



callus

callus  
(2018)

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self published by  
javetta laster

location  
Albany, Georgia

*with gratitude for the process*

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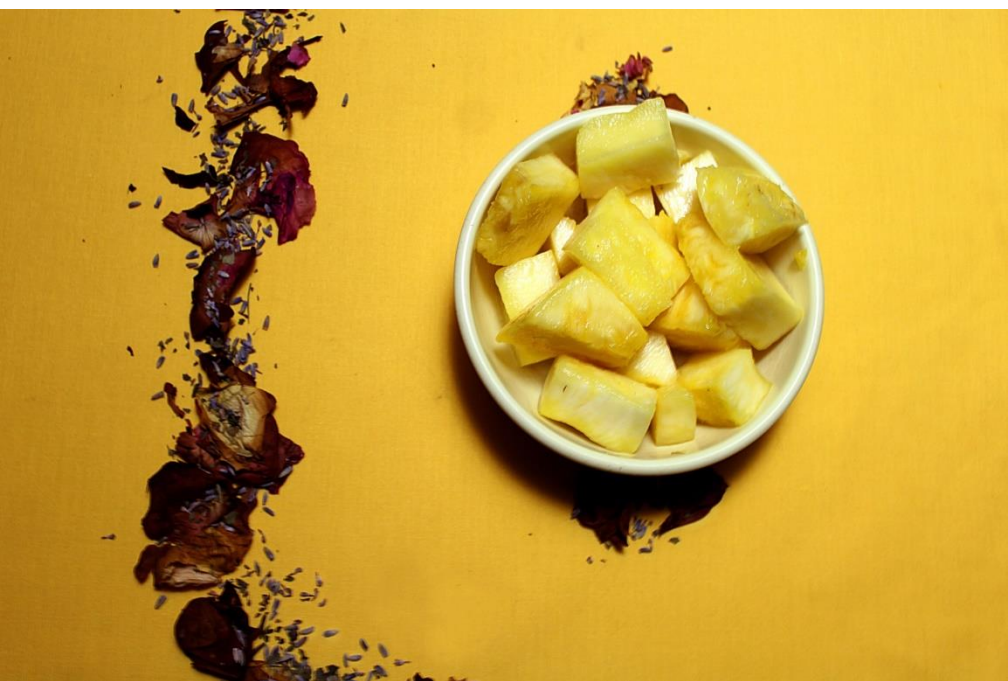
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# callus<sub>[ka-liss]</sub>

1. *a thickened and hardened part of the skin or soft tissue, especially in an area that has been subjected to friction.*
2. *the bony healing tissue that forms around the ends of broken bone.*
3. *a hard formation of tissue, especially new tissue formed over a wound.*





# offering<sup>[aw-fren]</sup>

*something offered; especially: a sacrifice ceremonially offered as a part of worship.*

In December 2016, I began an experience that would shape the next 12 months and align the rest of my life. *callus* unearthed itself as an outlet to explore the emptiness of a recent breakup. I was in a place of confusion and very unsure of my next step. My financial resources, self-worth, ability to envision a new future, and sense of continuity were all impacted by the abruptness and callousness of the separation. Callousness creates calluses, I suppose. But if I am to be honest, the breakup was simply the crack that allowed the rest of *it* to fall through. The rest of it was Grief.

Through that initial heartbreak, I discovered I had been unknowingly holding griefs in my belly since I was 6. Many of these were experiences where grief should have only been a portion of the whole, but the Grief in them took over and shut everything else out. The Grief forced those other portions to become reclusive in the dankness of sorrow and silence. It wasn't until this season that I acknowledged I had been walking around with a grief retentive belly all this time. The breakup caused an involuntary release of the ancient oceans inside of me, and the waters came tumbling down one after the other.

I wanted *callus* to reflect the steady weight of grieving from multiple angles. I wanted the tone of the writings and photography to convey that not every part of grieving is about sadness. A lot of grief is about sitting still. For me, sitting still included smoking a black down by the river. I am in deep gratitude to the river, georgia earth, and the trees (3 in particular) for assisting me with my griefs as much as they did.

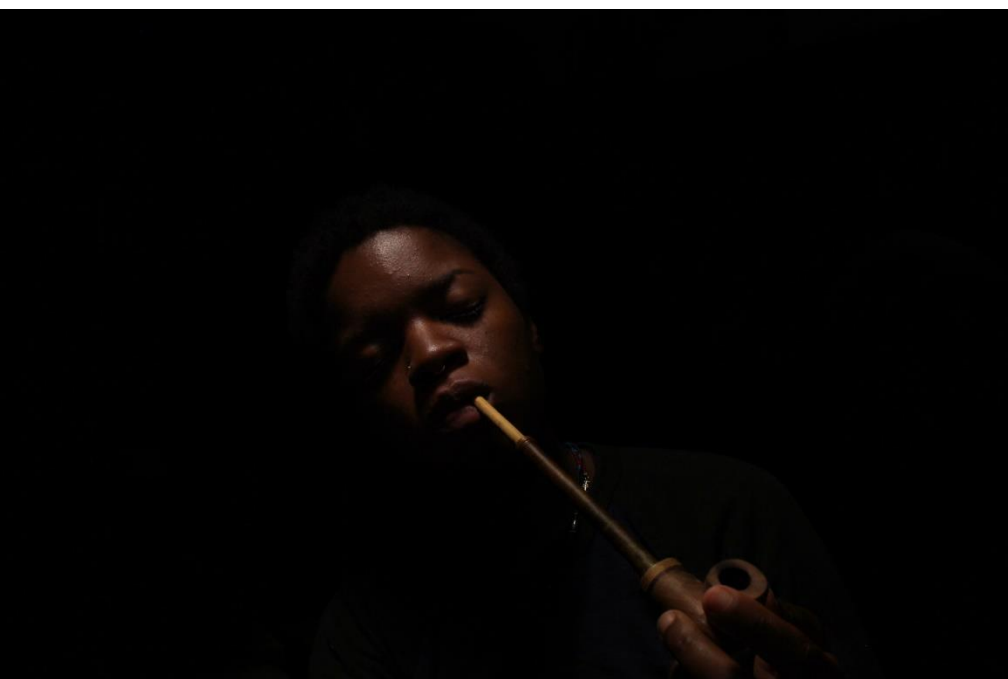
And then of course there is the sadness. What I express here in this chapbook is deeply about healing by way of disappointment. It is about affording yourself the grace to admit that you are not feeling well. Once you can admit that everything is not okay, then the work can begin of identifying the poison. To identify the poison, it helps to acknowledge *where* it hurts, *for how long* it has been hurting, and what new areas are starting to hurt because of a poison that has travelled. Once you know your poison, then you can find your medicine. *callus* taught me much about doing the work of extracting medicine from the poison and making a tea of it afterwards. It also gently taught me that sometimes what I come to view as poison is just medicine steeped too long.

With this chapbook, I accept the titles writer, photographer and artist. My vision of self and potential has grown since this compilation was first birthed, and it is my goal to transform *callus*, my first chapbook *Hurricane Season* and my first gathering of poems *Galaxy* into a full fledged book. Maybe even something more. I share this vision because I am not afraid of where I am headed, and I know who protects me and my/their work. (And also, a little buzz never hurt anyone.) As always, I am in request of your prayers and well wishes on this journey. Until then, please enjoy *callus* and find the places where it gives your grief freedom. My hope is that some of us will find comfort in knowing pain does not happen in isolation or sparingly.

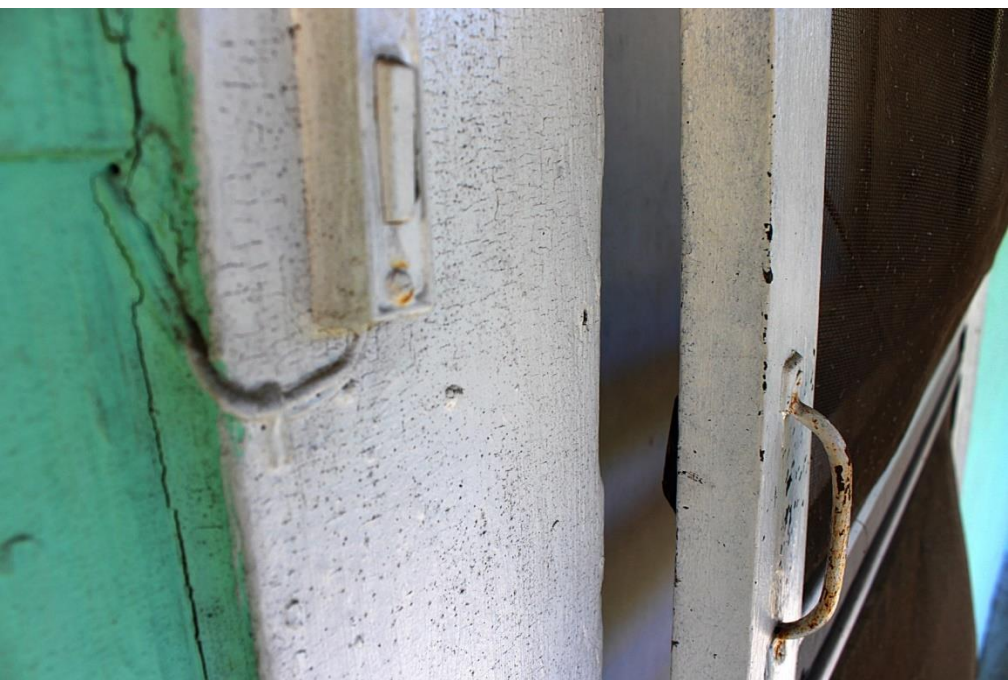
Bless.

Javetta

*callus* (2018)







**welcome back**<sub>[wel-kum bike]</sub>

*a phrase used to acknowledge the return of someone or something who has been away*

I kept my hair short in the beginning and cut it once when I first returned home. I learned patience through 6 new moons, 6 full, 2 eclipses and entering into my Saturn Return. Patience has become a ritual of itself. I bathed for hours praying. I waited on the first rains of the month to wash my hair and didn't let a comb touch it. I stopped all intoxications even if they were holy – whiskey, sex, weed, love, lust, money, pork and other foods. For 8 months. Felt them move like molasses suctioning bile through my chest, pulling down with the weight of detox extracted from my lungs, my core, spiraling down to the place where I fold into halves.

I found the stars counted the hours better than clocks. They better emphasized this reality where 3 days fit into 1 and 2 weeks made a summer.

*Around the Moon's 3<sup>rd</sup> phase for the 5<sup>th</sup> time,  
I stopped missing you.  
Around my 4<sup>th</sup> moon cycle  
I stopped making a muse of us.*

I been  
*a bag of lipton tea steeped for thirty minutes*  
kind of bitter.

I been making this pain  
*tea leaves in tea bags*  
kind of useful.

I am  
*steam rising*  
kind of over it.



Keeping pace with these  
castor oil rituals at  
Home.

Been Gone.  
Been Healin.  
Been Lost.  
Been Listenin.  
Been Prayin.  
Been Fastin.  
Been Drinkin.  
Been Rock.  
Been Honey.

Been Askin.  
Been Hurtin.  
Been Callin.  
Been Dreamin.  
Been Seein.  
Been Moanin.  
Been Talkin.  
Been Mutterin.  
Been Hidin.

Been Bathin.  
    Been God.  
    Been Dead.  
    Been Eve.  
Been Forgotten.  
    Been Back.  
    Been Living.  
    Am Alive,  
  
Still Tired.

The difference  
between poison and medicine  
is dosage and application  
which means  
the difference  
between poison and medicine  
is the intention of the practitioner.

when my happiness became  
less like flowers in my hand  
and more like a razor  
I started to feel safe again.

when my self-care became  
less like the smell of eucalyptus  
and more like the smell of sweat  
I began to see progress.

Nothing about this process  
looks like the peace I thought it would be.

Like I gotta ask myself –  
maybe *I* got peace fucked up?  
Maybe it's less like happy sighs and  
more like the gritted stillness that comes  
when you've scraped the sides  
until you made it out alive.

my bones begin to bend again  
I stretch my legs to stand,  
I am sore in all the places  
that I used to use to dance.







# **perspective**<sub>[per-spek-tiv]</sub>

1. *a. the faculty of seeing all the relevant data in a meaningful relationship accurately and fairly*  
*b. the capacity to view things in their true relations or relative importance*
2. *a. a visible scene; especially: one giving a distinct impression of distance.*  
*b. a mental view*

I loved you because  
I thought by loving you  
I was truly loving myself

That was selfish.

We postponed the inevitable,  
confusing the words coming from our lips  
with promises meant to be kept.  
The time came to prove ourselves –  
we jumped the gun instead of the broom.

The truth is, the day got longer  
when you came home.  
Your kisses began to taste  
like stale yesterdays and buried futures.  
There were *new* questions,  
questions I had about *you*  
that went unanswered.  
I looked at you for the first time in weeks  
I mean, *really* looked at you  
and you looked like someone I had never loved.  
I remember you said my name softly only once in October.  
It was brief and not enough.  
The 7 letters darted into the air  
and searched the ceilings frantically  
for ways to escape.  
The cat didn't even bother to chase them  
they got out the window so quickly.

Falling out of love  
sometimes happens gently  
and is still deadly like poison in tea.  
Sometimes falling out of love  
happens silently like empty streets,  
hollowed like empty jars.  
Softly like falling leaves  
that hit the ground  
breaking open sink holes.

It's telling how meaninglessness  
shape shifts into people.

When we find the time, we fumble over the insides of each other, touching the inner walls of caverns coated with heartache and stalactites. We try smelling for gold and are disappointed when we find water ways. In these godly, mortal vessels of time and transportation, of ancestors and bowels, we get trapped in a labyrinth of self denial. Planted into the walls of this maze, our baby teeth snag us when we're about to tell another lie. They remind us of the shallow wishes we used to make for happiness. Even after cutting and blood, not much has changed in our decay into adulthood. We've learned to look for crowns that don't come with kingdoms. Maybe if we want a throne so bad, we should learn when to have a seat.

the weatherwoman predicted the trajectory of the storm.  
she jumped over the islands that led up to Miami  
because stepping stones don't need names.  
the doppler radar made no indication  
there would be people killed in the blank rectangles  
hovering on the ocean right outside of Florida.

for days after the storm hit,  
I had to search for news of those stepping stones.  
first I had to search for their names,  
the newspeople never spoke some of them.

everyone was called to "pray for florida"  
and only the waters preyed for all the people.  
This is why the slogan "pray for \_\_\_\_\_" only works  
if your prayers themselves are nationalists.

these feet been travellin tragedy to tragedy  
like we all good neighbors.  
aint nobody got no sugar.







# magnolia

[mack-nole-yuh]

1. *any tree or shrub of the genus magnolia; valued for their longevity and exquisite, fragrant blooms*

2. *dried bark of various magnolias; ancient genus; used in folk medicine*

*see also: magnolia grandiflora (southern magnolia), native to coastal north carolina to central florida, and west to east texas and oklahoma.*

1.

People comment on my softness.

2.

To make cake,

You beat eggs.

Bleach flour.

Mix brutally beaten eggs and stripped, bleached flour.

Heat at a sweltering 400 degrees.

Top with icing.

3.

Comment on how sweet the taste.

4.

You don't know what it took to wear my skin down.

the love of my life is a flower.  
I'm open to many lovers of many lives  
but if we are to be together,  
we must make meadows.









# **ruminations**

[roo-mih-nay-shunz]

1. *to slowly go over in the mind repeatedly*
2. *meditations*
3. *to chew or grind food in your mouth until it becomes soft enough to swallow*

My Great Auntie Janie was a small brown lima bean folded in the baptism clothes of hospital sheets. The thin blankets swallowed her up like the whale did Jonah and probably woulda did you too, had you been living back then and such.

It took the nurse 30 minutes of gentle speak to push the 2 pills down the throat of my great auntie, the shrunken giant. She let out a small yelp that fought with its life to get past them thick ass pills trying to get to her belly. Auntie gagged and reached for water anywhere nearby. She reached her hands into the air with what seemed like frantic motions but her movements were slowed by the tubes in her nose and arms, the recline of the hospital bed, the overwhelming sterility of hospital rooms, the fluids that needed to be drained from her lungs, and the 5am vitals check followed by a 7am check for something else. The nurse somehow moved *even more slowly* than Auntie and with only a pinch of the urgency. She passed Auntie's thin grasping hands a cup of water no more than 2 ounces full.

-

Prayer: May the community relearn how to take care  
of the ones who have taken care of it.

Being home is taking turns sleeping in hospital chairs.  
 Love is appreciating having another time to do so.

Humility is comforting the hands  
 that held you when you were a baby  
 as the nurse draws another sample.  
 Love is continuing to hold them when the nurse leaves.

Humility is praying for great aunts  
 with the words they used to wash over you.

Acceptance is your transitioning uncle  
 asking you to solve a riddle  
 that he won't tell you the answer to.  
*How many ribbons does it take to get to the moon?*  
 Love is knowing the answer doesn't matter  
 because he loved to *tell* riddles  
 and he chose to tell one more to you  
 before he passed.

*Love is patient, love is kind.  
 It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud.  
 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking...  
 It always protects, always trusts,  
 always hopes, always perseveres.*

Love is knowing what scriptures to place in obituaries,  
 (and meaning it)  
 even if we do not share the same gods.

The rain pounded the leaves and the cement with the same intensity, didn't give a care whether nature or man made it, all was under her kingdom today. The trees swayed in trance creating what sounded like an ocean in the middle of the air. The wind chimes chirped and folks were deep in their houses with the big door open and the screen door shut. The smell of rain and earth mixed and separated at whim. It was 3 o'clock in the day and was as dark as the night at 9. The wind crept past the screen door cool and chilling and snooped about the house.

*If there were a dance for séances, it would be danced best by the wind.*

I sat in my grandmother's old room in front of the computer. My throat got thick with the heavy of silence, a weight levied by solitude.

*Sometimes you doing somethin' and you look up and all of a sudden you just lonely.*

It felt like that right then and there. I refreshed my Facebook feed hoping to distract my mind more but the overcast weather slowed down the internet connection. Soon the connection would cease to exist all together, per usual per storm.

I clicked refresh one more time for good measure and that dinosaur game popped up to tell me my internet was inaccessible. I took off my glasses and rubbed my eyes. I had been absentmindedly twisting my hair all day, half bored & half anxious, and the residue of black castor oil and peppermint oil on my fingers made them sting.

It had been about 9 months since I moved back home. 3 of those months I couldn't barely do anything other than take baths and sleep and eat piece meals of rice, lentils and other beans. The other 6 months, I'd been glued to this screen. If not this screen then some piece of

electrical equipment. But that day the rain had something to say and we all shut up when God is talking, yeah?

The drone of the rain, steady and unrelenting started to get fuzzy. I swallowed hard and closed my eyes hoping that would keep them from swelling up as quickly as they would had they been open, but I knew better. Glimpses of my grandmother's face flashed into my vision. I searched her cheekbones for forgiveness or the spell that would make the distance a dream. Something to unspin the time lost in the 10 years away from home.

*But you know it all feels like it's too late when you come home to bury.*

There in her room, I cried both remorseful and angry at the choices I had made. I cried defeatedly. More than anything, I cried because I felt I understood too much too late and had said too little too many times. If I could have washed and oiled my grandmother's feet one more time, I would have stayed on my knees for eternity. She once said to me, years before when I was sitting in that same room, *"I know bout that depression, too. It's hard."* In that room, *her* room, I sat wondering about the griefs my grandmother and I could have shared that were now topics of discussion to be held at cemeteries, altars or in dreams.

For an elongated moment, I felt the anger take over the disappointment and something in me sneered. I caught myself being annoyed and irritated by my own sadness. I contemplated running anywhere, getting out of the house again, drinkin, fuckin, anything to move away from the guilt of my decisions. And not just decisions with my grandmother but other regrets that had waited for the right moment to resurface.

It was in that moment I understood that the devil is real. And the devil is a certain kind of pain that strickens black women with a certain kind of shame and sorrow and suffering that thins you out slowly over time and ties you down one limb at a time - one finger and then one toe and so on. You find yourself rummaging through your cab'nets trying to nurture yourself and the devil is taking half of your nourishment. That kind of devil, no matter how far you "travel" from it, is always right over your shoulder waiting for you to crack! and then laughs at you even more because it tricked you into thinking that cracking was something *bad*.

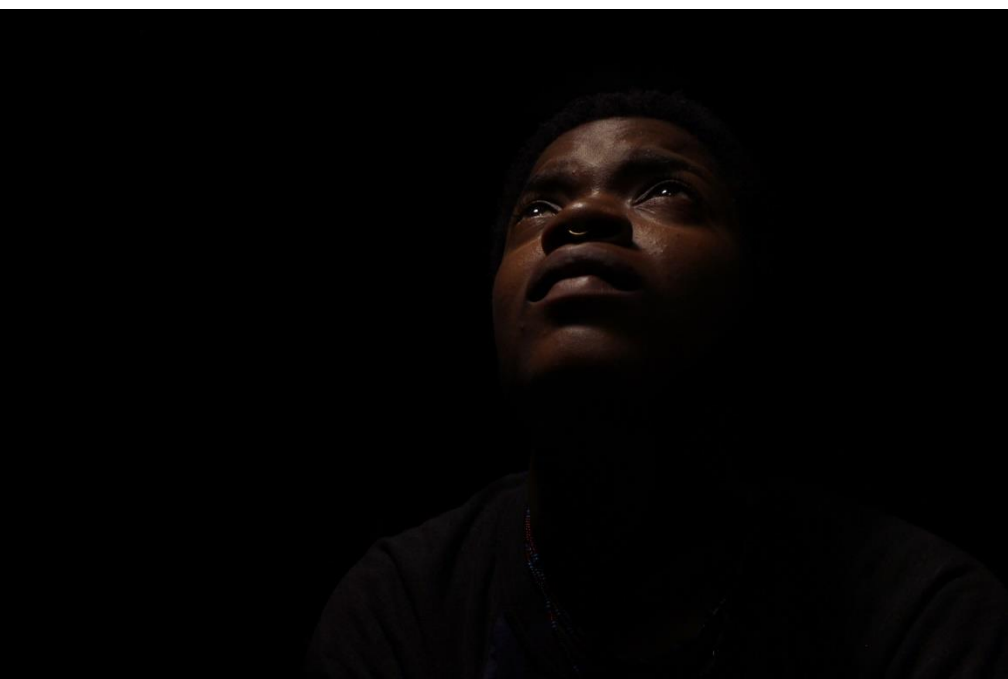
There is a devil standing between me and my grieving that I have to exorcise daily. It tries to convince me that grieving isn't sustainable. That devil that tries to tell me that every loss is a part of a greater good and that there is a way to win at grief. But I know you don't checkmate Death. It asks me "is that enough?" and "when are you going to let it go?" and "aren't you tired of *feeling* this way?" The absurdity of these questions tire me because they come from so many mouths silently. I do not *feel* how much I miss my grandmother, how much I miss my grandmother is a part of my skin - I walk with it daily and only notice when something tries to puncture through it like it isn't there.

That devil that haunts black women be trying to tell me a lot of things about how to grieve and for how long. It tries to tell me to bottle up my pain inside my belly so that the pain can become ulcers, cysts, tumors and infections. It tells me to clog up my tears so that the salt raises my sodium levels. It encourages me to become hard and move past the pain too quickly so that I never learn how to slow dance with my children and loved ones. I feel

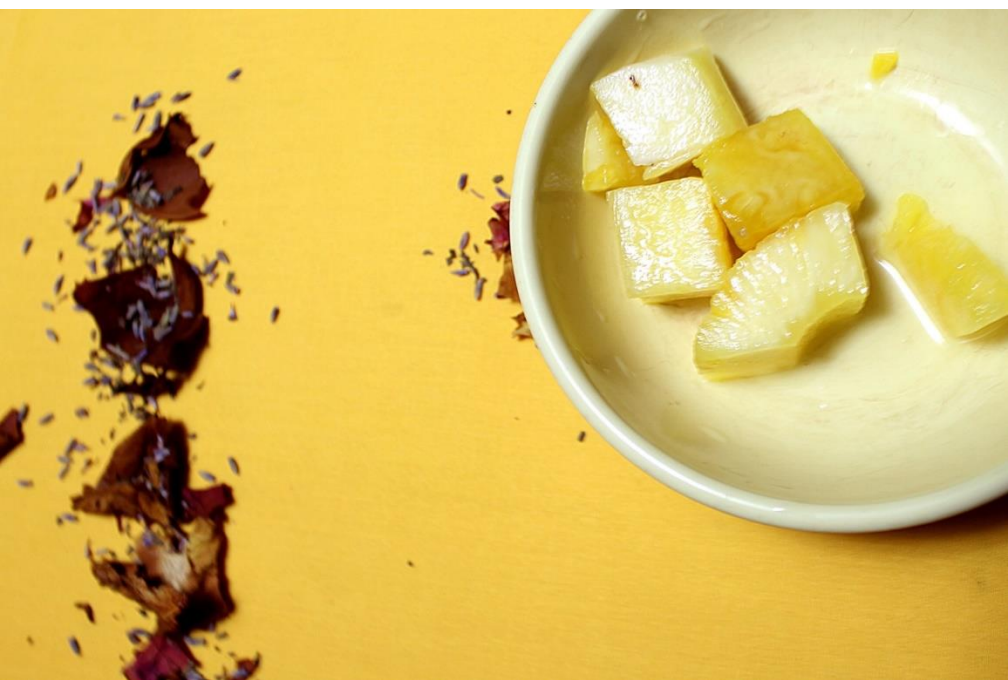
it in my joints how I've been stiffened in lives before. Maybe most scary, the devil wants the pain to trade places with me. Pain that deep can shapeshift just like meaninglessness; it gets up and pretends like it's you and no one will know for sure but everyone will be able to tell there's something different about you.

When them lil lies start to spreadin every now and again trying to convince me to consider hurryin up and beating the grief way down to the bottom of my belly, the rain comes to reveal the truth. She brings the baptism with her. She comes down to georgia following the trail of the devil and of the slave routes, and she come to tell me that the devil is a lie. She looks at my tears and tells me they are made of the same stuff as the ocean and the rainwater and all these three are places my grandmother visits. She searches my questions and lets them stretch out loud for they've been buried in the back of my throat for years. She does not rush to answer them but allows the towering Unknown to stand to its full height and magnificence. She quiets the streets and plays on the leaves of the oak, pine and magnolia trees – dancing, drumming, sometimes a shekere until the anxiety is lulled to sleep by the steadiness of renewal. When she leaves she leaves, and when she comes she comes.

In the stillness after the rain stopped, my body shook and heaved once more before calming itself. Breathing as I did when I was a child, I self soothed until I was able to leave the computer, leave her room, and go to run a bath. I stayed there for 3 hours and cried a set of different tears in another kind of water.







A woman with dark hair and glasses, wearing a white t-shirt and dark pants, stands in a field of tall, green grass. She is looking towards the left. The background shows a dense line of trees under a blue sky with some clouds. The text 'javetta' and 'laster' is overlaid on the left side of the image.

javetta  
laster

## Appreciation

*Many thanks to every being who took the time to read these thoughts and reflections. Thank you to everyone who encouraged me to write and during this process. I am so happy to be able to share in this healing with you all.*

*If you enjoyed the chapbook and find yourself able, please consider donating to my paypal, venmo or cashapp! Any amount is appreciated with full gratitude. All funds will go to my health, healing and future works.*

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*Bless.  
Take Care of (and with) Yourself.*