

never  
make a  
sound

*a memoir*



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sound

*a memoir*



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The Awakened Press

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The Awakened Press  
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This book is a work of creative nonfiction and is a memoir.

It honestly reflects the author's true remembrance of real experiences. The events, people, locales and conversations brought to light are presented as accurately as possible in accordance with the author's recollections. This book is of a self-help nature and was created for the purpose of healing and growth. Although great care has been taken to ensure that all characters and situations are presented in a compassionate and respectable manner, others' memories may be different than the author's own. The words are based on truthful situations from the author's memory and are her words alone, and the reader should not consider this book anything other than a work of literature.

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# prologue



christmas time

holiday time

last good time

ivory sands

emerald seas

shining slides

blinding smiles

(eclipsing

grinding poverty)

barbeque lobster

father christmas

we smile in those photos

two little girls in oversized dresses, magenta,

pinstriped charcoal

bows on bows

like wrapping paper

too big dresses on too skinny girls

I'm smiling arms out ready for the world

new teddy bear

but by summer we're already talking trash

the season's changed but we don't see it coming

he sits us down with the news

a) she's going to come live with us and be your new mother

b) you're going to have a new baby sister or brother

c) we're moving to paris

*moving to paris, moving to paris...*

the paris years: you will know them by my cries, short  
and sharp like knife wounds

too many to count but open them up and you'll tumble  
into my weltering world

beautifully hellish years, cute baby hell baby  
in paris I learn a new language *you don't matter you're a  
defect you're a monster whom no one can love*

my birthday card says, you're ten years old not  
zero one years old act your age and be a good girl  
problem child demon child devil child stupid  
girl ugly girl

movies on the champs-élysées

galeries lafayette

peaches at the marché

*un croissant et un pain au*

*chocolat s'il vous plaît*

(I must learn to understand)

my trusty friend *la tour eiffel* watches over me as I walk  
alone to school

my heavy backpack no match for the speeding cars the  
gale force winds

on the *métro* there are men

their eyes their hands their half-moon faces

their fingers their dancing eyebrows

their naked scarlet dirty dicks right in my face

my ten-year-old face my craning neck

she just laughs when I tell her (is it *my* fault?)

chocolate cereal for breakfast football in *le parc*

world cup blues

*les bleus*

my mind a hall of cracked mirrors

I love paris

one day I take a bar of pink soap rub it all over the  
bathroom walls

but they don't read the writing

they just say don't do it again  
but I do:  
again  
and again  
and again  
you should be as mature as a fifteen-year-old boy, they say  
*they say*  
so I take a pair of scissors open the closet door and cut  
and cut  
and cut

I am the one  
I am the one who cut her clothes to shreds  
one friend tells her: just slap her, just slap her without  
warning  
but still they don't see  
(there's something wrong with the baby)  
by then I've discovered a new thing  
I watch it on the other families  
in the hotels like cruise ships  
by the pools  
in the restaurants  
why can't we be more like them?  
*but you're a disgrace you're disgusting you're a mistake you  
are dirty*  
*you have no right to life*  
*you're a terrible person*  
*you're not even a person...*

he teaches me to love (but he doesn't know how  
to love)

takes me into his lap in the dark and weeps  
(probably drunk at the time)



he says, she thinks it's just her baby just her baby  
her baby  
(by now I am mute)  
we don't know anything, he says, we don't even  
know how to love  
but I've found my escape hatch it's been there all along  
the slit in the membrane  
the side door  
I can slip in the wound  
and it doesn't hurt here *and they can't find me here*  
so I climb inside cast a spell remain a child forever  
and they say, why don't you listen  
they say, we just talked about this  
they say, we've been talking about this for days  
they say, where have you been  
why are you never here  
watch me in the paris years I'm slipping away I'm  
stuffing my mouth with cotton balls I'm growing  
scales on my body retractable spikes they can gouge  
into my skin and I won't feel a thing  
just sew myself back up barbed wire black wiry thread  
*dirty teddy bear*  
I can turn into a lizard turn into a reptile  
I have slime in my veins for blood  
I have learned a new language  
the world is not safe people are not safe  
but the thing is: *fish can't see water*

*part one*



**in nairobi my sister tells me about the thunder.** we lie  
in our beds listening to the rain flogging the night outside.  
from her top bunk she says, you just have to be careful  
because it's when the thunder gets really loud that's when  
it gets dangerous and people have to start packing out

from my lower bunk I listen for the rumble of thunder as soon as I wake up but all I hear are the rumblings my sister and I never talk about on the other side of the wall like furniture being thrown down the stairs breaking apart. I picture my mother flying tumbling legs feet over head arms out grasping onto nothing like a newborn baby falling... a sofa an empty fridge... broken doors...

boom

boom

boom

down the stairs... busting

through the floor...

and I feel my own rumbling the wrench in my deepest pit I always feel when I hear them fighting but my sister does not stir from the top bunk so I do not stir

when my mother emerges from the rumbling room she acts like nothing's happened, her furnishings put right after the storm. she does not look into my eyes and I walk into the bathroom he's just come out of and there is urine all over the walls but I don't mention it to her, I don't mention it to anyone, instead I join my sister in the playroom and play like nothing's happened

at dinner she sets the food on the table calm as a lull but she scolds me, why are you digging your fingers into your ears when you're about to eat and I think *why would you say that in front of him* and I wait for him to explode but he acts like he hasn't heard her

we sit on the living room floor, the tv box pitching its  
rowdy lights, the two of them sit nearby in quiet talk so  
I don't hear but all of a sudden he stands hurls his beer  
and storms off, foam lathering her face, sliding down, she  
squeezes her eyes shut bubbles licking her face holding it  
all in, the froth, her breath, our shame

on the worst night the blood rushes from her nose, the  
rain sends its torrents but still he kicks us out and we  
stand damp before the gate of some ambassador's house.  
can you help us, she asks the guard, we have nowhere to  
go, and the guard says the master is sleeping but he lets  
us stay in the shed until morning. by the morning the  
rain has stopped, the blood has dried on her clothes in  
big brown flowers



in lagos I sit at one end of my grandmother's large dining room table, at the other end my mother lifts a tumbler to her mouth and I watch the water disappear into her lips like a fish. she catches me in the courtyard, the front of my shirt all wrinkled up and soaked with my saliva and she asks, have you been chewing on your shirt?

no, I lie. *I fell in a puddle*

you're lying, she says, you've been chewing on your shirt.

*no. I fell into a puddle*

she grabs me by the arm. tell me the truth she says, her words florid with promise, you've been chewing on your shirt. my insides cave inwards but I stick with my story because I don't know what she'll do if I tell her the truth now. you're lying, you're lying, she says, her voice like black crayon scribbles, dragging me into my grandmother's house.

she lets us go stay with him for christmas because she doesn't know that we will not return.

thank you



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## further resources



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#### *resources*



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Beacon House: <https://beaconhouse.org.uk/>.

Center on the Developing Child: Harvard University:  
<https://developingchild.harvard.edu/science/key-concepts/toxic-stress/>.