

# In the Blood

Poems

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Caitlin Press, 2022

## Introduction

This book is a story of brothers and of an illness and the illnesses that came after. I was made as a person, for good and bad, by the experience of growing up with an older brother who received a diagnosis of a mental illness and who spent most of his adult life in institutions.

Poems written directly about that time are interspersed with and framed by work concerning my own later and linked mental health struggles and my move towards a form of recovery.

I would hope that many of the themes touched on in these poems are universal enough to travel across borders and decades—even if the travel documentation may be somewhat muddled and the roads laid out by time not as straight as they could be.

I dedicate this book to my brother Christopher John Hill, who will probably not read it and to whom I will probably never be the brother I could and should be.

—Alan Hill, New Westminster, British Columbia, February 2020

## In This Beginning

—which is also the end  
—somewhere hot, bland

Maui or Cancun  
—vacation lite, factory farmed

a suburbanite's Garden of Eden  
just made for me.

Leaving the kids at the pool  
I slip away  
head down  
between the mile-high dunes  
that guide me to the beach

towards excited shouts  
that call me towards them

where I  
find the fishermen  
on the ocean's edge  
dressed in white lab coats  
holding clipboards

a pole  
from which my brother hangs

head down in an  
ill-fitting sports jacket

an aquatic Mussolini  
speared, dragged from the waves:

they have not noticed he is still  
alive.

# Eating My Own Heart

*for Christopher Hill*

Overwhelm me brother, obsess me, make me you.

Now—that would be love  
and I would need to kill you for that

take an axe to your double bind, see it triple bind  
in that silent forest of the beginning of us

the start of humankind, its tight fingered blood  
curled in the ear of first light seen by nobody.

That is who we are

we are the sharing of all you have

the needles, tablets, the half-life rooming houses  
of the strapped down normality, you are allowed to be

all your death which is nothing but mine  
that I cannot live without.

You and I, together

trapped beneath the tree that fell  
that could not be heard

that is crushing us with the hardness of love  
bedding us on the sharpened points of Eden.

# Inheritance

It is this illness of the mind

that has farmed me to the outer acreages of loss

trapped me in a freak show of continuous fresh starts

I have applied an anxiety to my life

with the dedication of a madman.

This is because I am one.

I have baby-gated every thought,

saran-wrapped, sealed all beauty

I must protect myself, not to become myself.

All this insanity to appear sane, stay unnoticed

stay undercover, plan the perfect rebirth that will not come,

the uncontrollable play at being in control

all that time wasted talking to doctors I do not like

about how much I do not like myself

writing out cheques in consultation rooms

studded with Buddhas.

Then I tell myself the lie that I have gained

—illness has made me bigger, better

made me compassionate, class free, an advocate

that there are others

that have gone beyond words, cannot be reached

—but not me, no not me, that will never be me.

## The Asylum Visit

An inverted Victorian castle build to keep in, not out.

My mother efficiently shuffled me  
through identikit corridors  
slipped in though security doors onto the ward

past anonymous doctors in crumpled whites  
those little worker ants with delusions of grandeur  
all clipboard, attitude, smudgy glasses  
who never seemed to see you,  
moved through you in reptilian slip.

Here was milky cold coffee, a rainbow of medication

the poor, the terminal, the chronic  
my older brother, perched silently over a plate of beans

Then the slippers. That was what I wanted to see  
Pandas, Sharks, Hippos,  
lined in their Largactil parade

Garfields, a Kermit, a Fox head  
rooted on curled linoleum. That was for me.

How I envied them, with their exotic footwear

as my mother sat in silence, waited for time to be up  
cigarettes burnt down onto carbuncled knuckles  
nobody moved.