it all down  
your head nods  
sympathy oozes under the door  
but it never changes

no point in even tryin'  
soggy fly in the cereal bowl  
nothin' ever changes

does anybody else  
ever read what's written down  
on those pieces of paper

you think  
they must  
but if they did  
they'd do  
    something

it's like those pieces of paper are blank  
or they're usin' invisible ink  
it disappears after you leave the room  
whatever they write down  
it's like they have amnesia

you begin to think  
maybe that really didn't happen

well it must have happened  
because I remember it happened  
even though everybody's askin' you all the time  
are you sure that's what really happened

yeah I'm sure

even though I keep tellin' them  
    nothin' ever changes

## run away



I go to a girls' boarding school  
 I'm nine when I go in  
 leave there when I'm fourteen

my foster parents  
 I write them lots and lots of letters  
 they hardly ever write back

I know they aren't my parents  
 obviously  
 but when you got nothin' to hold onto  
 you take what you can get

I'm in boarding school  
 those five years

there's a lot of good  
 first lover  
 there's a lot of bad  
 accused of things  
 slapped around  
 this place is run by nuns too

there's a big dance in a week  
can't go unless you clean your room  
cleanliness is godliness  
dirt's the devil's work  
in their eyes

you can't go anywhere  
without hearin' someone talk about  
the dance  
everyone's so excited  
the nuns say they'll  
cancel the dance  
but they can't stop  
the whispers

what you gonna wear  
you can't wear that  
so-and-so's got the same thing  
definitely not  
that's terrible

nothing to wear  
wear this belt  
you can borrow it if you want  
who are you goin' with

the nuns will die if they  
catch you  
what would be so bad about that

where did you get it  
my sister sent it to me  
can she get one for me too

I'm up real early this morning  
strip the wax from the hallway floor re-wax polish  
floor's so shiny  
you can see yourself in it

take everything out of my room  
clothes shoes books papers  
scrub  
the ceiling  
the walls  
the windows  
the cupboards  
under the bed  
dust until  
every last mouse turd's gone  
put the spiders outside  
room's so clean  
looks like there's no glass in the window  
you can eat off the floor  
it's that clean

four o'clock  
get ready for the dance  
brush my hair a hundred times  
maybe two hundred  
hair's as shiny as the floor  
wear my favourite top  
blue with the big yellow flower

one of the staff comes up to me  
why didn't you clean your room you silly girl  
clean it up now  
or you don't go tonight

she's lookin' at me like  
I'm something nasty stuck to  
    the bottom of her shoe  
piece of chewed gum  
residue scum  
no one ever looked at me like that  
    before

but I spent all day on this room

either you clean this room  
right this minute or  
you don't go

no point in lying to me girl  
clean this room  
and the hallway  
no dance for you  
you shameful girl

that's what she says  
you shameful girl

she did finish it  
we saw her do it  
we saw her  
her room and the hallway  
it's not fair  
you have to let her go

but she doesn't believe me  
she doesn't believe anybody  
she can see perfectly well  
how shiny the floors are

she's a mean woman  
plain nasty

some things you try to understand  
you go over them again and again  
tryin' to figure out where the truth is

all you've got  
is your own truth

you can't crawl out of your own skin  
into someone else's to figure out  
what they're doin'  
why they're sayin'

things don't match  
no way they ever will  
right where the black and the white meet  
that's where people get hurt

I'm obedient  
follow the rules  
never get in anybody's way  
mind my own business  
    until now

I run away

wander around the streets  
until 2 in the morning  
walkin' plain angry  
get away as far as I can  
never goin' back there  
    never  
they can't make me go back  
they can't make me

it's summer and it's rainin' and rainin'  
I'm walkin' through these big puddles  
worms all over  
lookin' for some place better  
than here

this guy stops  
he's drivin' a rusty old blue pick-up  
what are you doin' out here all by yourself

must look strange in my blue shirt  
big yellow flower

he buys me warm food  
greasy spoon joint  
eggs over-easy  
slop off the edges of the plate

edge of the world

no centre no more



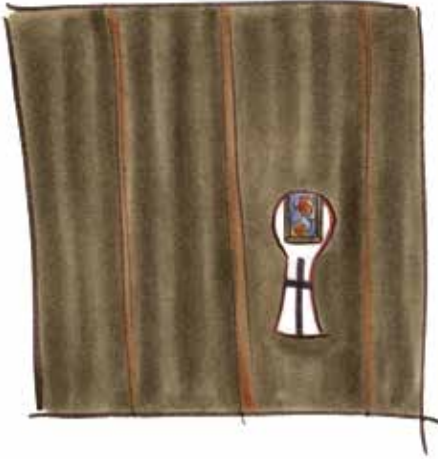
he asks me what I'm doin'  
tell him what happened  
he listens really listens  
feels like somebody hasn't listened in a long time  
maybe never

nice eyes  
doesn't look like he's had an easy time either  
little finger on his right hand's missin'  
his nose it's squashed crooked  
he's comin' off the night shift at the slaughterhouse

it preys on your mind  
killin' things all day

drives me back early in the morning  
sun startin' to come up  
worms musta found whatever they were lookin' for  
they're all gone

## infirmary



supervisor  
 when she hears  
 I can't believe  
     you ran away  
 veins on her like blue rivers runnin'

now there's a whole big investigation  
 what happened why when  
 we're glad you're safe

upshot

that woman is fired  
 the mean one  
 because I don't run away

you did the right thing  
 the girls say  
 they pat me on the back  
 she never should have said that  
 how'd you have the guts to up and leave

join the club  
 I'm finally one of them

what did he say  
what did you say  
what did you eat  
what's it like to be free  
why'd you come back

longing in their voices

it isn't as if we're in prison  
but we aren't allowed to leave either

thou shalt not leave the school  
girls been here for years  
their families forget  
they're alive

I run away  
it's the talk of the place  
everybody's glad she's gone  
isn't the first time she goes after someone  
everyone else is too scared  
say something

that's what some people do  
wherever they go  
spread misery

she's probably doin' the same thing  
the exact same thing  
to some other poor kid somewheres else  
accusin' them like she accuses me  
she'll get away with it again  
and again  
nothin' I can do about that

what goes around comes around  
like killin' the dandelions

of course I get punished  
doin' somethin' so stupid

expect to be punished  
who wouldn't in a place  
where heaven and hell's more real  
than anything here on earth

bein' punished doesn't change anything  
only makes me think  
more and more  
about leavin'

want to go home

they throw me in the infirmary  
what a euphemism  
there's no way anyone  
will get better in here  
if they really are sick

they want to make sure  
nobody else catches  
whatever strange disease you have

don't want to be called a liar  
they accuse me of a lot of things in this place  
lying's the least of it  
they blame me when things go missin'  
a bible a pencil a shoe a ring

even if I did steal everything  
where would I put it  
room's big enough  
for one bed one dresser  
hard enough  
goin' to the bathroom  
to get some privacy  
let alone tryin' to hide a stash  
the size of a barn

don't call me a liar 'cause  
I know what's right  
I know what's wrong

the infirmary  
where they punish you  
solid brick walls two feet thick  
door with a small peep hole  
impossible  
for any disease to get out

you can't hear anything  
    dead quiet

door's locked  
but there's a keyhole  
Mary and Baby Jesus are hangin' on the wall  
big black crucifix under  
that picture musta been there a long time  
can't see the eyes or nose of Baby Jesus any more  
should paint them back  
not fair he can't see

what'll happen  
    if there's a fire  
'cause prayers to the sky  
they aren't always enough

take action yourself  
don't rely on others  
not even God  
'cause God  
    if there is a God

that's what they keep talkin' about  
like it's all they think about  
God this and God that  
until you'd think that God has nothin'  
better to do than listen to them all day  
maybe they carry God around  
    in their pockets  
because they're always shakin' God in our faces

God must be pretty busy all the time  
so many people gettin' in trouble  
not a job I'd want

stuck in this stone room  
what if there's a fire and they forget  
no one'll hear me  
I'll burn alive like Joan of Arc

soak my blanket in water  
stuff it under the door  
hide a cup of water under the bed  
in case of emergency

a concrete bed  
two blankets  
one skinny pillow  
one window  
way high up  
the only light in here  
watch the sky and the clouds  
guess what time it is

spend five days solid in this room  
meals on a metal tray  
no one speaks to me

they take me to the washroom  
they stand right there  
lookin' at me  
watch me go to the washroom  
no doors nothin'

take a bath  
somebody's with me  
no towels allowed  
somebody's watchin' me the whole time  
got nothin' better to do  
they think I'm gonna drown myself

they're scratchy towels anyways  
no soap either  
maybe I'll eat it and choke  
they take away any pleasure in gettin' clean  
how are we supposed to cleanse our souls  
without soap

supper's cold potatoes  
grey gravy  
grey peas  
old salad  
lumpy bits floatin' soup

lots of stories  
about where those bits  
come from

three sheets of paper and a pencil  
that's all I got

draw dandelions  
stems and leaves and flowers and roots and fluffs  
hide them under the pillow  
so nobody can take them

make me as small as  
a dandelion seed  
gone with the wind  
hide in a crack  
they'll never find me

think over  
what have you done  
what will you do  
    in the future

what future

don't see how it'll be any different  
had enough  
rules  
had enough  
scrubbin' and waxin' all their floors

like bein' free  
and even though it's stupid  
'cause I'm only a kid  
even though it's against the rules  
I know I'll try it again

one of the girls has a long skirt  
tapes a bottle to her leg  
she's real good at walkin' that way only  
the tape tears the hair off her legs  
no razors to shave our legs  
one day she wears knee socks  
but the bottle keeps draggin' the sock down  
as she's walkin'  
they almost catch her this time

the nuns go to bed  
last rounds ten o'clock

midnight party  
we drink our hearts out  
we laugh and giggle until six in the morning

we pretend  
we're the nuns  
we deliver these really long sermons about good and evil  
we're all plain old evil kids  
all of us we're goin' to go to hell  
sermons way better than  
the ones we have to listen to

we know our bibles inside out  
the nuns know for sure  
the bible saves our immortal souls  
with or without us





**lucky**

it's rainin'  
 rainin' a lot  
 I find a book of matches on the ground  
 they're sopping wet  
 try one see if it works  
 sulphur cakes off  
 there's no way it's gonna light

throw the box in the garbage bin

garbage bin goes up in flames  
 you wouldn't believe it  
 how quickly that fire begins  
 black smoke everywhere

I'm coughin' and chokin' and spittin'  
 there must've been paint in that garbage bin  
 something for it to go  
     up in flames that way  
 big orange flames lickin' out the top  
 the whole thing's gonna blow  
     and me with it

run back into the building  
 I'm yelling

what trouble have you got yourself into  
this time

I didn't do anything  
found this book of matches  
didn't do anything  
I swear I didn't do anything

they accuse me of tryin' to burn  
    down the school  
like I have this whole huge plot goin' or something

this is a very serious matter  
cannot be ignored  
this will go in your record

the big threat  
add another piece of paper to your files  
by your sins so shall ye reap  
    your one-way ticket to hell

who else is in on it

there isn't anybody else

there's this huge conspiracy  
it's so big so real  
they can't see what's right in front of them

a scared little kid

and even if there's a plot  
and even if there's somebody else in on it  
that's the worst thing to do  
is rat on somebody

rat on somebody  
gets you killed

so I'm punished  
this time for a month

there's not one piece of kindness  
there must be one  
there must be one nun out there somewhere  
you'd think there'd be one  
who's encouraging me  
it would be an act of charity wouldn't it  
a good deed  
wouldn't take much  
offer a little praise

I'm gonna be in this infirmary  
for a whole month  
more like solitary confinement  
it's torture

nothin' to do  
nothin' to read  
no paper no pencil either  
nothin' other than  
    nothin'  
and one small window up by the ceiling

I'm one of the lucky ones  
I'm allowed  
to read  
I'm allowed  
to come out of my cell  
go to the basement reading room  
there's a table and a chair

two hours is up  
go back to your room

some people there  
they don't even let 'em read  
God knows what they do  
inside their skulls  
I'm one of the lucky ones

the books are old  
books about saints  
books about popes  
books about sermons  
I'd give anything for a dictionary

most of the time I cry  
sometimes I cry so much  
I use up all the tears

a person can only cry so much  
before they turn into a desert  
maybe that's why I never cry again  
no more  
all the tears are used up  
in that infirmary

I make up sermons  
about guardian angels  
the nuns always tells us  
every child has  
a guardian angel

one of those psalms  
God orders all the angels to guard us  
to hold us in their hands  
they're supposed to save us from lions and snakes  
that's the story anyway

angels of God our guardians dear  
protect us all from harm and fear  
ever this day be at our side  
to light and guard to rule and guide

stop bein' such a cry baby  
you're really beginnin' to bug me with all your crying  
it could always be worse  
what's worse  
at least you're allowed to read  
what's the point of readin'

if you can't share it with anyone  
don't know how many days  
it'll be over soon

I'm hearin' voices  
I'm hearin' music in my ears  
it's a buncha radio static  
somebody's talkin' right at you  
inside your own head  
I wish they'd go away  
so I can be alone

it's my own brain  
goin' around and around in circles

stick us in this room where we're all alone  
fillin' our heads with stories about  
guardian angels savin' us  
they're savin' us so  
they can punish us some more

our guardian angel is always right here with us  
never doubt the angel is here  
proof comes not only by sight  
you'll hear the angel  
or touch him  
why it has to be a him I don't know  
or you'll smell the angel  
a special perfume in the air

what's an angel smell like anyway  
cinnamon wild roses oranges  
maybe vanilla  
that's a good angel smell

the only thing they don't say  
an angel might taste like something

maybe 'cause we'd have to bite the angel's arm  
to know what an angel tastes like

all those big philosophical debates about God  
they have nothin' on me  
debatin' all the possibilities

I try listenin'  
I wait  
I wait for the weight of  
an angel's hand on my shoulder  
or something whisperin'  
be not afraid for I am by your side  
as hard as I try smellin' the air  
nothin' comes to me

maybe my guardian angel's takin' a vacation  
maybe there never was a guardian angel in the first place  
nothin' sittin' in this sorry stone room other than me  
no wings no feathers  
no dandelion fluffs either

sit starin' at the intercom  
plastic box screwed into the wall up by the ceiling  
try speakin' to somebody in the next room

anybody there  
can anyone hear me

this really crackly angry voice comes  
over the intercom  
all of a sudden

be quiet

no talking allowed

now that's creepy  
'cause nobody's talked to you in days  
and here's someone shoutin' at you  
but they're invisible  
there's all this static  
and they tell you to shut up

there's no way you can talk back to  
a voice in a box  
no body it's just a box  
doesn't have eyes or a face  
can't argue with a box

feel like smashin' that box  
pullin' it down from the wall  
but of course with my luck  
I'll have to stay in here  
for another whole month

swallow everything  
but now I can hear someone  
snivellin' in the next cell

but it's hard to know for sure  
'cause you're too busy  
cryin' yourself





## hippo in a tutu



a week before I'm supposed to  
leave this absolutely wonderful school  
the best school in the whole country

everything's bein' prepared  
I'm movin' back to my foster parents' place  
that's what Children's Aid says

everything's packed  
room's empty  
    real empty  
like I never lived here  
like I never even existed  
clothes books my stone collection  
all my drawings everything  
two suitcases sittin' in the corner  
waitin' to go home  
can't wait to leave

my mother and father are gettin' my room all ready  
they're even gettin' new curtains for me  
high school knows I'm comin'  
I'm excited

I'm gonna take ballet lessons again  
I have an old photo they took of me  
I look like a hippopotamus in a pink tutu  
this girl with these really chunky legs  
she's so happy  
wearin' this pink tutu  
'cause she loves to dance

I'm supposed to go back  
but a week before I leave  
get this call from my foster mother  
she calls me up on Friday night

she's cryin' she's angry  
can't understand what she's sayin'  
her words they're slurrin' together  
like peanut butter and raspberry jam  
my heart starts thumpin'  
can't breathe  
the telephone feels all slippery  
'cause my hands are sweatin' so much

you changed your mind  
why

what are you talkin' about  
what do you mean I changed my mind  
I'm comin' home  
comin' back to your place  
my bags are all packed  
everything's packed  
I'm comin' back

no you're not

what are you talkin' about  
who told you I wasn't comin' back  
who did you talk to  
what did they say  
and why haven't they talked to me

no one said anything to me  
don't know anything about this  
I'm comin' back

but you said that you didn't want to come back  
I spoke to them tonight

I want to come home

talk to your social worker  
find out what's goin' on  
something strange goin' on  
they said  
you changed your mind

have to wait the whole weekend 'til Monday morning  
the office is closed  
there's nothing  
absolutely nothing  
I can do except  
wait

can't eat  
can't sleep  
can't read  
can't do anything

the first thing I do Monday morning  
I'm up so early no one else is awake  
refuse to go to school  
until I talk to my worker  
glue myself to that office door  
nobody can get in or out

now they hustle around lookin' for my worker  
I'm sittin' in the office on the hard wooden bench  
underneath a picture of the Pope  
there's this glowin' light around him  
there's another picture of Mary and the Baby Jesus too  
they're both starin' at the Pope

the secretaries they're answering the phone  
everybody's real busy  
but they keep starin' at me  
like I shouldn't be there  
like I should be somewhere else  
of course I should be somewhere else  
but I'm stayin' put until I get  
    an answer

the smell of coffee fills up the whole office  
and I'm waitin' and waitin'  
bell rings halls empty  
still sittin' there  
waitin'  
    to go home

but inside  
I know they're not  
gonna let me  
go home

I'm gonna have to stay at this school  
forever fever amen  
and they're never gonna let me go home  
and the smell of that coffee is makin' me feel  
sicker and sicker  
like throwin' up

I'm all alone and everybody's runnin' around  
it's me the Pope and Mary and Jesus  
I really am in prison  
    stuck  
they're not lettin' me go nowhere

saw one of those paperweights in a store once  
one of those dandelion puffs only it's  
    stuck  
inside a clear orb  
plastic or glass or something  
preserved forever

it's a little funny  
'cause lots of people call dandelions  
plain old nasty weeds  
then somebody sticks 'em inside a clear glass ball  
makes a lotta money

and the guy that's out puttin' weed poison  
and this is the funniest thing  
you know what he's got sittin' on his coffee table  
you know what his grandkids give him for Christmas  
yeah one of those dandelion tombs  
and he can't throw it out  
maybe if he looks at it long enough  
he'll stop killin' the dandelions

smash that glass  
free the seeds  
'cause even if they rot  
even if some sparrow eats them  
they get chewed up by some squirrel  
still one or two of those seeds will grow  
that's what they're meant to do



## coffee and paper



so they find her  
 my worker at the school  
 her name's Cindy  
 finally I get to talk to her

she has an ugly brown coffee mug in her hand  
 lipstick tattoos all over it  
 coffee's stinkin' up the whole room  
 she takes a sip  
 she's buyin' time

you know  
 women who wear lipstick  
 they swallow four pounds of lipstick  
 in their lifetime  
 they don' mean to  
 just happens

used to make lipstick out of whale blubber  
 can't do that no more  
 whales they're all gone  
 now they use  
 cow brains coal tar  
 maybe it's a big invisible plot  
 kill off all the women



so Cindy smiles at me  
only the bottom half of her lipstick face is smiling  
the smile never reaches her eyes

before she even opens her mouth  
I can see exactly what she's gonna say  
can see it squatting there in her eyes

no you're not goin' back there

why not

she takes another sip from her mug  
like the coffee is gonna find the  
God-given answer for her  
she's tryin' to pour words into her mouth  
'cause all the words in her mouth they're dried up

she's mumblin' something  
her words are gettin' blurry  
or maybe it's not the words  
maybe it's her face  
it's turning into a blurry ball  
the room is spinning  
my eyes are blinking  
I'm havin' trouble swallowing  
my stomach's tight

we don't have to tell you why  
    simply put  
we believe  
it would be in your best interests

then she repeats herself  
as if I didn't hear her the first time  
as if I'm stupid don't understand

we have your best interests at heart of course

but I did hear her  
I'm not stupid  
I can hear what she's thinking inside her head

welcome to Monday morning Cindy  
what a doozy of a way to start the week  
have a good one

what the hell kind of phrase is that  
your best interests at heart  
my heart is splittin' inside out  
everything's spillin' out onto the floor  
and I'm runnin' around tryin' to pick it all up  
but it's no use  
'cause everything keeps rollin' around and around

and if there are best interests  
there must be worst interests too  
can't have the best without the worst  
but no one asked me about my interests

a kid's just a nothin'  
gettin' in the way  
makin' trouble for everyone else  
that's what they think

you have the option of either goin' to  
a new foster home or a new group home

fine if I go to a group home  
will I still be able to see my foster parents

unfortunately not

good I'll go to a group home then  
that way I don't have to see them

and I'm thinkin' in fact  
I'll disown them right now  
sure seems like they don't wanna see me

a big scream  
it's fillin' up my head  
and the scream is gettin' bigger  
it's shoutin'  
    why

Children's Aid doesn't give  
    no answers

they have this big pile of papers  
it's sittin' right on the desk  
between you and them  
that big pile of papers

everybody has the same pile  
the same old ugly coffee mug  
brown stain from all the bad news

and those papers they're all about you  
but they won't let you see those papers  
least not when you're a kid  
everything's marked  
    private  
    confidential  
    restricted access  
    restrictive asses

everything they're thinking about you  
it's all written down in  
    black and white

it's like their eyes are glued to those papers  
they're fingering them leavin' through them  
starin' at them  
it's like you're not there  
those papers are more real than  
    you are

and they're tellin' you all about  
why you can't go  
    home

only they aren't tellin' you the real reason  
lies and truths but you're lookin' for reasons

we have another good idea  
what would you think about this

and you can't think about anything except  
one thing

this big elephant in the room  
it's standin' right in the middle of the room  
it's takin' up the whole room  
it's practically pushin' everybody out the door  
but everybody's pretendin' they don't see it  
it's hungry  
it's thirsty

who are you to ask questions  
'cause the answer will always be the same  
it's in your best interests

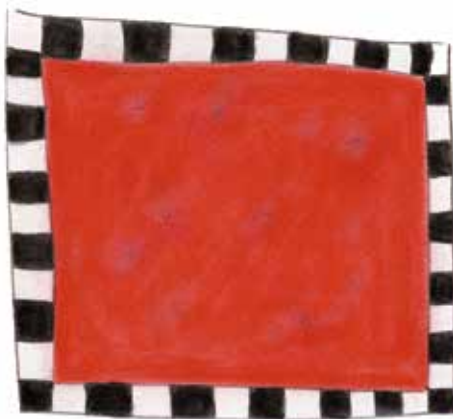
I'm lookin' out the office window  
Lipstick Cindy's voice is far away  
I'm lookin' at all the dandelions  
growin' free by the fence  
they're wavin' in the wind  
their yellow heads tossin'  
they're wavin' right at me  
they're callin' me  
waggin' their jagged leaves

why won't she stop  
nothin' more to talk about  
nothin'

stuck in this chair  
can't breathe the lipstick coffee air  
stuck behind glass  
if only I could



## **ruby slippers**



two weeks after that  
straight back to Toronto

I'm the first person in this brand new group home  
see my foster parents a few times  
but it's not the same  
they don't wanna see me  
I can tell  
no room in their lives

I'm not allowed to go  
to my grandmother's funeral  
which is a real drag  
she taught me how to bake bread  
how to knead it how to braid it  
and every time I make bread  
smell the dough risin'  
see her hands kneadin' the bread  
she was good to me

sometimes I save a piece of bread for her  
the dead  
they need to eat too

my uncle dies  
can't go to his funeral either  
that's the last straw

isn't right I can't go to their funerals  
pay my last respects  
especially when there are so few  
so few who actually care  
who want the best for me  
they look at my drawings their eyes light up  
give me hope that maybe  
    just maybe  
a reason

for the second time in my life  
    I run away  
want to go back home

my uncle's the first person who ever  
gives me a book  
    my very own  
it's a birthday present  
cover's falling off now  
Wizard of Oz  
flyin' monkeys carryin' everyone off  
with their big wings  
copy all the pictures  
only have a pencil to draw with  
no pens at school  
pencil's as good as anything else  
better in fact  
at least with a pencil you can rub it out  
can always find a pencil  
nothing fancy  
not like those pens to write all the reports

ruby slippers  
ruby slippers

all Dorothy has to do  
    say  
no place like home  
no place like home  
no place like  
    home  
click her heels together three times  
she's right there

every time I see a pair of red shoes  
can't stop lookin' at them  
remember Dorothy

I run away  
get picked up by my social worker

I can help you if you tell me what's wrong  
you know it's not safe  
didn't you hear what happened last week  
you're lucky to be alive  
everybody missed you  
you must understand

I stop listening  
don't say anything  
get him riled  
he starts pointin' his finger at me

running away from your problems doesn't solve anything  
we can't help you  
if you don't want to help yourself

you have got to face up  
no point in  
think you're so smart  
you don't  
can't you see  
if you think  
if I were you



big bunch of clichés  
nothin' but one lecture after another  
what does this guy know  
he doesn't get it

he isn't me  
he can't possibly know

they're always puttin' me somewhere  
but they never ask me where I want to go  
what I want to do with my life

they're squeezin' my life in their hands  
pullin' it up by the roots  
    over and over  
shakin' it out  
diggin' a hole somewheres else  
stickin' it in that hole

be grateful and shut up  
and if you aren't grateful  
if you don't shut up  
then we're sorry  
game over

no way I'm gonna talk to this guy

refuse to talk to him  
the entire drive back  
sit there lookin' out the window  
watchin' the seagulls swoopin' overhead  
wishin' I could fly

another lipstick social worker gets assigned  
brings me into her office  
asks me a question or two  
at least she doesn't have a cup of coffee  
sittin' on the desk

she's askin' a lot of questions

same questions as before  
but this woman seems pretty on the ball  
maybe something'll happen this time

finally someone's gonna listen  
someone's gonna do something  
things are gonna change

then she says  
she asks  
sends shivers  
down my back

do you know why were you in that school

you people put me there  
you're the ones makin' all the decisions  
not me

you should never have been put  
into that school in the first place  
it wasn't the right school for you  
they made a mistake  
whoever put you in there  
you shouldn't have gone to that school

what are you talkin' about  
the right school

that school was for emotionally disturbed girls  
her answer is plain and simple

they let me spend five whole years of my life  
in a school I never should have been in  
they told me when I went in there that  
it's a boarding school  
my idea of a boarding school  
it's a private school  
you know an independent school

and what's an emotionally disturbed kid  
someone who pees in the bed  
that's emotionally disturbed  
does it mean you're sick  
they need to put you somewhere  
far away

I'm shy  
therefore I'm emotionally disturbed  
just what are they sayin'

I spend five years of my life  
in the completely  
wrong school  
somebody signs a paper  
sends me there  
somebody signs a paper  
keeps me there  
somebody signs a paper  
gets me outta there

pick up one of those heavy-duty swivel chairs  
pick it up as if it weighs nothin'  
my social worker  
she's lookin' right at me with her lipstick face  
her face it's nothing but a stupid mask  
eyeholes starin'

pick up one of those office chairs on wheels  
fake leather  
little rubber wheels spinning  
they don't know which way to turn

heave the chair at that pile of papers  
never want anything written down  
about me  
again

not unless I say so

walk outta that office  
no lookin' behind  
    slam the door  
last I see of her

hey you're not supposed to shoot  
the messenger  
it isn't her fault

nobody ever apologizes  
nobody ever says I'm sorry  
everybody's too busy pushin'  
the pile of papers  
so they don't have to deal with  
    someone like you

too late now  
woulda shoulda coulda  
build the wall  
higher and higher  
you can't see over it  
    no more



## ink blots



four of us in this group home  
 feels like family  
 I have a small bedroom  
 pin up my drawings

Uncle John and Aunt Leona they're nice  
 they have an adopted daughter  
 little younger than I am  
 there isn't any shoutin'  
 that's new

learn how to make spaghetti sauce and roast garlic  
 how to make pickles from baby cucumbers  
 there's always lots to eat  
 for a change

by the time I move in here  
 I'm already tryin' acid  
 already drink  
 start goin' to high school and dealin' drugs  
 begin hittin' the bars

first couple of years of high school  
don't do very well  
I'm not a quick learner  
nothin' goin' in there  
nothin' anyone says  
no difference

Mme. Sardou's shoutin' at me  
she's asking me a question  
she's leanin' over my desk  
glarin' at me  
her breath stinks of old coffee  
she's shoutin' in French  
some pretty choice words  
judgin' by her expression

sit there lookin' down at my  
je ne sais pas je ne sais pas je ne sais pas  
for good measure Ich weiss nicht  
one of the girls in the group home  
she speaks German  
she's teachin' us a little

Mme. Sardou thinks I'm swearin' at her  
makes me stand in the corner by the garbage can  
put my head against the wall  
stand there with my back to everybody

school counsellor shows me  
a bunch of ink blots

big pieces of paper  
someone spills the ink  
didn't clean up the mess

tell me about this picture  
what do you think it is

looks like somebody's throwing up  
splat on the floor

anything else

two people kissing  
don't know  
two ink splotches

try using your imagination

okay use my imagination  
I got an imagination  
we all got imaginations  
humans got 50 percent of the same genes as a banana  
99 percent of the same genes as a mouse  
who's to say  
a banana and a mouse don't have imaginations either

looks like an alien space ship  
maybe some kind of insect  
it might eat me up

yeah it's a flower  
a venus flytrap  
that'll eat you up if you're a bug

it's some kind of amazing diamond  
you could get a lot of money for it  
nope looks like a frog  
or a motorcycle  
looks like a bird actually it's two birds  
and they're fightin' over a grasshopper

actually I don't see  
nothin'

she's busy writin' everything down  
again  
it's not like there's a right answer  
it's all a bunch of choices  
it's a lottery  
sure would be nice to know if  
you're on the right track or not



nice to know  
not that you're the same as everyone else  
but you're not way out there weird either

they're lookin' to see how psychotic I am  
that's the game

is she getting confused  
how rational is she  
how does she think

the pile of papers is gettin' bigger and bigger

what if they spent as much bloody time  
actually helpin' people  
as they do writin' down stuff about them

could as well be lookin' at  
the cracks on the wall  
the scuff marks on the floor  
the coffee stains on the desk  
as those ink blots

somebody's makin' a lot of money from these blots  
they sure as hell have a pile of paper  
all that writing they do  
everybody's gotta have a job

whatever they think  
whatever they're findin' out about me  
they're probably makin' up a lot of things  
like I'm makin' up all those things about  
their precious little ink blots

## 1-2-Z-5-4-17-3



I'm always drawing  
 every chance I get I draw  
 draw doodles on any old scrap of paper

they're always telling me I'll never be an artist  
 always being told I'll never amount to anything  
 never go anywhere  
 never do anything  
 just plain gonna be dead  
 that's all they say

I'm livin' under a rock  
 no sunlight  
 can't crawl out  
 buried alive

no one's out there for me  
 make your own joy  
 make your own luck  
 no one else is gonna make it for you baby

what if someone had actually wanted me  
 what if I hadn't been sick  
 what if I never  
 what if everything was different

not like you can erase your memories  
even if you want to  
not like you can turn the clock back

yeah it could be better  
could always be worse too

could be damaged for life  
be psychiatric  
    for the rest of my life  
so drugged  
don't even know  
    I'm human

or I could be plain dead  
or could be servin' years of jail  
with no chance of never

why be angry  
play that boring old blame game  
when it could be as easy as 1-2-3  
everybody else's makin' it 1-2-Z-5-4-17-3

basically it all comes down to  
whatever doesn't kill you  
makes you stronger

girl you're here for a reason  
you may not know what it is  
maybe you'll find out years later  
maybe you'll never know

I'm still tickin'

**them**

I'm in this independent program in Children's Aid  
 it's supposed to be a steppin' stone help you  
 live on your own  
 support yourself  
 take care of yourself  
 I'm seventeen

instead of bein' under a rock all my life  
 I'm makin' progress  
 I'm on my way somewhere  
 headin' to better things  
 I'm jumpin' over the rainbow

I'm goin' to school  
 get a job  
 do normal  
 make something of  
 this life of mine

they're gonna help me with my schooling  
 'cause I'm goin' to university or college  
 psychology or sociology

we're very pleased you're goin' to college  
 exciting idea well worth pursuing

you have potential  
why don't you contact  
of course  
demonstrate financial responsibility  
plenty of time to discuss  
perhaps we can  
that's definitely probably a possibility

I'm really excited  
for the first time I have a plan  
gonna make something of this life of mine

day I turn eighteen  
I'm literally cut off  
from Children's Aid  
just like that

cut off  
no if  
no but  
no money  
no nothin'  
no place to stay  
kicked  
out

it's two weeks before I'm eighteen  
and this is the notice they give me  
this is what they say

in two weeks' time  
you have to be out of this house

they changed their mind  
that's all I can say about that

don't know why  
'cause as far as I know  
this isn't supposed to happen

it isn't my worker  
don't know who it is

it's them  
whoever them is  
the same old them

them  
hide everything under a rock word  
it's like a marshmallow  
got no centre

it's always  
    in the mail  
it's always  
    don't call us we'll call you  
if you need assistance  
please call 1-800 mumblemumblemumble  
please press 1 please press 2  
for more options please press 3  
if you know the person you want to reach  
please dial the number now  
loopdeloo around and around  
something goes wrong  
gotta be strong  
so long so long

don't get it  
how they can be sayin' one thing  
just like that  
it's a completely different story

only it's my story

it's like talkin' to somethin' with two heads  
saw a sheep skeleton once had two heads  
in some museum  
that's what this is like  
those heads are lookin'  
two completely different directions

turns out  
all I've got is

a ghost of  
a plan

slam

I'm lookin' at another pile of papers again  
black and white gobbledygook

it's somebody new  
someone I don't know  
she's my ninth or tenth social worker

doesn't look any older than me  
so here I am lookin' at this worker  
sure enough  
same old coffee mug with Cindy on it  
think I'm seein' déjà vu  
laughin' to myself  
until I hear her say  
I'm sorry

and I'm afraid she's gonna tell me  
my other worker's dead  
she looks through my papers  
she's frownin'  
she's lookin' way too serious

Children's Aid has come to  
a decision  
they are closing your case

her voice sounds real far away  
like it's comin' from inside a sardine can

I'm starin' out the window  
like I always do  
'cause you can breathe out there

don't see any dandelions  
they're buried under the snow

know they're out there somewhere  
what I wouldn't give to see a dandelion right now

and I'm tryin' to listen real carefully to the words  
the words comin' out of her mouth  
but they sound like they're from  
some place that has  
nothin' to do with me

we can't possibly support  
you've had plenty of opportunity  
there are so many others who  
I'm sure you'll be able  
certain responsibilities  
I'm sure you understand  
you're eighteen  
you're free to leave  
plans in place  
custody discharged  
sign here on the dotted line  
so everything's clear

she's waitin' for me to say  
something

buzzin' in my head  
screwed again

what plans are you talkin' about  
I'm thinkin' in slow motion  
yeah but free to go where  
what does free mean  
doesn't free mean  
    havin' a choice  
what kind of a choice do I have  
if I don't have any money

I'm left holdin'  
this white piece of paper



dear so-and-so  
rip it up

shoulda kept it  
for posterity  
for history  
in case  
'cause you'd have to read it to believe it

I'm supposed to have  
a plan for where I'm gonna live  
a plan for a source of income  
a plan for where to go  
dentistdoctorcounsellinglegalservices  
you name it

try to make some phone calls  
have some friends stayin' with  
an uncle or a grandmother  
no room at the inn

gonna get a place with a friend  
we go lookin' at apartments  
can swing it if I get a job  
pillowcases and knives and forks and spoons  
my foster mother she's got extra sheets  
this is gonna be okay

my friend ends up movin' back  
with her dad and stepmother  
it all falls through

I go lookin' for work  
help wanted apply within  
take a deep breath  
walk in  
ask to speak to the manager  
like you're supposed to do  
hand in my resume all typed up it's perfect

but they're lookin' at me  
and I can see the no in their eyes

have you had any experience

how am I supposed to get a job  
so I can get some experience  
when I don't have any experience  
beyond me  
even though I can type  
I can sew  
I can cook  
I can do all these things  
it still isn't enough

have lots of experience  
too much in fact  
guess it's not the kind they're lookin' for

of course being a drug dealer doesn't count  
not in this world no matter how  
you slice it or dice it

entrepreneurial spirit a must  
check  
financially accountable  
you better believe it  
customer relations experience an asset  
yup  
prepare to be part of a global network of distributors  
okay  
flexible hours must be self-motivated  
definitely

legals get in the way of course  
wrong means to an end

nothin' worse than havin' people look at you  
like you're a nothin'

they actually send me this birthday card  
four-leaf clover big smile on its face  
it's a cartoon  
open the card up  
it plays Happy Birthday

now that you're an adult  
good luck!  
we thought you might need a  
four leaf clover  
lucky wishbone  
horseshoe  
lucky 7 dice

but we realized that  
everything you need is right  
inside you

yeah right

that's all I need to get by  
don't need a place to live  
don't need food  
don't need any cash before I  
crash

## two weeks



two bloody weeks to find a place  
just isn't workin' out  
not for lack of trying

sometimes the universe  
doesn't go your way  
you're buttin' your head against a wall  
so thick so tall  
no way you can climb over it  
no windows  
    no doors  
        no cracks

so you say hey go around this wall  
but you look left and right  
wall goes for miles and miles

so you say hey dig underneath this wall  
but you don't have a shovel  
all you got is your bare hands

you keep hopin'  
'cause a bottle of hope  
that's all you got  
that and a few books

couple of old photos  
your drawings  
four school trophies  
shirts pants jacket socks  
a hat if you're lucky  
a toothbrush  
one pair of shoes

it's not a case of you can't always get what you want  
it's more like you can't even get what you need  
that's what's happening to me

apply for 25 jobs in 10 days  
maybe it's 26 or 27  
it's all gettin' to be a big blur anyway

thank you for your interest  
we certainly appreciate  
we'll let you know  
we'll keep your resume on file  
a pleasure to meet you  
thank you for coming

it's startin' to feel as if there's no place for you  
anywhere on this whole  
godforsaken planet

have no money comin' in  
not enough to pay  
first and last month's rent

havin' trouble imagining  
what I'm gonna do  
where is this story goin'

no idea

I can draw a path  
and it looks real  
can draw what I want

but what's it mean

when I leave  
the only person to turn to  
my foster mother

hi it's me  
oh it's you  
silence  
sucks everything up

I can hear the questions  
they're strangling in the telephone wires  
halfway between here and there

why's she phonin'  
always something  
what does she want  
must be in trouble  
again

explain the situation  
how I have nowhere to go  
okay if I stay with you for a few days  
until I get my own place  
until I get on my feet

got a couple leads on a job  
have this friend  
actually she's a friend of a friend  
I'm hearin' about this other place soon

sounds pretty feeble  
wouldn't believe it myself actually

silence

gotta say something

or I'm gonna get  
swallowed up by that silence  
there won't be anything left of me

she always sighs  
like a saggy stocking  
with a gaping hole in it

any hope you mighta had  
drops out  
    rolls into the ditch

she gets off the phone  
she's talkin' to my father  
only I can't hear the words  
but I'm hangin' on to the other end of the phone line  
feelin' like one of those bats upside down  
I'm hangin' on by  
    one claw

she gets back on the phone

big sigh

okay you can come here  
    for a few days  
we'll see how it works out

thank you

this isn't rocket science  
know how it's gonna work out  
not a lot of options  
beggars can't be choosers

we'll see how it works out  
turns into  
I gotta get outta here  
as soon as I walk in the door

memory chains  
same old noisy clock by the front door  
same old crucifix hangin' right beside it  
fly speck on Jesus's nose  
Our Lady of Perpetual Cabbage soup  
simmerin' on the stove  
I'd be willin' to swear it's the same soup  
that was cookin' on my last visit

same clock same cross same pot same soup  
welcome home I say to myself  
it would be nice if somebody else said it  
but it's obvious no one else is gonna  
so I do the honours

nothin' I say seems to make things better  
    which is too bad  
'cause I try to clean  
do the shoppin'  
keep askin' if I can help  
even clean Jesus's nose

I can't do anything right  
they're criticizin' everything

don't know what Children's Aid said  
must have been some pretty bad stories

always two sides to a story  
always three or four or five sides  
hexagon stories  
stories inside stories inside stories

just 'cause you have a pile of papers  
doesn't mean your side of the story is true

my foster parents and me  
we don't really like each other I guess  
they're the only family I know



they try to correct me  
the clothes I'm wearin'  
the people I'm with  
the books I'm readin'  
how I use my knife and fork  
it's like they can't help it

it isn't workin' out  
and we all know  
it can't  
it won't  
it'll never work out

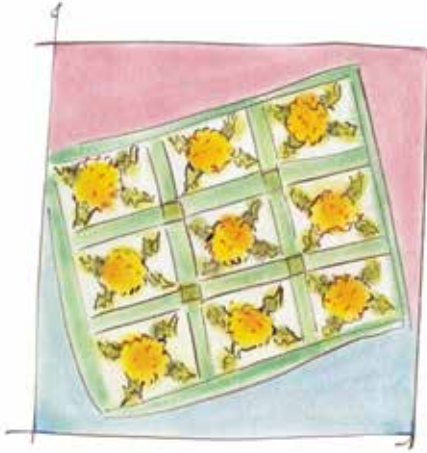
my foster mother  
she's actually the one  
she calls this hostel  
to see if they have space

don't know what to expect  
no one knows who I am  
don't have to live up to anyone else's  
expectations

looks like a pretty ordinary brick building  
three stories tall  
school across the road  
big trees  
kids playin' ball hockey  
they're yellin' and screamin'  
all looks pretty normal  
pretty ordinary  
outside

but it's pretty scary  
inside

## hostile hostel



why the hell am I here  
 girl you better turn around  
     right now  
 and I mean right now  
 'cause you don't belong here  
 no place here for you either

but I'm already steppin' in  
 they shove this form into my hand  
 sign here on the dotted line

someone's screamin' at her husband  
     go to hell  
 only she's talkin' to thin air  
 a woman's cryin' in the corner

someone else paces looks at me says  
 if you don't watch out  
 they'll take you away  
 so you better listen to me  
 do what I tell you

this place is a  
     nuthouse

someone's stolen my glasses  
maybe I lost 'em can't remember  
can't see much  
everything's a big blurry  
smudge

can hear this woman growling  
she's growling at me  
growling in the back of her throat  
like a dog growling  
if you take its bone away

the place smells of  
cigarettes and bleach  
soup and bread

without that soup I probably  
what with that woman growling at me  
I'd be out the door  
on the street tonight  
doin' God knows what

takes a couple days to get new glasses  
the very first staff member I actually see  
her name's Sarah  
short red hair and too many rings to count  
in her ears on her nose her eyebrow her lip  
never seen so many earrings on one body before

she's sittin' at the dining room table  
fifteen women sittin' around there  
they all look up at me at the same time  
I start backin' away

Sarah says come join us  
introduce you to everybody  
she smiles  
and there's this other woman  
sittin' beside her  
her name's Catherine

she's the growler  
and she starts growling at me again

does this woman even know how to talk

I look at her  
don't want to get too close to her  
one scary woman

this Catherine keeps growling at me  
it isn't a game it's for real

remember Alice in Wonderland  
remember the part where Alice says  
I don't want to be around mad people

and the Cheshire Cat says you can't help that  
I'm mad you're mad we're all mad  
and Alice she says how do you know I'm mad

cat says you wouldn't be here then  
cat says I growl when I'm pleased  
wag my tail when I'm angry

but a dog wags its tail when it's happy  
growls when it's angry

that's what this was like  
as upside down as Alice in Wonderland  
maybe this woman is actually  
glad to see me  
but this woman's definitely not purring  
not by any stretch of the imagination

and she can speak all right  
she has more than a few choice words for me  
she doesn't even know me  
I'm too scared to answer back  
but I swear I can match her  
word for word and then some

all week she growls at me  
after a week I look at her  
say yeah okay  
after a month  
we're best friends  
we're inseparable

when I finally get my glasses back  
right as you walk in the door  
hangin' on the wall  
there's a quilt somebody donated  
one of those home sweet home quilts  
somebody must have spent hours on it  
tiny stitches

bright yellow flowers and jaggy leaves  
even if I couldn't see them  
when I first walked in the door  
there they are  
    my dandelions

## street sisters



Catherine and me  
we're street sisters now  
family outside a family

there's a feeling you have  
for somebody  
goes beyond

when everybody else has disowned you  
or you've disowned them  
even friends you thought were friends  
they're bad-mouthin' you behind your back

your street sister  
that's the only family you have

whatever happens they'll be there for you  
they'll always be there for you

your street sister and street brother  
will protect you  
if you get charged they'll jump in  
they'll say no it was me who did it  
she's innocent it was me

this is what Catherine does  
I do the same for her

we're inseparable  
we talk  
we argue  
we probably argue more than we talk

whenever we get into an argument  
it's scary like two cats  
spittin' hissinn' caterwaulin'  
everybody stays away  
'cause no one wants to get between us  
no one

and then it's all over  
everyone brings us  
back together again

why was I so angry with you she asks  
like she can't remember  
and I sure as hell can't remember

all you know is that  
you were really angry  
about something or other  
but now you can't exactly remember why  
and now it doesn't really matter anyway  
even though at the time  
it was the most important thing in the world  
like the entire world was gonna blow up

I don't know  
could be anything  
I said something  
you don't want to hear  
I did something  
you don't want me to do

I know you'll always come back

we have a pet rat named him Alfred  
he's brown  
looks like he's wearin' white gloves  
funny we're keeping a rat like a king  
when where we're stayin' is  
nothin' but a cockroach hotel

turn the light off at night  
hundreds of 'em crawl out  
is it us or the cockroaches sign the lease  
it's more their place than ours

I'm getting so sick of macaroni and cheese  
can't even take a mouthful of the stuff  
    not without gaggin'  
can't even look at the outside of the package  
    just barely

Catherine has a lot more than I ever had  
she has a family  
she has people who love her

around Catherine  
I'm somebody  
I can do things  
I have ideas

there are a lot of good times  
and a lot of sad times too

we face an awful lot of deaths  
that's the thing about the street  
it's a hard life

our friends  
don't know how many funerals  
lose count  
you're always thinkin'  
there but for the grace of God  
'cause that could be you



it's a fluke  
I'm still here

hard when you know  
someone died alone  
there wasn't even anybody there in the end  
everybody should have somebody  
to hold their hand

mark their passing

but when somebody dies on the street  
they die alone

maybe they're livin' in a lean-to  
under the overpass  
die from the cold  
maybe they're mugged  
left to lie in the street  
get run over by a streetcar

maybe they jus' plain give up  
check outta this hotel

it's full-time work  
survivin'

my friend Frankie's goin' to jail again  
she's been in and out so many times  
we're all losing count  
Frankie's laughin' and tellin' me she's gonna go  
kick a few tires  
'cause Lacie her lover  
Lacie's back in jail  
they wanna have Thanksgiving together

how're you gonna do that  
what do you mean you're gonna kick a few tires

she laughs again  
watch me

doesn't Frankie begin to holler and shout and scream  
make a real scene  
crowd's gathering  
everyone's starin' at her

run around the corner don't want any part of it  
Frankie's kickin' some shiny red car on Queen  
frie kin' car alarm goes off  
buzzin' and honkin' and beepin'  
we're in the middle of a war  
and maybe we are  
kicks it three or four times before the cops  
pull up handcuff her haul her off to the station  
I'm watchin' from around the corner

and Frankie she waves goodbye to me  
she flashes me this huge smile  
mouths the words  
    good-bye

she's gonna shout  
Lacie honey I'm home  
as they bring her in  
that's the kind of person she is

last time I see Frankie  
    alive

she loves drawing wolves  
she did one of a wolf howling at the moon

if you ever hear a wolf  
moanin' at the moon  
you're hearin' something  
ten thousand years old  
once you hear it you never forget it

can hear that wolf of hers howlin'  
gives you the shivers  
that wolf is starin' right straight through you

jail's like a retreat for her  
like some kinda holiday  
no worryin' about  
where's your next meal comin' from  
where you gonna sleep tonight

take a holiday from beggin'  
at Yonge and Bloor  
panhandling's outlawed no loitering it's a crime  
cops tell you move along move along  
no room for you here in this city  
get invisible  
get lost  
get dead

Lacie's still hookin' the last I hear  
Frankie she's dead  
she's stabbed  
they think she's somebody else  
drug deal gone bad  
she knows the odds  
beats 'em for a while

another hopeless homeless  
statistic

never forget full wolf moon  
that's how I remember her  
that's how I want to remember her  
I'm sure that's how she wants to be  
remembered

Catherine dies too  
cause unknown

she's a year younger than me  
we spend a long time together on the streets  
she never tells me everything  
about her life  
always thinking she will

we're never lovers  
always thought one day we would

she never tells me the story of her life  
people think we're real sisters  
we braid our hair the same way  
wear the same kinds of clothes  
people think we're twins  
they can't tell us apart

if no one remembers us  
if we don't remember ourselves  
what then

livin' on the street  
you never get the dirt out  
from underneath your fingernails  
sometimes the only thing you can do is  
    act crazy  
maybe people will stay away from you

I'm hooked on alcohol  
everything keeps goin' back and forth  
like a see-saw  
I stop drinkin' for a while  
    start again  
stop

you're so stuck  
no point in changin'  
thinkin' about changing  
'cause everybody else around you  
they're doin' the same thing  
this is the way it is  
this is life  
this is your life  
    nothing else  
normal is ten in the morning  
passed out  
wearin' the same  
clothes for days

'cause you haven't bothered taking them off

you don't even notice  
stink of old puke  
that stink is you  
your hair  
your shirt  
puddle of sick on the floor  
can't smell it

no more

**guest**

I been raped twice

and now it's three times

the first time it happens  
 when I move back to Toronto  
 go downtown  
 and this guy has a bottle  
 we're sittin' there in the park  
 he says he's gonna walk me back to the subway

nobody around

he knocks me over the head  
 drags me into an alleyway

the second time it isn't  
 an actual rape  
 it's an attempted  
 but it's close enough  
 by another friend's boyfriend

you're askin' for it  
 no I'm not  
 I kick him hard

and then the third time  
get hit on the head  
knocked out again

I get up  
get dressed  
look at him  
scar on my head

throbs



don't say a word

he won't even look at me  
leaves

nothin' left

I see it

the dandelion growin'  
out of a crack in the pavement  
one flower lookin' right at me

pick up the spill from my purse  
yellow comb two teeth missin'  
only now three teeth missin'  
drug prescription  
money gone  
cigarettes gone  
hey still got my free French fries coupon  
guess he missed that

the flower  
so soft

stumble over to one of those places on Yonge Street  
where eggs over-easy  
slop off the edges of the plate  
edge of the world

no centre  
no more

woman behind the counter looks at me  
brings me  
hot barley soup brown toast

on the house honey

sometimes people do good things  
just not enough to make up for all the  
other times

funny thing is  
have to get up the next day  
go to the university  
talk about homelessness in a sociology class  
I'm it  
I'm the guest speaker

feel like a real pile of shit  
all I know is I have to concentrate

I'm gonna call this woman up and tell her  
I can't do it  
can't make it  
to the university  
to do the speech  
that's all I'm gonna say  
and I'm gonna  
thank her  
for invitin' me

then I say to myself  
gotta do it  
gotta do this  
gotta get outta here  
this is my only reason for  
gettin' out of here

I go there I do it  
stand there in front of all these students  
they look like they're still in high school  
here they are in this class that's teachin' them  
why the poor are poor  
they're readin' the books  
they've never lived there

so I try to tell them  
what it's like  
to be homeless  
what it's like to live on the street  
how you eat the half sandwich  
thrown in the garbage

how you eat the packages of ketchup  
from that restaurant  
check the dumpster behind the grocery  
survive every little you can  
tell them how you think you'll never get  
    off the street  
how you keep tryin' and tryin'  
but everythin' pulls you down

and I tell them how you never have enough money for  
first and last month's rent so you end up livin' from  
hostel to hostel  
corner to corner  
when you get some money  
spend it fast  
so no one robs you  
or help a friend out of a tight spot  
that's where the money goes

I tell them how you sleep on so many sofas  
so many places you lose track  
every time you move  
lose something else  
there are pieces of you all over the city

and when the students ask  
how did you get off the street  
tell them how it wasn't easy

it's a lie  
should be tellin' them  
I'm still on it  
I can't leave

once you live on the street  
once you've been a street person  
you're always a street person  
you never forget it  
it's always inside you  
you never forget your friends

you never forget the ones who are dead now  
you never forget  
because you never know if  
    you're gonna end up there again  
you're the one they'll find

maybe you only stop bein' a street person  
when you stop carin' about your street friends

I'm not thinking

I'm not thinking about  
what he did to me

I'm a wreck  
I don't know what to do

there's only one person who knows  
I'm havin' a baby  
I'm hiding my pregnancy  
wearin' baggy clothes  
no one knows  
and when the day comes  
this good friend of mine  
she's in the delivery room with me

have to argue with the doctor and the nurses to  
allow her to come in  
it's a Catholic hospital  
it's supposed to be the man

don't have a man here  
I want her

she can't come in

she'd better come in or I'll do everything  
in my power to  
not have this kid

I'll lock myself somewhere in a washroom  
I don't care  
that woman has to be in here

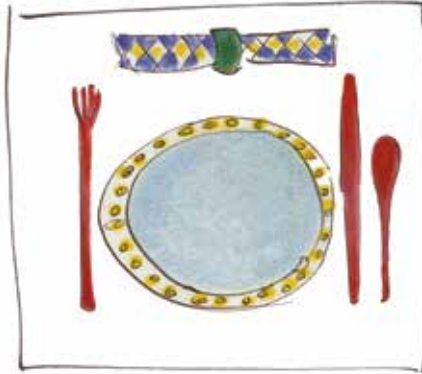
so they finally allow her in

she has four kids herself  
it's the first time she's  
ever seen a baby bein' born

say goodbye  
sign on the dotted line



## stubborn



this women's shelter  
 something's changing  
 I'm helping the staff  
 I want to stay here  
 I'm cooking the dinners  
 cauliflower cheese soup  
 dandelion salad  
 pick the dandelions myself

I'm cleaning the place  
 doin' anything to stay

so they won't  
 kick me out

whenever someone says I have to move on  
 I say I'm gonna go to  
 the streets

we'll find you another hostel  
 we'll send you over

fine goodbye pack my bags walk out the door



here's some bus tickets  
take care of yourself

keep your bus tickets  
give 'em to somebody who really needs them

aren't you goin' over to the other place  
we phoned  
told them you're comin' over

I'm not goin' to another hostel

sometimes  
actually most times  
people don't listen  
they get it in their own mind  
what's best for you  
only what they're tellin' you to do  
it's really what's best for them  
what's easiest for them

why don't you  
if I were you  
but it's mostly do as I say  
not as I do

## kicked



meet this woman at a party  
 Sybil's her name

friend introduces us  
 you two will hit it off she says

this woman has a great crooked smile  
 like she's holdin' a secret inside

my husband beat me says Sybil  
 pretty bad  
 they want me to press charges  
 don't ever want to see him  
 never again  
 not for the rest of my life  
 I up and left him  
 walked out one day with my suitcase  
 haven't seen him since

Sybil and me  
 we both like the same ice cream  
 yeah we're livin' on the street

eatin' rocky road ice cream  
almonds with those small marshmallows

we have a great time  
for a while  
yeah until it starts turnin' ugly  
and I'm regrettin' we ever  
got together in the first place

she's sick  
really sick  
takes a while to realize it

have so many problems of my own  
blinds me to the fact  
she's drinkin' more and more

the whole thing's falling apart

things turn really bad  
she's jealous  
she's accusin' me of goin'  
behind her back

I'm not seein' anyone  
no way I'm seein' anyone else

you're lyin'  
I can tell when you're lyin'  
how'd you think I wouldn't know

if you want to go screw around behind my back  
that's it  
that's the kiss of death  
and if you think I'm gonna wait

she's on a rant  
no reasoning with her

can't figure out why  
maybe the alcohol's destroying her brain cells

one of those things that haunts you  
until your dyin' day

what have I done to deserve this  
what have I done to deserve anything

the world doesn't owe you nothin'  
up to you  
make the most of what you got  
nobody else's gonna do that for you

and if you don't  
if you want to screw around  
who am I to stop you  
she turns blue in the face  
from all the lies

I'm a beater  
I abuse her  
and every other bad thing  
under the sun

the more I hack away at the lies  
twenty more like it  
there's no stoppin' her

can hardly put one foot  
in front of the other  
she's harassin' me so much

when I finally move  
I can breathe again  
get accepted into university

quit drinkin'  
thank God my life is startin' to turn around

but she's followin' me  
she's callin'  
she's makin' my life hell

I'm at the university  
go to the washroom after class  
it's a night class  
sociology course on deviance

what's normal what's deviant what's criminal  
we're talkin' about  
all these mental disorders  
all these crazy things people do

I come out of the bathroom stall  
she's there waitin' for me  
she doesn't say anything  
standin' there lookin' at me  
it's creepy  
she's gonna kill me

she knows where I am  
and she's standin' there waitin' for me  
no one else around  
she musta followed me to school

I have to quit

it's a long road from the street  
keep lookin' over my shoulder every second  
wonderin' if she's gonna jump out at me

move again  
'cause I can't take it  
no more

one day she up and leaves  
she's gone  
it's over

but I keep lookin' around  
somebody's watchin' me

Sybil's behind that tree  
she's standin' there when I turn the corner  
she walks in the door of the laundromat  
and I'm foldin' my clothes  
catch her out of the corner of my eye

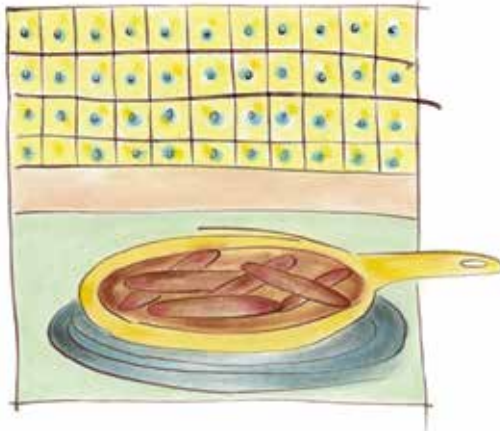
my insides pitch

it's always somebody else

I'm jumpin'  
from home  
to home  
like a frog  
for years  
no safe place



## cleaver



I'm workin' at a shelter  
 one of the bag ladies comes in  
     it's Hazel  
 you have to go through her every bag  
 every last thing she's carryin' is broken  
 you're lookin' for weapons spray cans  
 knives drugs rotten food oven cleaner  
 anything lethal  
     you name it

here's a pork chop  
 petrified green  
 lookin' like a semi-precious stone

you need this

yes

it's so hard  
 it isn't gonna decay anyway  
 crystallized like a chunk of jade

one night a woman threatens to  
 kill one of the staff members



I walk in  
    between  
  
    give me the knife

she's screaming  
breathin' heavy

I grab her arm  
grab the cleaver with  
my other hand  
pull it away

someone's callin' the police  
critical incident that's what we got

I walk away with the cleaver

she follows me

I look around  
I turn around  
I look her straight in the eye  
my voice is flat  
it's not loud it's not soft  
say it casually  
as if it's something you'd say any time  
no one would think twice about it  
like please pass the pepper

and this is what I say  
plain and simple

if I see you pick up another knife here  
I'll chop your hand off

she looks at the cleaver in my hand  
    backs off

threaten her with the same thing  
she wants to give other people  
it works  
    sometimes  
not all the time

depends on the situation  
depends on the individual  
depends on the wind  
depends on how the stars line up  
depends on how the sausages  
fall into the saucepan

what works tomorrow  
won't work tonight  
won't work yesterday

you get an extra sense  
like your nose hairs tickle  
or a spot on your arm goes itchy  
you know you better be careful

talk 'em down  
cool the air  
connect  
whatever level they want to connect  
somebody else is standin' by the phone  
in case they really need to phone  
    911  
        just in case



## graveyard of names



all those people you meet  
never see again

I'm walkin' down Yonge Street  
this truck pulls up beside me  
this guy's drivin' a truck of flowers  
rolls down his window says  
you doin' anything tonight miss

no

hard question to refuse sometimes  
need the money  
must be the smell of all those flowers  
I climb into the truck

whole truck smells like a flower garden  
roses and daisies and lilies  
and a real fancy one  
he tells me it's a bird of paradise  
nice name

long beak  
crown fire orange  
arrow-shaped blue tongue

he's lookin' for a good luck piece  
I'm his good luck piece  
so he buys me  
a steak sandwich fries chocolate milkshake  
takes me to the racetrack

he wins in five races  
thousands of dollars  
he passes me five hundred bucks  
buys me a case of beer  
gets me a hotel room for three days  
it keeps me goin'

I'll remember him  
if I ever see him again  
he laughs when I tell him  
my name

go by a lot of names  
depends who I'm with what I'm doin'  
one way or other  
drive the suits and their computers nuts  
they can't find me  
not unless I want 'em to

depends how long someone knows you  
what they call you

if you got a secret name  
they can't curse you kick you beat you down  
'cause they don't know your name

Kay Sarah Gracie Lori Barb  
whatever

Angel  
that's the one  
my parents gave me

but I ain't no holy saint  
angel means messenger  
maybe that's what I am

maybe I'm a messenger  
but a messenger's gotta have  
a message  
someone wants to hear it

don't give up  
you can't give up  
give up and that's it  
game's over  
no more dandelion salad

you're here for a purpose girl  
even if you don't know what it is  
you won't ever know  
even if you try  
that's the funny thing  
the joke's on you  
you'll never suck out the end of the story  
outta the melon

you're always comin'  
in the middle  
you're always leavin'  
in the middle

you can only say a name so many times  
life's only got  
so many heartbeats  
so many breaths

name gets worn out  
like an old sock with a hole

your name drops out onto the sidewalk  
and you hardly notice it's gone  
'cause everybody calls you something else

someone finds it  
puts it in their pocket forgets about it  
falls out in the laundromat  
they sweep it up in the dustpan

they throw your name away

somebody else comes along  
steps on your name  
squashes the whole thing

it's a dead name now  
goes to wherever dead names go

names like dandelion seeds  
every time someone reads your name  
every time someone writes it  
every time someone whispers  
sings shouts curses it  
every time someone hears your name  
another seed lifts off  
drops inside the crack of the curb  
the city is my mother

when your name's all used up  
when the jar of raspberry jam is an empty smear  
when you chew the last slice of bread  
when the milk's all gone  
last squirt of ketchup  
last lick of margarine  
last pickle in the jar  
cupboard's so empty  
the cockroaches scut away  
the dead names rattle

Angel's a good name

an angel's watchin' over me  
since I was a baby  
else how would I still be alive  
    how can I still be alive  
        how can I survive  
            everything

the world owes you nothin'

guess my mother thought if she brought a little angel  
    into this world  
she could just as well kick a little angel  
    outta this world  
that's what she wants to do  
gets it in her mind  
and there's no stopping

how  
could  
she

if it isn't for my father  
    I woulda died  
he carries me to the hospital  
    four miles  
he walks along the railway tracks  
stumblin' through the snow

funny thing  
    in my dreams  
I see her  
see her clear as day  
long brown hair pulled back  
eyes like dark raisins  
she's wearin' a hair clip  
dandelion on it  
she's smilin' at me



in my dreams my mother smiles  
sometimes she touches my forehead  
frownin'  
sometimes asks me puzzled  
how'd you get this scar

it doesn't matter mom

she's my mother  
no matter what she does to me  
she's still my mother

## Angel's story begins —

no one has a scar like this unless  
go ahead  
yeah someone's tried to  
kill me



girl you must be here for some reason  
that's what I keep tellin' myself  
you must be here on this blessed earth  
for some reason

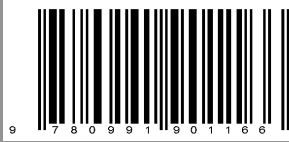
A testament to the search for reason in the face of loss and sorrow, the resiliency of the human spirit, an unerring sense of hope...

Angel tells her story of a treacherous childhood, abuse and living homeless on the streets of Toronto. First person narrative, fragments of memory and free verse heighten the immediacy of this gritty yet poignant story for young adults, which treads a fine line between the sane and the incomprehensible.

Angel draws inspiration from many years of ethnographic research on chronic homelessness in Toronto.

Rae St. Clair Bridgman has authored several books, including *Jimmy Tattoo: Homeless on the Streets of Toronto* (2016), *Safe Haven: The Story of a Shelter for Homeless Women* (University of Toronto Press, 2003) and *StreetCities: Rehousing the Homeless* (Broadview Press, 2006), co-authored *Braving the Street: The Anthropology of Homelessness* (Berghahn Books, 1999), and co-edited *Feminist Fields: Ethnographic Insights* (Broadview Press, 1999).

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