

Dear Clarity,

You are my new best friend, and here's why:

- Your sweet words cut through the noise, shine warm beams of light into all my cells, and silence doubt.
- You are the lotus flower growing out of the swampy pond.
- You dance with me and remind me to play by helping me avoid situations that will cause harm.
- Without you, this poetry book, *Sunshine by Design* would not exist.
- You're sexy and you make me feel powerful.
- You restore my vision and open my eyes to the truth, that my depression is rooted in being human —and maybe caused by my head injuries, and maybe by my past, but one hundred percent in being human—and feeling connected to all beings everywhere.
- You remind me with sweetness that running water is a gift. Clean water is a gift. I am abundant in the daily use of flowing water.
- You remind me I'm not afraid to see problems. I don't need to pretend they aren't there.
- You remind me my problems are valid and, also, most of them can be worked through with a pen and paper.
- You led me to the organization Charity Water and to the book *Thirst*.
- You told me to begin selling all of my books for zero profit, to follow the Charity Water way of giving, to give to The Spring at Charity Water, and to figure out how to keep giving and growing from there.

So, thank you, Clarity, my best friend, for always being there when I need you, especially over these last two years.

Love Always,

Danielle Mallett

What Happens When You Die

The day of my mother's funeral was bright. It was my first time in a church, that I could remember.

The priest was talking about Jesus, and the light was shining through the colorful window art.

Everybody was crying, weeping, and saying things like,

“That poor girl. She's so young.”

I had this sense they were all crying for me. Replacing my tears with theirs.

Their bodies cracked under the pressure of my smile. One of my mom's friends had on a black hat, and I recognized her immediately. She threw her head into the arms of my mom's friends, and I felt the entire group vanish—into shadows.

There were other people there.

Lots of people,
so many people.

I didn't recognize a lot of them.

I don't remember sitting with them at the funeral and I don't want to remember looking into the eyes of anyone in my family.

The impermanence of death pressed down on them.

In my imagination, I wasn't sitting in my body, smushed between hysterical adults talking about why they couldn't have an open casket.

Instead, I was sitting with my mom at the back of the church, and she was saying things like,

“This is silly,” and, “Tell them to stop crying.”

Nobody could hear us talking, nobody could see us leave, walk into the sun,

close our eyes, bask in the sun,
walk back into the church,
see people shrinking into shadows.

Nobody could hear her sweet words remind me to,

“Shine your light baby, they’ll see you,” she’d say, “shine your light.”

This moment changed my life. Not because I lost a mother, but because I became highly sensitive to the feelings of every human being in the room.

Everyone’s heart was inside of mine.

At the end of the funeral,
someone gave me a small framed photo
of Jesus and said,
“Your mom will find her way to heaven with Jesus.”

I didn’t feel an ounce of anger or confusion before this moment, but there I was staring at this stranger, and other strangers who said,

“Jesus saves, child,” and “Jesus is with you now.”

And Jesus was forced into my small brain as the only way to get to heaven.

This was meant to assure me, somehow, but my mom never told me about Jesus.

As far as I was concerned, she had no idea who Jesus was, which made me mad. Who was this Jesus guy?

And what made him think he could steal my mom?

After her funeral, I had nightmares, followed by dreams. I’d see her in the car, the devil on one side, Jesus on the other,

“No,” I’d scream. “NO, he’s tricking you. Don’t listen to him, he’s not real, go to Jesus. He’s the only way to heaven.”

The fear of her burning in hell haunted me.

Before that day in church, I didn’t even know hell was an option.

Nightmares were followed with dreams

of her and me

under a rainbow.

“Don’t worry baby. I’m resting in peace. I found my way.”

“But how? How did you find your way? How do you know the devil
didn’t trick you?”

“You’ll understand one day,” she said, “we all find our way.”

It was beautiful: the light,
the rainbow,
and the sunshine.

I wanted to stay with her forever, but she told me,

“You have a life to live Danielle, and you can’t stay here with me.”

I’d wake up
trying to understand how anyone could be alive one day and dead the
next.

The thought of heaven and hell felt forced,
like something people created to feel better about death.

I found it hard to listen to teachers after my mom died.

What was the point of school?

I learned more from walking around and asking people,

“What do you think happens when you die?”

That question fascinated me.

The stories people came up with about the afterlife were all altered.

I found that nobody could describe God to me. People would say
endless things, but this was my favorite,

“God just is.”