

The
BOOK
of
EMOTIONS

Or — how it feels to feel

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Content

A HEART PROJECT & AN INVITATION Anna Linder	5
ANGER	
HELLO ANGER. HOW CAN I HELP YOU? Aimee DuFresne	9
WHAT'S THE COLOR OF ANGER?	13
ANGER Tracy Stamper	15
FREEDOM	
CHASING BIRDS Bretton Keating	21
FREEDOM Tracy Stamper	27
WERE IN THE BODY DOES FREEDOM LIVE?	31
SUPPORT	
SUPPORT... A HAND IN NEED Patricia L. Atchison	35
SUPPORT Amy Barfield Martin	39
SUPPORT Kristina Johnson	45
A RECIPE FOR SUPPORT Tracy Stamper	51
SUPPORT - COMES FROM WITHIN Bretton Keating	59

VULNERABILITY

VULNERABILITY Casha Doemland	75
VULNERABILITY Heidi Prah	77
VULNERABILITY Tracy Stamper	81
VULNERABILITY Kristina Johnson	87
VULNERABILITY Aimee DuFresne	93
VULNERABILITY Kasia Lindahl	96
HALFWAY BROKEN THINGS Bretton Keating	100
NEXT CHAPTER	105
THE AUTHORS	106

A heart project and an invitation

Sometimes we shut down, turn off our emotions. It might be our way to make it through. Our way to stay sane and keep some parts of ourselves safe.

Almost everybody do it, but some of us have felt the need to tune out for long periods, months or even years.

For me, it became years. The chaos around and within me was too complex to cope with. Without really noticing I pushed my feelings down and away and emotion after emotion was shut off.

And then the day came when I felt safe and secure enough to want to smile and I noticed that I lost the ability to freely feel.

THE BOOK OF EMOTIONS

My wish is to create a book on emotions and feelings. A guide to everybody or anybody who have shut down or lost their own system of navigation.

It would give me, personally, a greater knowledge and support in my journey and I hope it can be of help to others.

THE INVITATION

Each month during 2017 the door to explore one emotion will be opened. I will do it with my craft – graphic art and book design. But a books is nothing without words and I am not a writer.

My invitation goes out to all heart leaders, highly sensitives, empaths and survivors that feel called to write and contribute with their perspective on feelings and emotions.

Coming together we can create a small encyclopedia on emotions for anybody and everybody who needs guidance.

If you feel called to contribute you will find information on the website for the project: bookofemotions/annalinder.com

ANNA LINDER is a Swedish based graphic artist supporting heart leaders and soulful women to craft beautiful brands, books and web designs that align their vision and story. The Book of Emotions is her heart project. Website: annalinder.com



VULNERABILITY

Vulnerability

CASHA DOEMLAND

“Do not equate my softness for weakness when my heart has always been my greatest strength.”

I am a woman who lives a life led by her heart; a woman who loves unconditionally through and through. I believe in compassion and living life raw, honest and in the light of vulnerability. Yet, living like this often creates heartache, disappointment and sometimes an abundance pain. I have had my heart shattered and the ground beneath my feet give way. I have loved unapologetically only to be told I would never be loved in return. I have experienced the intolerable pain of losing something you hold so dear to your heart.

Through the tears and the aching, I have been told to harden my interior, to peel my heart off of my sleeve and to tuck it safely away within the

comfort of my rib cage. And each time I have the same reply for it does not matter who is on the other side of those words.

“No, thank you. I am privileged to have my heart, to love as deeply as I do and to see the beauty in the world that most tend to overlook. My heart, as fragile as it may seem because it is sewn together and bandaged up like a rag doll continues to beat vivaciously and with a ferocity so intense a great hurricane could not compete. I have lived more authentically and lush than individuals twice my age and I would not trade that for a polished heart and hubris.”

CASHA DOEMLAND LA-born, Georgia-bred and one-half of a set of identical twins, Casha spends her days writing poetry and prose and exploring the world. She’s a classic film enthusiast, runner, dog walker, and collector of quotes and tattoos.

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Vulnerability

HEIDI PRAHL

I used to think vulnerability was a word that implied weakness, gullibility. It felt risky and exposed. And I didn't want to be any of those things.

This word, rather the definition of this word, holds a particularly special meaning in my life. That wasn't always the case. In fact, it wasn't even part of my vocabulary for many years, as I lived my happy go lucky life as a wife and momma to four beautiful children. When life is good, who really thinks about vulnerability

Certainly not me. Until I was forced to. Until my vulnerability was taken advantage of. My cocoon of happiness shattered, shards of broken dreams littered around me.

Just like that, being vulnerable takes on a whole new meaning. Protection, safety and emotional stability become priority one. *And vulnerability becomes a liability.*

And then life goes on, with or without you. So you stop letting yourself feel vulnerable, but at least you feel safe.

But safety can become an idol. Something you protect at all costs. Something you even end up laying your life down for.

Because the truth is that a life without risk is really no life at all. That's comfort zone, self protection, guarded living. There's no room for beauty and growth and change in a life that's sole focus is survival without pain.

I've been there. I've lived the stifled life that says it's too risky to be vulnerable, for almost a decade now. Shutting out perceived danger and threat feels like the right thing to do after you've been hurt, blindsided, devastated. But then we also shut out the possibilities of what may be when we choose to live a wide open life. Deep love, connection and even our very soul retreat to the shadows in our efforts to self protect. The truth about vulnerability is that it's one of the main ingredients to a rich and meaningful life.

Real life is bittersweet. Vulnerability opens you up to both the bitter and the sweet. It's a dance, a rhythm. You can't really enjoy one without the other.

These days I'm counting the cost of being vulnerable, susceptible, open to being hurt. I've seen both sides of this coin now - living vulnerably and living protected. And if I'm being honest, there's no comparison. The freedom of a wide open life wins every time. But I can't un-know what I already know. I can't take back the hurt. I can't un-feel the wounds. And when I start to weigh all of that it feels too risky to be vulnerable again.

But then I remember the thick blanket of dark clouds I've been living (*surviving*) under as the banner of safety. The light of this very life can't peek through this wall I've built. My heart is hidden behind a bullet proof window and there is no "break in case of emergency" clause to this glass. Sure, maybe I'm safe from perceived dangers, but I'm also blocked from truly, deeply feeling the good things in this world, or, truly, feeling anything at all sometimes (as an overly sensitive person, not feeling anything can be it's own type of prison).

There is no real way to live in this world and guard yourself from the possibility of all pain. But that illusion is sometimes enough to keep us

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stuck there. The reality is I know that I want to embrace vulnerable living again, and each day I'm fighting to inch my way back.

I'm learning that we need to redefine vulnerability, see it differently. It doesn't have to imply weakness or susceptibility. Vulnerability, at its core, is actually very beautiful. To be vulnerable means to be real and authentic. Vulnerability is the very breath in our lungs and it is what makes us human. It connects us to others and allows us to feel things deeply. Being vulnerable is the opposite of weak, in actuality, it's very brave and takes great courage and strength. It tells those around us that they matter, they're worth the risk. Vulnerability burns truth within us

and forces us out of our comfort zone and into real life. Life that is rich and crafted with meaning. Vulnerability says that we recognize that life will be messy, relationships are hard, we will have to fight the urge to run and hide and self protect, but in the end we understand that it will be worth it. That we're worth it. That the we have something to offer the world and in response, the world has something to offer us, and we don't want to miss it.

Taking the time to see vulnerability through new eyes, yields to the understanding that there is power and life and truth there. I'm choosing that life. I'm choosing freedom. And I'm realizing that *VULNERABLE* is exactly who I want to be.

HEIDI PRAHL is a Chicago based writer and photographer who appreciates and cultivates honest conversation around difficult topics.

She is a lover of Jesus, her family, beach glass, good coffee, exceptional books and is an absolute foodie at heart.

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VulnerABILITY

TRACY STAMPER

VulnerABILITY is Strength not wearing its armor.

Vulnerability can show up as a state of fragility. In the beginning of my relationship with Vulnerability, Vulnerability always expressed itself solely in this way. It involved feeling unsafe. Exposed. Susceptible. At risk. Helpless. Hopeless. Small. Teary. Weak. Its shoulders were caved-in and hunched over. Vulnerability and I curled up in corners, protecting a hurting heart. Vulnerability was a bird with a wounded wing, exposed to the elements and to danger.

Back then, when Vulnerability was one-dimensional for me, it was stuck in the strict definition of woundedness. The Latin root of the word Vulnerability fits my early experiences of this emotion. This was before I discovered that Vulnerability can be a wellspring of deep strength.

The word is derived from the Latin root word ‘vulnus,’ which translates into ‘wound.’ The adjective ‘vulnerabilis’ found its way into the English language as ‘vulnerable.’ The root speaks to susceptibility to being wounded, physically and/or emotionally, whether by attack, harm, damage or criticism.

This ‘wound’ at the root of the word is merely the beginning of the

story. VulnerABILITY wishes to co-author with us a story that is so much more dynamic and empowering than the setting of the scene in the first few pages of our story. ‘Wound’ is the root, the roots of the tree in the darkness underground. This is simply the opening chapter.

Tree roots dig down into dark soil. Branches reach for sunlight. Just as trees grow and mature, this word has evolved. Until I dug down into my own roots and found a willingness to surrender into Vulnerability, my experience of this emotion remained flat and fragile.

Then, the word redefined itself for me.

Times of Vulnerability are asking us to feel to heal.

Vulnerability is an invitation into vulnerABILITY.

VulnerABILITY is the ability to remain open to growth born of fragility.

Especially when it first arrives, Vulnerability lands in my bones as fragility. Now, however, I also sense Vulnerability’s arrival as an invitation to sink into my roots, amp up my self-care, regain the security of feeling grounded, and fortify. Vulnerability can become a portal into Strength. The open space of vulnerABILITY holds vast room for transformation. When I am ready, I can step into the invitation to explore how to shift from fragile Vulnerability into the Strength of vulnerABILITY.

Several years ago, the words ‘Vulnerability in Strength ~ Strength in Vulnerability’ began dancing in my consciousness. I could sense the interplay of these energies, yet couldn’t fully grasp or articulate their relationship. This dynamic dance was always on the periphery for me, piquing curiosity.

My moment of discovery came during an apprenticeship to become a Trainer of Nia, a mind~body holistic fitness and wellness practice. Part of the process involved guest teaching training sessions and assessments with my mentor.

One of the sessions I guest taught touched on moving emotional energies through our bodies. This aspect of Nia has been so life-changing

*VulnerABILITY is the
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and life-giving for me that I experience it as nothing short of pure magic. Speaking to the power of this practice often moves me to tears of enormous gratitude. That is the case to this day, years later, and it was no different as an apprentice. I cried while speaking of my journey of reclaiming health.

When my mentor checked in with me after this session, my self-evaluation began with a critique of my delivery. I was critical of an aspect of how I presented the material. To clarify, she asked: “Is it because you started crying?”

The confidence and certainty in my immediate response to this question took me by surprise: “No! Being moved to tears while standing in my truth is when I am most in my power.”

Whoa! There it was. I hadn’t yet realized this truth until speaking it aloud to my mentor. She nodded.

I had not yet fully consciously realized the power and magnetism of seeing someone – and certainly not *being* someone – who is able and willing to fully show up within vulnerABILITY. But my words struck a chord

for me: “*Being moved to tears while standing in my truth is when I am most in my power.*” Yes.

This heart-to-heart with my mentor marked the moment that the words ‘Vulnerability in Strength ~ Strength in Vulnerability’ lit up for me: I felt these words in my body. While delivering this session, I had owned my story of traversing challenging emotional terrain of a decade plus of severe depression. Through tears, I stood in my strength and used my voice to speak my Truth. I spoke to a time of intense Vulnerability in my life, and I spoke to my healing journey. The Vulnerability of sharing such a personal journey blossomed into the vulnerABILITY of choosing to share my story from a place of healing. By remaining open to my desire to shine the light for others who may travel similar terrain while opening up about a tender time, I felt the word vulnerABILITY expand. It became multi-dimensional like a gem that reveals its many hues, depth and sparkle when viewed through different facets. That was the moment in which the meaning of the word Vulnerability completely shifted.

*I felt the word vulnerABILITY expand.
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gem that reveals its many hues,
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through different facets.*

When Strength arrives dressed in vulnerABILITY without armor, its power is positively electric. It is palpable. This is the Strength that doesn't wear armor. It doesn't need armor: it wields Truth. Empowerment comes through the immense courage it takes to remain open in the midst of it all. On the other side of courage, the cloak of vulnerABILITY lined in silken Strength awaits.

Wedding our words with authentic expression of vulnerABLE emotion – no holding back or making our feelings or self small – results in this magic. Showing up in this way shifts the energy in a room. When I see others do this, it reaches, teaches and moves me. And in that moment of reflection with my mentor, I was able to see and source my own power.

My power arose from what once felt wounded me in.

Honoring the root of the word, vulnerABILITY speaks to a 'wound.' What is a wound but an opening in one's protective layer of skin? In time, a cut on the skin heals by the body's miraculous ability to form a protective seal or scab. Likewise, an emotional wound asks for healing. In the initial fragility of Vulnerability, can we find a way to bravely remain open or regain openness?

As with our skin, the healing of this wound happens in natural time. There is no forcing healing. Sometimes we must first curl up and lick our wounds. Sinking into the darkness and regaining Strength is often how we find our way back into the light. Stories always begin with Chapter One.

Can we find our voice and begin to tell our story? Whether that voice moves fully and evenly into the space with clarity and density or quivers forth from wobbly knees and a butterflied belly, it fills the space with resonant Truth. This is a Strength that comes from the depths, right out of the crucible of the fire of transformation.

Often, this is Strength training in a manner we would have never asked for. It is the Strength training of a wounded healer. And those who have healed their own wounds are the ones I trust to help guide the way.

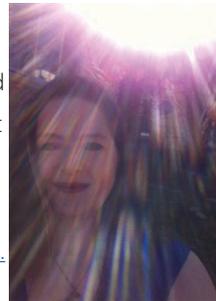
Tears that cascade down the cheeks of wounded healers are the diamonds formed by the intense pressure of having walked through the fire. Tears glisten to decorate Truth.

VulnerABILITY. ‘The ability to remain open to growth born of fragility.’

VulnerABILITY transforms us by arriving with this question...

While feeling fragile, can you root down, open up and enter the portal of transformation by living and speaking your Truth?

TRACY STAMPER is a dancer at heart, in mind, of body, and with words. Her writing has been featured in *Rebelle Society* and *Elephant Journal*. Her current favorite colors are purple, orange and glitter. She likes her chocolate dark, her inspiration flowing and her car dances to be uninhibited. Website: [facebook.com/shinesistarshine/](https://www.facebook.com/shinesistarshine/)



Vulnerability

KRISTINA JOHNSON

TAO

Verse 22

*If you want to become whole,
first let yourself be broken.*

*If you want to become straight,
let yourself be crooked.*

*If you want to become full,
let yourself be empty.*

*If you want to be reborn,
let yourself die.*

*If you want to be given everything,
give everything up.*

I stand alone and vulnerable at my kitchen window staring out at the darkening sky. A winter storm is rapidly pulsing it's way towards us. Rotting leaves rustle in the rising wind scattering noisy fragments and debris into the fading light, the sounds deepening the fear already churning in

my belly. Tiny shards of frozen ice begin to pelt the window in a rhythmic pattern. The symphony of sleet sends shivers up my spine, reminding me why this specific month haunts me. This is not my story. It is the story of my grandmother, and the sadness and vulnerability she experienced every year of her life when the month of February swept in on icy wings. We all have family stories that travel through time, one generation to another. Stories that we share so that we will not be forgotten when our bodies vanish from this earth. Tales that contain lessons that must be taught to those we love so that they will learn how to dance with the dangers and survive.

Each year when the snow, ice and freezing rain of February returned to chill our bones, we would find my grandmother sitting at her kitchen table with a cup of camomile tea grasped in her pale weathered hands and a far a way look on her face, quietly announcing, more to herself than the rest of us, that “February is the cruelest month.” In the beginning, I did not understand. February is a month filled with love, sweet Valentine notes, my sister’s birthday and above all else, big red boxes of delicious chocolates to give and to devour. What’s not to love? My young mind could not comprehend why she was unable to embrace the frivolity and light hearted playfulness of the shortest sweetest month of the year.

As an adult who has also suffered bone crushing loss and heartbreak, I now have a deeper understanding of the sadness that squeezed her heavy heart, but even as a small child I recognized the sadness and vulnerability that seeped into her bones each February, weakening her voice and threatening to suck the life from her spirit. Our children watch us closely, waiting to see how we decide to be in the world. They see our weakness as well as our strengths and carry forward the invisible messages we imprint on their souls. To watch my grandmother expose her raw emotions frightened me. She was the warrior that kept our family safe. I would later learn that warriors come in many shapes and sizes and the bravest of them all

In silence, we clung tightly to each other, welcoming the healing powers of connection and compassion. Exposed and hidden wounds once filled with darkness and despair were magically repaired and renewed.

wear their hearts on their sleeves and are willing to express their emotions and expose their vulnerability when necessary. This lesson, however, would take time to fully unravel.

In those early years when February arrived intent on destruction, I did not ask for answers. I merely crawled into my grandmother's welcoming lap and melted my tense body into her softness. Her warm embrace calmed my nerves, comforted my fears, a nest of safety and security in which to rest. In silence, we clung tightly to each other, welcoming the healing powers of connection and compassion. Exposed and hidden wounds once filled with darkness and despair were magically repaired and renewed. Bound together, breathing as one, we found the strength to face our fears and carry on.

When my grandmother deemed me old enough to understand why she sometimes allowed emotion to overcome her, she shared the story of how one merciless day in February death came knocking on the door of her childhood home demanding the lives of her two younger sisters,

Mamie and Ida. During the early 1900's, diphtheria epidemics ravaged the United States and physicians watched in dread, for they were helpless to combat the rapid and fatal course of this awful disease. Life taught my grandmother that unrelenting heartbreak and despair would be a part of her existence, but it had also taught her that along with suffering, there would also be survival, recovery and hope for a better tomorrow. I am reminded of a lesson taught by the Tao. "To become whole, first let yourself be broken." Falling apart and allowing ourselves to be wounded and vulnerable can actually be the very thing we need to heal and become whole once again. Though I doubt my grandmother ever read the book of Tao, I do believe she embraced and understood the importance of being broken. She was fearless in befriending her weaknesses and embracing the difficult emotions. Her willingness to expose her raw nerve endings to the world was an act of courage that I will never forget. A person who is willing to open and expose the naked vulnerability of their heart is a true warrior. Release the warriors!

She was fearless in befriending her weaknesses and embracing the difficult emotions. Her willingness to expose her raw nerve endings to the world was an act of courage.

*Be scared, but be willing to go for it.
Speak your truth with integrity and
honor your broken places. Liberate
yourself through your vulnerability.*

The author Brene Brown has much to say about vulnerability and the importance of owning our own story, but she also warns us that embracing our vulnerability can be both risky and frightening for most of us. Vulnerability, she states is “the willingness to show up and let ourselves be seen.” The problem, however, is that too many people fear being seen and fear being vulnerable. They worry that sharing their stories, revealing their mistakes, errors and imperfections to the world comes at too great a cost. Hiding and pretending to be someone they are not becomes a safer place to exist. Brown reminds her readers that, “Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of light.” If we are brave and let people see our authentic self, warts and all, we open ourselves up to possibilities, not endings.

When researching the definition of vulnerability, words like unprotected, defenseless, danger, exposed, and open to assault jumped off the page and punched me in the gut. Further descriptions included; a weakness, helpless, in a precarious position, open to criticism, being wounded or hurt, and susceptible to emotional injury. Honestly, none of those

things sound inviting and actually feel quite painful, so why in the world would someone willingly step into the space of emotional vulnerability. It sounds terrifying! Wouldn't it be better to build a giant wall of brick and mortar with barbed wire on top to keep the sadness out? Though building such a wall to surround and protect us might at first seem beneficial, the simple fact is that those walls also keep out the joy.

Tear down your walls. Be wild and free. Lean in. Show up. Boldly expose your authentic self to the waiting world. Have the courage to be imperfect and allow yourself to get a few scars. This connects you to the rest of the suffering world. It's ok to be frightened. Be scared, but be willing to go for it. Speak your truth with integrity and honor your broken places. Liberate yourself through your vulnerability.

Live with the heart of a warrior.

KRISTINA JOHNSON is a lover of all things that inspire creativity and invite happiness. In addition to teaching Vinyasa Yoga and whirling her cares away on the dance floor, she makes time to travel the world, create art, do cartwheels in the grass and make play and laughter a priority.



Vulnerability

AIMEE DUFRESNE

The flutters in your stomach...

The rush of adrenaline...

Sweat pouring...

Breath tight...

Mouth dry...

Mind blank...

Cells shaking...

Bursts of red...blue...black...

Darkness.

The darkness before the light.

Across the ocean of vulnerability lies the love, compassion, and connection I crave. I sit on the shore, shielding myself from diving in. Why is it so hard to swim across? Sisterhood sits there, patiently waiting for me to join the ranks of highly powerful, creative and conscious women.

I dip in a toe. Wading in a further, wondering how long it might take to master this ocean. The land across the water looks so inviting. So I set out to swim. But too soon I'm flailing, failing. I'm halfway there but I'm floundering. The land seems further with each stroke ahead.

Fear seizes. It chokes down my authenticity. Fear puts the mask over my face once again. It washes me back to the shore of status quo. It tells me to pretend. Act as if I'm the success I wish. *Don't show your weakness*, Fear whispers. *It's not safe. Show it and you'll never succeed.* The tidal wave spits me back to the beginning. And I stay safe on shore for a while. But it is boring. My heart longs for more. Adventure and fulfillment are across that ocean yet Fear keeps hanging on me like a heavy wet blanket. It reminds me my many mistakes. *YOU'LL NEVER MAKE IT THERE*, it shouts as I tiptoe to the water again, hoping to go unseen by that which holds me. Reaching the edge, Fear shakes its head. *This is a bad idea, You'll regret it. You'll never make it across. You'll drown in vulnerability. Stay safe. For god's sakes, stay safe. On the shore. Shun vulnerability. You don't need it.*

But the shore beyond beckons. Love lies here. You are welcome here. You belong here. Its sweet voice of hope seep through the split seconds of silence between the lyrics of Fear.

I dive. Sharing myself with the sea. The darkness embraces me.

Intention kicks in. Action follows. I *will* make it.

Vulnerability cradles me. It is not the vicious enemy Fear had me believe. I float in its gentle arms.

Vulnerability cradles me. It is not the vicious enemy Fear had me believe. I float in its gentle arms.

More surprising still, I feel the arms of others in the ocean of Vulnerability. The circle of sisterhood starts here. We support one another. Those closer to shore offer assistance to those further out. Spinning, swimming, thrashing, bashing, floating, flowing. Within the uncertainty, one thing becomes clear: whatever happens, it was worth the ride.

Finally, feet meet sand.

Planted on the shore of freedom, the sweet spot I had been eyeing and envious of for so long is now mine. I shield my eyes from the beaming sun and look back across to the shore from which I started this journey. A dark mist shrouds the sands there. Fear remains, yet it can no longer steal my joy, my love, my life. I am free. At last.

Thank you, Vulnerability.

AIMEE DUFRESNE is a Joy Catalyst and soul-shifting creator, writer, and traveler. She is the proud author of *Keep Going: From Grief to Growth*, a memoir about love, loss, life's journey and the power of perseverance. Aimee is currently writing her next book, *52 Lessons I Learned From My Father*. Website: aimeedufresne.com.



Vulnerability

KASIA LINDAHL

Come closer.

Show up.

Skip the masks.

They mean nothing to me.

I long to get to know the true YOU.

To SEE you.

To see your true LIGHT.

In your light I will bathe my naked face.

Vulnerability is the courage to be authentic.

It shows up when my urge for deep connection with another human being is stronger than my fear of being judged for my flaws and shortcomings.

After years of shallow encounters and playing safe in relations I lost interest in people pleasing. More correctly I lost the energy, I got burned out, and then I simply had to find another strategy of interacting with the surrounding world.

Authenticity was the only answer. As it always is.

Authenticity is the sexiest thing in the world. Next to a plate of sautéed

*Strangely, none of this comes
naturally to most of us.
It requires courage.
And a lot of practice.
Plus being present in the moment.
Try it.*

asparagus with few drops of extra virgin olive oil and salt flakes. And my husband.

Writing this text is an exercise in vulnerability. I reach out and I hope that what I have to offer is enough. More: I do the best I can, I engage in a subject which is important to me and what happens later is not up to me anymore. How my words will be received by anybody is not my story anymore. I will survive either way. Because I showed up. I did my part.

And I will do the same tomorrow. In a grocery store, at a job interview or a dinner party.

Me. The only thing you get when you meet me, is me. To the best of my ability. And when I meet you I want you. I can help you to carry your distress for a while, I can hear your stories but I don't want you to hide behind your drama, or your masks.

Strangely, none of this comes naturally to most of us.

It requires courage.

And a lot of practice.

Plus being present in the moment.

Try it.

It is very refreshing after years of pretending to have it all covered.

After *trying* to have it all covered.

After years of chasing perfect...

Please, keep in mind: This will not save you from pain or disappointment.

It might change your relation to it though.

I came to realise that the idea of being *hurt* lies all together in my own hands. I am in charge of my own pain. In other words: you will not hurt me if I won't let you. I will learn plenty about myself and about you, but I refuse to be involved in dramas of our egos.

Thanks to this I came to understand that vulnerability is not even risky. It is necessary. It is the only way.

And when the person in front of you is not there yet?

Serve them with a good example, show them some of your most shameless moves, your truest self.

Let them see that it is totally safe. And then release them.

In worst case you are just becoming someones hilarious story at a dinner party.

KASIA LINDAHL An explorer of the human being, with all too long experience of human doing. Practising awareness and connection of the physical body and mind with help of yoga, meditation, plant based mindful cooking, writing, breathing, observing the nature, anything basically.

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Love is the companion of vulnerability. It holds the fragility and dares vulnerability to show itself.

KIRAN



Halfway Broken Things

BRETTON KEATING

So much has broken in the six months I spent in India. I've gone through three purses, three pairs of sandals, two rings, countless clothing items, a dog leash, a puppy carry case, two pairs of glasses, a laptop charger, two phone chargers, two scooters, a couch, a coffee mug, and more that I'm forgetting at the moment. Everything that has broken has been something I needed to replace. You can only walk barefoot for so long. It's too strange to be coincidence, too striking to go unnoticed.

The last thing to break was my shattered-glass heart.

I wasn't looking to be swept off my feet. Most days it felt like I was only looking to survive.

Yet swept away I was, and in the whirlwind I forgot to lock the door behind me. I left the entire thing ajar.

Some moments the past spins circles around us. It's easy to say I should have listened, in retrospect.

He said we wrote a fairy tale, but I had to disagree. Because the thing I discovered, albeit unintentionally, when I began writing fairy stories to begin with, is how *not* to separate myself from it all. I can travel through the twisted trail of a tale, wind up back on the other side and nothing

has changed yet nothing stays the same. I can try to focus on memorizing moments, knowing that nothing wraps itself in happily-ever-after, the end. I can lose myself, in each and every particle of time, each and every story, and last but not least, in our strange little fairy tale, but then at the end of the day, what does it matter? I have no control over any of it. It's already been written.

I told him I wouldn't for a second trade my imagination land for the ability to be intimately understood. I had no idea when I said those words, how deeply they would cut, the very next day.

For me, this is the essence of vulnerability: that which we must trade for the ability to be intimately understood.

Some of us appear vulnerable on the outside, but really we're hiding. We bare our hearts on paper but it means nothing because none of it is true.

When lightning strikes sand, it sometimes causes glass to form. I first heard of this phenomenon in a movie, and never questioned it until last weekend, when I understood what I've always known: that certainly, my heart must be made of glass. So, I investigated further. Turns out, the magical illusion in *Sweet Home Alabama* does, in fact, happen, but not quite as depicted in the film. The glass stays hidden beneath the earth for centuries after the strike, until enough erosion perhaps brings it to surface, to see the light of day. And so it goes: the epitome of nature's unique strength.

That which we deem most breakable has, in fact, weathered the masses.

The sky flashes purple, but only for a second. Too quick to notice, most of the time. The aftermath lies hidden beneath layers too complex to count.

Things are replaceable, but the heart isn't. I've left halfway broken things in bins inside and in front of dozens of temporary homes.

The next time, I tell myself, will be different. I won't be so open to the heartbreak. I won't invite it in. I will stand on guard and I will watch,

Sometimes we become so surrendered, we allow life to sweep us off our feet even as it steps on our toes in the process.

ready and waiting for the eventual dagger of a free-fall. But even as I write this, I know its untruth.

Because I believe in people too much.

Goodbyes become easier even as leaving is hard. Sometimes we become so surrendered, we allow life to sweep us off our feet even as it steps on our toes in the process. We make a game of words not realizing that words are swords. The simplest of which break hearts each and every day.

You can fall in love in four days, you know. Or even less. I've fallen in a matter of minutes.

A dear friend warned me this would happen. He told me to be careful. Because, in his words (not mine), "Your heart is too big." I don't think my heart is any bigger than anybody else's, but I do know that it lies, open and bleeding, most of the time. For others or myself or a combination, I'm not so sure.

And so my heart continues to drip dark blood on a moonlit shoreline as she dances the green-toed possibility of next-time. The next time she lands somewhere, it will be in the place where the waves come to crash. For that is the only place she has ever belonged.

The further we dive into vulnerability, the stronger we become. It's cliché because it's true. You may break my heart into a thousand pieces but one day it just may make sense and I will keep on walking the entire time regardless. Even when I find myself absolutely floored. Writing these words brings tears to my eyes because right now I'm in a space where I don't believe that they're true.

Trusting in timing sounds nice, but timing is a liar. The only truth is the moon.

So here's why I'm done being vulnerable, with people, today: plain and simple, it hurts.

But in the end, it's not like I ever had any choice.

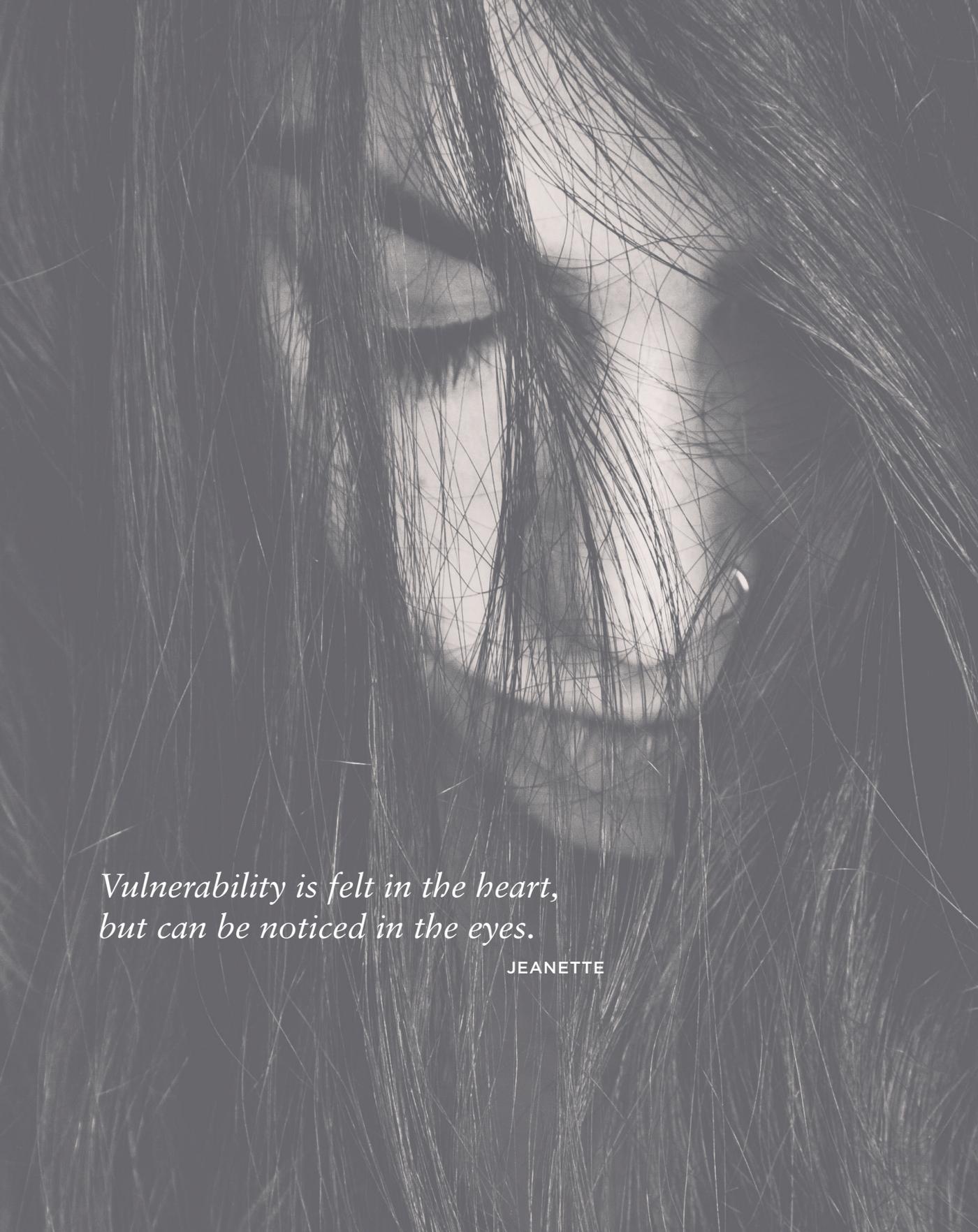
I've learned this before, but life tends to sound itself in similar notes until we start to listen. Whenever anyone is interested in the story of me, they are searching for something that I can't give. Because we all know I didn't create this story or any others. They just traveled through me.

Traveling through—what an immensely tiring way to live. But then it's the only way that makes any sense. The zipper closes shut and all the half-way broken things left behind in bins. I smile through tears and decide, yet again, that in the next place, I will be more on guard.

I let my guard down too soon, and that is always my biggest mistake.

BRETTON KEATING is a yoga instructor for adults and children, barre instructor, Reiki healer, writer, and artist. For her heart-centered writings, please visit her blog (brettonkeating.com). For creative work, including poetry and your fairy tale within, here is her website (whitecottonrose.com).





*Vulnerability is felt in the heart,
but can be noticed in the eyes.*

JEANETTE

Next chapter

The Book of Emotions is an ongoing project and every month will be focused around one feeling and become one chapter in the upcoming book. Each month a digital sneak peak of each chapter will be released – free for everyone to share with the world.

UPCOMING EMOTIONS

Anger and freedom was the focus for January and February. March was about Support and April gave us Vulnerability. The feelings for the upcoming months are:

May: Trust

June: Hope

July: Shame

CONTRIBUTE

If you feel called to contribute you will find information on the website for the project: bookofemotions/annalinder.com

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