



**CHEMICAL BUTTERFLY**

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**To my incredible parents, Barbara and Richard, and sister, Nina, who continue to design unique pathways in life rather than follow those created by others. They have always believed in me and provided a strong foundation for achieving my dreams.**

**To my husband, Bradley, who encourages me to “just keep pouring” when the glass appears half-empty and remember that no matter how little you have, you always have something to give.**

**And to the medical professionals at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute who used all their powers to keep me on the planet long enough to give birth to and raise the greatest inspiration of all, my daughter, Arden, who amazes me everyday. I hope to be just like her when I grow up.**

## PREFACE

As a senior communications executive for Fortune 100 and Fortune 500 corporations, I started my career in New York City immediately after college. I began at a prestigious international consulting firm which afforded me frequent travel to Europe and exposure to corporate titans. I then worked in the glamorous offices of Revlon on Madison Avenue writing announcements, collateral materials and speeches for executive staff. After a few years, I began studying for my MBA at NYU's Stern School of Business and dating a successful publishing trailblazer from Sports Illustrated.

By our late 20s, we had ascended our respective corporate ladders enough to enjoy generous salaries, travel, leisure, property, cars, and frequent contact with business leaders and celebrities. We wore designer clothes, attended upscale parties, and dined out every night. Most importantly, we amassed a large circle of accomplished friends and colleagues. When we married, my life was everything I wanted it to be.

However, since my career began, I have been continuously challenged with significant obstacles, starting with a diagnosis of Multiple Sclerosis at age 27 followed by advanced Breast Cancer at age 31. Just when I was getting my mind wrapped around the fact that I might end up in a wheelchair, I had to begin aggressive treatment to halt the metastasis of my cancer, which included nearly two years of surgeries, chemotherapy, radiation, and regular heart scans.

Being in touch with my mortality exposed me to extremes I never knew existed. My emotions and questions were so plentiful and profound, I couldn't fathom how to convey them verbally. Instead, I found that imagery was the quickest and most cathartic way to process them, so I began creating collages with rudimentary materials from home. Having never created a collage before, like a mad woman, I sat on my living room floor tearing up magazines and reassembling their colors and pictures onto pieces of heavy paper with glue stick. After I "said" everything I wanted to "say," I had no desire to display them, as they would only remind me that I was bald and being ravaged by cancer, so I stored them in the file cabinet where we kept insurance policies, bank statements and tax returns. Then I forgot about them.

After I completed my treatment successfully, re-entry into the "normal" cancer-free world was anything but glorious. Although I should have felt like the strongest person on the planet, my illness was followed by bouts of depression, an unexpected pregnancy, my husband becoming an alcoholic, the premature birth of our daughter who weighed only four pounds, our divorce, a relationship with a man who became abusive, and single motherhood to my intelligent and funny little girl, who, after walking pigeon-toed since age two, was diagnosed with Cerebral Palsy. Moreover, I still had to battle the degenerative effects of my MS with self-administered injections which made me feel worse than the illness did.

These struggles, which followed the supreme hurdle of beating cancer, seemed particularly unfair. They further contaminated my perfect world of joy and confidence with pain, doubt, hopelessness, and self-loathing, at times, leading me down all sorts of unforeseen avenues. Not one to believe that "everything happens for a reason," anger became my dominant emotion accompanied by perpetual feelings of injustice. Denial, wine and more lip gloss were my solutions for coping, but proved to be inadequate bandages for wounds that required more substantial dressing. It was at this time, I revisited my collages and began writing poetry.

Regardless of the catalyst that inspired the creation of my words or images, each one explores the universally-understood human condition. They are honest, in-depth evaluations of myself and my journey that question current beliefs, social mores, self-worth, and our significance in the world. They highlight my achievements as well as my failures-- some of which were self-induced, some of which were thrust upon me.

Although my life has turned out differently than planned, my experiences have afforded me a greater understanding of others' challenges and a more holistic view of the world. The crosses I have been given to bear, though heavy, came with the gifts of empathy and understanding, which continue to expand my heart. I am stronger than I imagined. I can love more than I knew. I am more enlightened. I have learned that any cracks in the ceiling can be repaired, any smudges on the glass can be cleaned and any sand on the floor can be swept away. Nothing is insurmountable. And fear, though powerful, will always take a back seat to love and hope, which have always guided my direction.

**I am lucky.**

**1**

**BROKEN**

Remnants of the accident  
 I caused  
 Strewn across the  
 Ceramic floor  
 Have ventured beyond the  
 Precise site of impact  
 Ignoring the boundaries  
 Delineating the room

Colorless, piercing shards  
 Lying motionless,  
 Now occupy more space and  
 Wield more power  
 As fractured casualties

Though silent,  
 I hear their laughs and  
 Comments saturated with  
 Condescension  
 Fueling my shame and  
 Self-hatred  
 Enough to quell  
 Any thoughts of  
 Confidence

Irreverent of the  
 Integrity of the  
 Structure they once formed,  
 I once formed,  
 No smarter than  
 Their enemies,  
 They hide like cowards in  
 Inestimable crevices  
 Concealing their imperfect shape yet  
 Perfect threat

The obvious pieces  
 I sweep away

The blood I clean

The wounds I dress

The tears I dry

To conceal the  
 Evidence documenting the failure of  
 My inconvenient,  
 Inelegant body

Time passes

The wounds heal

The casualties evaporate from memory  
 Like children's toys or  
 Birthday parties do  
 For those too young to  
 Recall them

We are happy for a while

When an external factor  
 Disrupts a forgotten remnant  
 Causing it to  
 Resurface and pierce  
 Again

Reminding me it will take more than  
 A broom and bandage  
 To eradicate their  
 Envidious status...

More powerful broken, than  
 Whole



# 2

## CHEMICAL BUTTERFLY

On sight, she evokes joy with her  
Vivid, unapologetic colors and sporadic  
Flight pattern

Her presence  
Enough to support  
The existence of a benevolent  
God

Perfectly symmetrical,  
Her flawless exterior  
Distracts questions about  
The integrity of her  
Composition

Yet her opportunity to influence  
Behavior and redirect  
Energies is  
Shorter than  
Contracted

Body parts are  
Removed and  
Discarded  
Like dying branches  
Pruned from  
Trees

The remains saturated  
In wicked

Scars replace  
Sick  
Yet are uglier  
Than what they  
Eliminated

Ink bleeds down  
 Blank canvas  
 Sabotaging all it  
 Was to display

Car crashes usurp  
 Oceans and  
 Constellations

Random acts of kindness from  
 Strangers validate that  
 Positive energy  
 Powers the Earth  
 Yet nightmares and  
 Visions confirm  
 Boundless pain exists  
 Everywhere

The best in people  
 The worst in people

The best in herself  
 The worst in herself

Now tempered in  
 Color and  
 Composition she questions  
 Her will to live as a diluted  
 Antidote

She longs for her simpler existence  
 And thinks,

*If this is life,  
 I would have rather been  
 Crushed the first sight of  
 Adversity and  
 Eliminated at my  
 Most beautiful state*

*Before I became  
 Old enough to  
 Digest my circumstance and  
 See how age has  
 Robbed me of my youth and  
 Innocence*

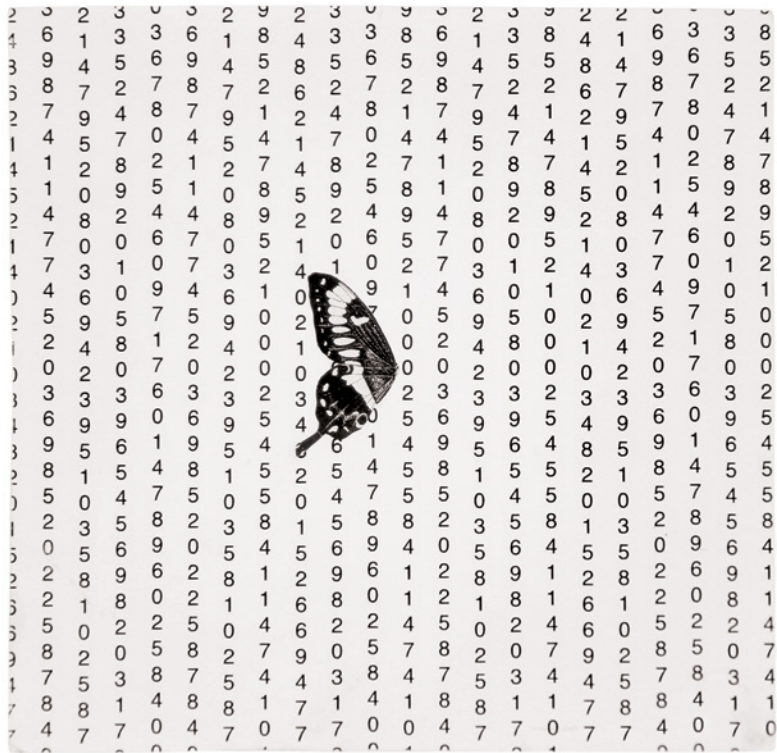
*And allowed me to  
 Make bad decisions and  
 Have regrets and  
 Become this lead pool of  
 Insecurity that  
 Takes me in all the  
 Wrong  
 Directions*

It's difficult to fly straight with  
 A severed  
 Wing  
 And damaged  
 Thoughts

She wishes she remained  
 Unaware of all the  
 Suffering

A heart can only expand  
 So much before it  
 Collapses

The monarch survives but is altered



Chemical Butterfly

3

REDACTION

Often I wish I could delete all the  
Unfortunate things I experienced and  
Return to the state of innocence and  
Trust I enjoyed before  
I was  
Betrayed

I wish I could redact myself to  
When I was happiest and  
Didn't view things so  
Realistically and  
Feel every bit of  
Pain and  
Disappointment

I don't know which  
Circumstance would be better in life's  
Grand journey or  
Which would improve  
My chances to  
Enter heaven  
But I sure know which  
Would feel better

Am I more evolved than before?  
Have I improved?  
I don't know  
But I do know this—

I'm not scared anymore  
Of anything



**LUCKY NUMBER EIGHT**

One in eight  
What a ridiculous statistic  
Because you never know which  
Eight you are  
Grouped in

Maybe you're in a room with  
Seven other sick people from their own  
Groups of eight  
Or seven healthy people from another  
Group of eight

The music stopped and  
There were no more  
Chairs

I guess I got grouped with  
The wrong eight



NEGOTIATION

Green is the speed at which  
Your illness is  
Progressing

Red is the need  
To stop it  
Fast  
Faster than green

Yellow is the caution  
We must take to  
Stop it without  
Killing you in  
The process

Which is most important?  
Which is fastest?  
Which will win?

It's supposed to be red  
It's supposed to be red  
It's supposed to be red



Negotiation

# 6

## SATURATION POINT

The forest is all I see  
It's all I am able to focus on  
The magnitude of everything and  
All that I do

How the slightest things seem to have  
Such great impact and  
Hurt so much and  
Dictate my  
Future direction

Air and feathers and dust and butterflies  
Are like lead to me now

It's exhausting  
It's immobilizing

What about the trees?  
They can be beautiful  
They can be  
But I can't see them right now

Is there a shelf life for  
Painful memories?  
It seems that it is  
Equal to the degree of  
Pain experienced

Unless something fantastic  
Comes into your life to  
Make you forget

What would be great is  
If it were  
Inversely proportional

Because this is taking too long



SHELF LIFE



8

BLOOD ANGEL

My purple robe is  
Stained  
It's ruined

My halo isn't  
Gold anymore  
It's tarnished and  
Dull

I'm dirty  
I'm ugly  
I'm mired in  
Pain

I can't absorb  
Anymore blood

I can't see  
The light

I can't carry  
This cross

It's too heavy

I've failed  
I'm not an  
Angel anymore



Blood Angel

# 9

CONSTELLATIONS

Rubbing our fists  
In our eyes  
We see galaxies  
Of stars

10

FAHRENHEIT 143.6

Wax wings  
Melted by the sun

Was it so bad to have such high ambitions?  
Was it so bad to want more?  
Was it so bad to have dreams?  
Was it so bad to want to feel invincible?

Icarus,  
I understand

**11**

**LOWEST COMMON  
DENOMINATOR**

Just increase your speed,  
Veer to the extreme right, and  
Close your eyes

It will all be over soon

The pain will end

You'll be free

You can be an angel again  
And love unconditionally  
Without suspicion or  
Doubts or  
Skepticism

God will love me  
He'll understand  
He just gave me too much to handle  
He just overestimated me

I'm sure He's sorry

# 12

MUTATION

MUTATION

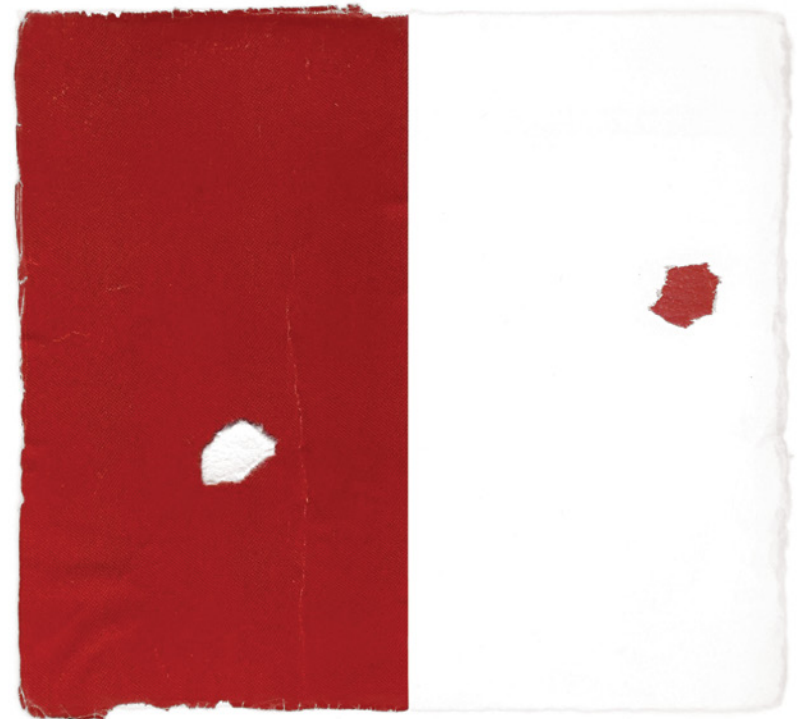
Red  
White  
How many tens of thousands?

We are here  
Running and protecting your body

Except for us  
We're different  
And now we're  
Loose  
Dividing and dividing so  
Rapidly  
If someone didn't catch us  
We would  
Win

It feels good  
It feels great  
It feels easier than being normal

We're going to run like this  
For a while  
We're pretty powerful little  
Mutated fucks  
Running amok  
Eating up all that's good  
Just try to stop us



Mutation

# 13

180 DEGREES

On the surface  
You're the same  
Nobody would know  
The pain you endured  
The things you saw  
The feelings you had

But inside you're all cut up  
And still bleeding

You are the polar opposite of  
What you were  
The innocence  
Is gone

# 14

ETERNAL I

Lonely, barren stretches of time  
He resurfaces  
Like a giant

I waited for him  
Secretly  
Hoping he would hear  
My silent screams

That I am drowning  
That I am sad  
That I am empty  
That I am used to the verge of expiration  
Like running shoes with no soles

That endless tears flow  
Carrying my pain  
Yet fail to extract my sorrow  
Instead they fester and multiply  
A million fold

I call but no one answers  
Oh, the incision, the incision!  
Not again

I knew he could hear me  
Though not a word was exchanged  
Or was but in some indiscernible code  
Concealing my acidic reality  
Of daily triage

He knew  
To come to me  
To dry my tears  
To heal my wounds  
To inhabit the cavernous valley  
In my heart  
And stay there  
Forever



I guess my luck ran out  
I regressed to the mean  
50 is such an average number  
I liked 100 better

# 15

REGRESSION TO THE MEAN



Hospital Gown

16  
He<sup>2</sup>

The Helium God will  
Only let the balloons  
Fly so high until  
He changes  
His mind

And when they fall,  
They fall hard

**17**  
**MY TEARS**

Salty tears flow endlessly  
Little parts of  
What's inside me  
Carrying my pain  
Trying to escape

The tears won't stop  
My heart is broken  
And nobody understands

**18**  
**REFILL**

I drink to forget  
I drink to remember  
I drink and drink and drink

The pain won't go away  
The joy won't return

My glass is always empty

# 19

THE ICON OF  
DUBIOUS SUBLIMATION

What symbol best represents this journey?

Something that represents  
Trying to live a noble  
Existence

Something that represents  
Doing right by others

Something that represents  
Compassion and  
Empathy and  
Selflessness

Something that represents an  
Unjust sentence

Something that represents  
Pain and  
Suffering

Something that represents  
A great wrong has been  
Committed

Something that represents  
Death  
And life  
And spirit

Something that represents  
A gift

A gift?  
I guess  
Can I return it?  
No, it's final sale



The Icon of Dubious Sublimation

# 20

## DIMINISHING RETURNS

I starve myself  
I exercise  
I read  
I write  
I work  
I take care of my daughter  
The best I can  
Day and night

And still all I see is  
A disappointment  
I don't see the girl  
I used to anymore

No matter how much I do  
I will never be  
Good enough  
I will never win

What's the point?  
Why bother?

Because in someone's little eyes  
I am everything

Do assets equal accomplishments?  
Do liabilities equal failures?  
Can an asset be a liability too?

Are my strengths also my weaknesses?  
Do I sabotage myself as much as I help myself?  
I think so

Which is why I'm stuck  
I think my balance sheet equals 0

# 21

## ASSETS VS. LIABILITIES



22

FREE RADICAL

Ok, you're done  
Congratulations  
You are free to go

You've done all the hard work and  
Hopefully it will  
Pay off

There are things to  
Help you  
Through this  
Transition

Medication  
Chemical substances

We don't advise them because  
They can kill you but  
They are available

You're not alone in  
This journey  
Other people have  
Endured it

I think to myself,

*But they're not  
The same person  
So it's not exactly  
The same journey*

*And you've never walked  
This path so don't  
Project your  
Expectations on me*

You might move forward  
 You might regress to  
 Happier, simpler times

You might use this experience  
 Productively  
 You might try to bury it through  
 Drugs, alcohol, sex

You might emerge  
 Greater  
 You might  
 Reduce yourself to  
 The size you  
 Actually feel

You might have  
 A child  
 You might lose  
 Your husband

You might be  
 Lonely  
 You might long for  
 Things

You might fuck a stranger  
 You might regret it later

You might become  
 An inspiration  
 You might become  
 A disappointment

You might compromise  
 Your integrity

You might lower  
 Your standards

You might indulge in  
 Your flaws

You might make  
 Bad choices

You might do  
 Something unethical

You might make a  
 Wrong turn that leads  
 To a destination  
 Different from  
 The one  
 Originally intended in  
 The grand scheme of  
 Your life

The butterfly effect in action

The chemical butterfly  
 Destroying herself  
 Because she is in  
 So much pain she  
 Does not know  
 Where to go

Veering farther and farther away from  
 Her true path



Free Radical

23

ATROPHY

I wish I did not have so many burdens  
And responsibilities  
And concerns

I wish I could just give in  
And be lazy  
And not worry about every little thing  
All the time  
And not care

Would anyone else mind  
If I did that?  
Or even notice?  
Would I be loved as much?  
Or maybe more?

I contemplate that choice  
But am too afraid to make a move  
I would like to sleep  
But my alarm clock  
Rings all the time

24

MY GIFTS

I am smart  
I am compassionate  
I am creative  
I am nurturing  
I can love  
I can be loved

There are so many thoughts in my mind  
I'm sure nobody can understand  
But I would like to find him

25

ETERNAL II

With a heavy heart  
I look to the black sky

Nightly

At the thousands of splendid suns  
That burn millions of miles away

Happily twinkling  
And flaunting  
How the absence of earthly problems  
Enables them to shine brilliantly  
And remain ever beautiful

Silently, they mock me  
As time and duress  
Scream their presence  
In and on my body

One sees and races to me  
Like a supernova  
With purpose and conviction

Humbly unaware  
Of the power  
Its flames possess

Innocently it infiltrates  
My body  
Coveting all and gluttonously  
Consuming everything  
Yet does not char or kill

Instead, its exquisite energy  
Flourishes  
And radiates through my eyes  
Impaling all in its path  
With glorious certitude

It is he who lives within me  
It is him for whom I burn  
It is he who gives me strength  
To love  
And be loved

It is he who has given me purpose  
And everything I need  
To someday fuel  
Thousands more splendid suns

As we bask forever  
In their magnificent light

