For The Perfectionist

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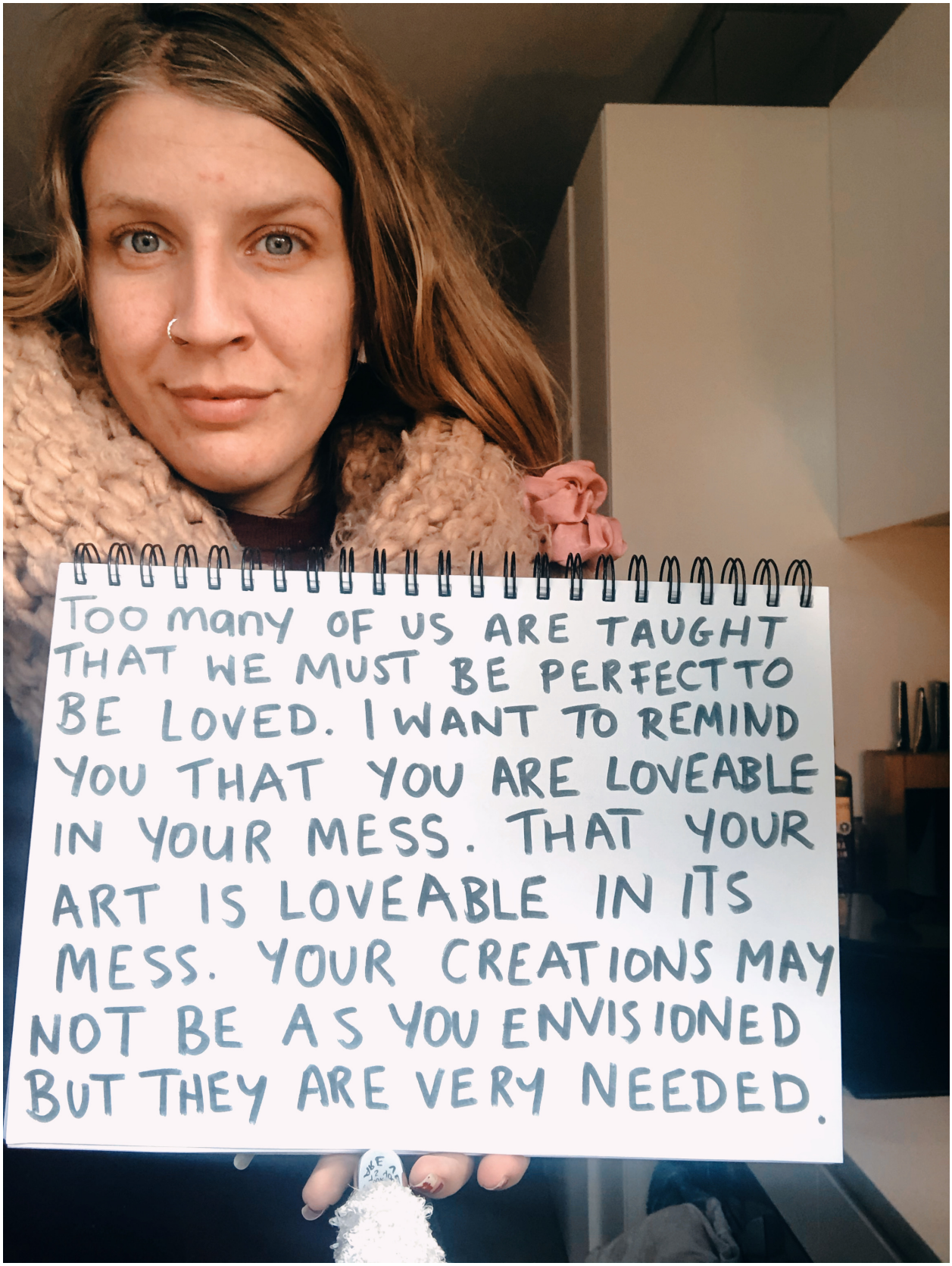
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Chapter One. To my Dear Perfectionist.



To my Absolutely Treasured Perfectionist,

I am so proud of you for being here.

Perfectionism has a way of self-preserving, any threat to her existence is obliterated. So, it says a lot that you're here, ready to do the work and look at those 'high standards' in the eye. I wrote this book so you can begin the journey of getting free, so you can live a life of true creative abundance where you are on your own side. This book is a gentle but essential questioning and investigation into how you came to this place of wanting perfection. It is an unpacking of what perfectionism looks like, specific to you. And it will be specific to you because perfectionism is a reflection of your own stories, your own childhood, your own beliefs about how you show up in the world.

This book is about recognising that the expectations you have for yourself and for your art are not serving you. It is about acknowledging that your art is important. It's about knowing that you deserve to live the creative life you've dreamed of, but the pressure and expectations that you have put on yourself are cock-blocking you and getting in your way.

Because this process is so very personal, at the end of each chapter is a reflection.

The reflections are where the work is. I really cannot emphasise this enough. The reflections are where you are going to level up. Take the time with them. Take them seriously. You might like to mull over them on a walk, talk about them with a loved one, type them out on your computer, or talk to yourself as you shower. Personally, I

journal my reflections — I take them to the paper. I choose to write them down because it allows clarity. Our head is a loud and noisy place a lot of the time, and getting to witness my thoughts on the page is clarifying. Paper is an orderly place to process complex things. But you must do you. This journey is yours. There is no right way to approach the reflections. What I am going to ask of you is this, watch out for your perfectionism throughout these reflections. If you choose to journal, I want you to make sure that you are allowed to get messy. You are allowed to cross things out. You are allowed to make spelling mistakes and leave them there. If this is triggering you, that is okay. Just notice that, get curious about it. Being curious, not judgmental, about your resistance is what will serve you. Noticing, being curious and respecting resistance is the way you will open doors, heal and level up. Feel free to come back to the reflections many times. Take them gently. If something feels painful to touch upon — go slowly, reach out for support, make yourself a cup of tea, and let yourself cry. This book isn't here to serve you up a few tips and tricks to deal with perfectionism, this is about going inwards, working with your inner child and healing wounds that you've harboured for a long time.

This work is important because you have art that we need.

You have messy, imperfect art that needs to be seen by the world, and touch the souls it's made for. And your perfectionism is getting in the way. Your perfectionism is hurting you, it's hurting your art, and consequently it's hurting us. Because we never get to receive your gifts. Your inner critic is going to be serving up some resistance to this idea right now. You might be excusing yourself from this statement, asking

questions like ‘why would they need my work? Why me?’

I want you to just notice that voice in your head. Because this journey is going to require us to identify the inner critic that demands perfection, that repeatedly reminds us that we are not enough. So, clock that voice — what did they sound like? You? A parent? An old, old friend? Noticing is key to this journey, without it we are at the whim of every critical voice that passes through our mind.

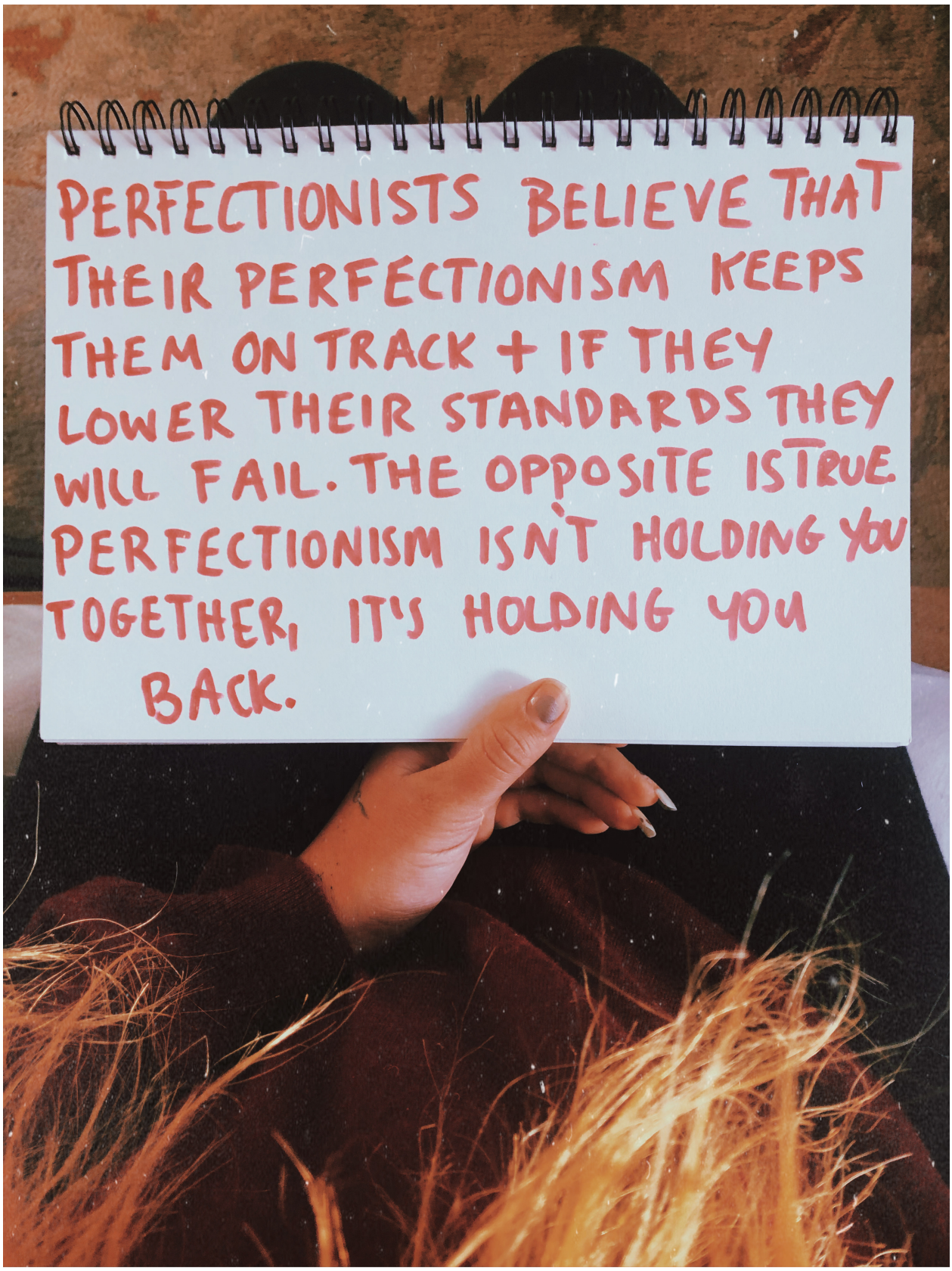
Go gently, notice when resistance rears its head, take time away if you need but remember that resistance is the sign that growth is available to you. When you want to put this book down, listen to the internal narrative. Remind yourself that it’s okay to find it hard, that it’s okay to feel resistance, but that you are here to do magical things - and magical things come from moving through trials.

Take care of yourself. You deserve care.

Alright, you incredibly magical, imperfect creator — let’s begin.

Amie.

Chapter Two: What is perfectionism?



What is perfectionism?

Is it the desire to be good? To make art that connects? Is it ambition to be the best? Is it high standards? The drive to excel? Frequently, our culture frames perfectionism as ambition. We are taught that perfectionism is the perfect answer to the interview question, 'what's your greatest weakness.' We see perfectionist behaviour as devotion and the key to excelling. English rugby hero Jonny Wilkinson was known for skipping Christmas dinner to practise kicking, director James Cameron is renowned for wanting to control everything in his movies, even doing the make-up and costuming when it wasn't done to his liking. Steve Jobs habitually pushed back deadlines to get his products 'just right.' Perfectionism, obsession, the desire to control is viewed through a lens of ambition and excelling.

I want to excel. You do too. But the story that is being told is that these 'greats' are successful *because* of their perfectionism. And that is so easy to believe. It's such a seductive narrative. James Cameron must be the best director in the world *because* of his perfectionism. I want this book to convince you otherwise. Perfectionism doesn't have anything to do with being the best. Conversely, it has everything to do with fear. It has everything to do with keeping you safe. It has everything to do with self preservation. It took me six years to finish my first book. It was because of perfectionism. I was so afraid I was not enough. Once I started facing my perfectionism, once I identified my fears and changed the narratives inside my head, my next book was written in six months, and it was the most wondrous abundant creative process ever. My books are better. The process is aligned. I am so much more joyful and alive. It is time to divorce perfectionism from it's romantic connotations.

Perfectionism isn't the desire to excel. Perfectionism isn't ambition.

Instead, Dr Brene Brown defines perfectionism as armour.

Perfectionism is a self-destructive and addictive belief system that fuels this primary thought: If I look perfect and do everything perfectly, I can avoid or minimize the painful feelings of blame, judgement, and shame.

If I am perfect, if I make perfect art, I will not feel shame. I will not be embarrassed, I will not be rejected, I will not be vulnerable. I will be safe and comfortable. That's the story. That's the lie.

Before we dive deeper into this, I want to say that this is *not* an invitation to demonise this part of yourself.

When we are working with fear, we are working with our inner child. A scared part of ourselves, that has in all likelihood been scared for a really long time. I want to address this issue as though we are addressing a young version of you. Think five or six years old you. See them. Go get a photo of you at that age. Treat yourself like you would treat that younger version of yourself. Watch your language, watch your emotions. Tread gently. It's very easy to want to get angry at the perfectionist part of yourself that is holding you back, but by getting angry and demonising this part of yourself, you are getting angry at the part of yourself that is afraid. Yelling at someone who is scared is not fair or productive. Instead, you need to be compassionate. Firm,

but understanding. Honour anger and frustration if it appears, but be careful about making an enemy out of the perfectionist in you. You're scared because what you're doing is vulnerable and terrifying — you don't deserve to be in trouble.

Being an artist is THE most vulnerable profession that we do as humans.

I am going to repeat this: being a creative, sharing your art, telling your story through the means of artistic expression is The Most Vulnerable Thing Humans Do. You just don't have to bare your soul in any other profession like we do. It is no wonder that most of us are plagued with perfectionism. It looks like armour perfectly made for us. The perfect fit for the artist trying to bare their imperfect soul. But it isn't working for you, is it? Perfectionism, with all its promises of great heights and high standards is keeping you small, mediocre, and hidden. She's sneaky that way. If we choose to create and make, we are choosing to show up in this world with our mess. Art must be messy. Creative expression must be imperfect. You're not meant to be getting this right. You're not meant to be flawless. It's time to lean into the ways you fall short, and realise they are what make you an artist.

Again, it's not your fault. We are at risk in this profession. Risk of being seen. Risk of sharing our soul and having people not quite understand us. So, if you're feeling guilt for the way you've used perfectionism to protect you — I want you to envision yourself putting that guilt down on the floor and walking away. It's not for you. It makes sense that we are so susceptible. Our work is dangerous. It makes sense that we choose to protect ourselves in this way. It is not your fault. But it is your responsibility to make sure you do what you can to move beyond the things that are

holding you back, and step into the creative abundance that is calling your name.

Perfectionism is the master of disguise.

Perfectionism is not high standards. It is not working really hard. It isn't wanting to do a really good job. So how do you know if you're a perfectionist? Or just someone who takes their creating very seriously? How do you tell when your desire to excel moves over to the perfectionist realm? It's hard. And it's why perfectionism can keep on thriving in your life without you realising it's doing damage. You can pass it off as an incredible work ethic, you can pass it off as wanting to learn, you can pass it off as humility. She is the master of disguise, which makes her hard to diagnose.

In order to release yourself from the bonds of perfectionism you need to understand how she is working in your life, and why. It requires gentle investigation. So that's what we are going to do today. If you feel resistance right now, notice that. Why? Is it the threat that maybe I might be about to ask you to take that armour off? Or to even just point out that you're head to toe in steel plate, and you haven't even noticed.

How do we tell the difference between wanting to excel and being a perfectionist?

Perfectionism is the constant striving for the unattainable. It is the commitment to the idea that you and your art will never be enough. It is creative work motivated by the fear that you'll never be good enough. It's creating from a place of lacking and scarcity. Conversely, wanting to aspire to great heights, wanting to connect and to make art that feels magic is a feeling of wanting to add more to the world, it is the belief that you do have something to give the world, and that it is your job to

generously make sure that happens. It is the hunger to connect, to see someone wonder at the world you created. Perhaps we could look at it like this: perfectionism is a desire to patch up a hole, creative ambition is the desire to add something to this world. It is an action of defence, and an action of offence. I think a lot of us move easily between these two desires, we are neither one nor the other. Some days we might wake up feeling vulnerable and we create defensively, to protect ourselves — with perfectionism at the helm. Other days we might feel more aligned and create from a place of curiosity and desire to connect.

What is important is that we start recognising the difference between the two states of creation. When you find yourself wanting to start again, throw something out, or edit profusely - it's time to take a breath and ask yourself why? What place are you creating from? If you are working on a creation right now, consider the space you are creating from? Is it offensive creating? Or defensive creating? It is only when you start to notice the stories playing out in your mind that you are able to re-write your narratives and heal.

How can we spot our perfectionism, and notice when it's incognito?

Throughout this book we are going to talk a lot about noticing. Just witnessing the way we talk to ourselves as we create and coming back to being present as we make. Perfectionists are experts at creating with their heads in the future. How will this be received? What will people think of this? Oh, an agent would never vibe with this sentence, I must delete it. A producer wouldn't approve of this new way I am mixing my music — I can't do it like this. You are in the future, predicting reactions, projecting your insecurities onto others, and second guessing everything before

anything has had a chance to develop. How are you talking to yourself as you create? Notice. How, specifically, is your perfectionism speaking to you? Stopping you from doing things? Altering the way you create? Because perfectionism can be sneaky, she can disguise herself in many ways.

In order to help us on our way to noticing our perfectionist's language and methods I've collected phrases that I've heard from perfectionist I've worked with in the past. These phrases are used to validate their unreachable standards. I've sectioned them up into different categories, to look at the different ways in which she dresses up, and convinces us that we don't have a problem. As you read through them, just notice the ones that you recognise as your own. Witness any thoughts that come up around them. Remember, this is not a place for judgement, but a place for curiosity.

Using 'humility' or self deprecation to cover up perfectionism:

- It's no good, I could never share it.
- I am an amateur.
- No one needs what I can make, not when they have *insert other creative*
- I'm just messing around, I don't take it very seriously.

Using hustle and hard work to cover up perfectionism:

- I need to do more research before I …
- I need to read other people's work before I …
- I need to plan more before I start.
- I'm researching the market before I launch…

- I worked so hard that I burnt myself out and now I am unable to complete anything because I fucked myself.
- I won't be finished for a very very long time because it's not ready yet. But I'm working on it every day!
- I can't release it yet, I have to do X, Y, Z again because it wasn't right the first time.

Using external circumstances as an excuse and a way to cover up perfectionism:

- It's not the right time to do this because I am giving all my energy to my kids.
- I do not have the ideal working space so I cannot work.
- Work got too busy so I don't have enough time to really focus on it so I cannot continue.
- The economy is shitty so I've decided to wait before I launch.
- My partner really needs my support right now, so it would be selfish to focus on my creativity.
- I only have thirty minutes or so a day to do my art, which isn't enough time, so I am waiting until I am less busy.

Perfectionism has a stubborn way of persevering, and she will do what she can to never be properly identified and found out. If any of these phrases feel familiar to you remind yourself that it's okay, that this is a journey — but let yourself know that you're on the path to getting out of your own way. Things are going to be different. Because you have so much to make, to create, to give to this world.

Reflection:

Are you a perfectionist? How does your perfectionism rear its head? What disguises does your perfectionism wear? Even if you don't consider yourself a fully fledged perfectionist, there are likely aspects of perfectionism that creep into your life and get in your way. Note them down. Name them. Own this.

I want you to understand how your perfectionism reveals itself so that you can begin the journey of challenging your patterns and your internal voice. To get to know the disguises your perfectionism wears we need to look at where you find resistance in your creative practice. Because where resistance shows its head, you can bet that perfectionism is there too. In this reflection, start considering where you slow down, stop, start over and sabotage yourself to the point of never finishing, releasing and feeling good about your art.

Here are some further questions to consider:

- How do you procrastinate? When do you procrastinate? Procrastination is likely to happen when the pressure to be perfect feels strong.
- Can you figure out what triggers your perfectionism? Or is it something that lingers always?
- Does your perfectionism masquerade as obsessive research? Reading / consuming other people's work? Can you identify the line between doing research because you need to do research, and doing research because of a fear that you are not going to be enough? Or is that line invisible to you? It is okay

if it is, in fact, it likely will be.

- Does your perfectionism focus on constant comparison to other artists? Is looking at other people's creations a part of your practice? Why? What does this serve? How does it help your art? Are the answers you are giving to those questions legitimate? Or are they an excuse so you can continue berating yourself for not being enough?
- Do you love to work harder than everyone else? It's time to examine your love of pushing yourself hard and inspect whether this could be less about loving to hustle and more about protecting yourself from being vulnerable. Why do you work hard on your art? Is your perfectionism masquerading as hustle?
- What is the motivation behind your hustle? Take your time with this question. It's a big one. A good way of determining the difference between hustle and perfectionism is asking why you are working the way you are working. Why are you hustling? What is the motivation?
- What are you working towards? Is your hustle there to protect you from embarrassment? Or is it there to help you chase magic?
- Does your creative process allow for mistakes and mess? Or are you determined to avoid all pitfalls? It is important to realise that you can never eliminate every error. I am sure you've noticed a typo in this book and I read it over multiple times, and had others check it. *But*, I still released her, because I believe this book has value.
- Does your perfectionism lead to self deprecation? Perhaps it doesn't disguise itself, *perhaps you're just a straight out dick to yourself.* Can you identify some

of the phrases that you use against yourself when you are feeling not-enough? It is important to start identifying the language you use against yourself. This is the language that keeps you small. These words make the bars of your prison. You must first notice them in order to challenge them.

- If you are feeling up to it, after you have thought through some of your internal perfectionist monologue, ask yourself: would you say this to anyone else? Would you say this to a younger version of yourself? Why do you deserve this language when no one else does?

This is heavy work. To stop you leaving the reflection feeling heavy and overwhelmed, prioritise self care. I encourage you to 'mother yourself'. This is a technique I use in my journaling where I adopt a voice of deep care and attentiveness. Ask yourself if you need anything. Remind yourself that you are doing well. Re-parent yourself in the way your inner child needs. You're doing really well. I see you. We are on the path to magic.

Chapter Three. Perfectionism breaks up relationships.



First of all, let's just make sure we are still on the same page: Perfectionism isn't good. It will destroy your relationship with yourself. And It will stop you from making the art you were born to make.

Perfectionism is a pattern of behaviour, a language of your inner critic and an expectation of yourself that you will be infallible. But the reality is: you are very very fallible. This way of living, it just isn't for you. It doesn't serve you. It hurts you. In fact, every time you expect perfection of yourself you are actively sabotaging your relationship with yourself.

How? You might ask. Aren't you just asking more for yourself? Aren't you asking yourself to step up and do the best you can? Aren't you being a stern but brilliant teacher/parental figure to your inner artist? If you want to excel, you have to push yourself to perfection, right?

I see you. I know that so much of that makes sense. I know you want to excel. I know it feels like this is the way to do it. But that's a lie you've been sold. Perfectionism is a cultural story that promises protection from embarrassment and shame. It promises success without cost. Being seen without vulnerability. It is a scam, a con, a story that will keep you small — this isn't the way you're going to thrive.

Why does perfectionism destroy your relationship with yourself?

It is similar to how persistent procrastination will ruin your relationship with yourself. When you promise yourself you are going to show up for your art, but repeatedly procrastinate and never follow through, you destroy your faith in yourself. Little by

little you deteriorate the relationship you have with yourself. Similarly, with perfectionism, when you constantly expect yourself to show up as perfect, and then constantly fail to meet those expectations, you are doing deep damage to the way you relate to yourself. Because each time you show up for your art expecting perfection, you are setting yourself up to fail. Your relationship with yourself is made up of a consistent pattern of disappointment. The simple act of desiring perfection is, therefore, cruel. You become the taskmaster. The eternally disappointed parent of your own inner child.

Every time you expect yourself to show up and do the art exactly as it is envisioned in your head; not to mess up; not to get confused; not to need time to process — you are playing yourself. You are sabotaging yourself. Every single time you show up and ask yourself to meet your unreachable standards you are doing damage.

Again, I invite you to envisage a younger version of you. Now, I want you to demand that little one to colour in a drawing without straying outside the lines. Then tell the child not to make a single mistake as they a create papier-maché mask. Order the child to create a painting exactly as you envision; make them throw it out and start again every time they misstep. They will not reach your standards. Is it appropriate then for you to get frustrated with them? You would be teaching them to hide their art. To never tell anyone that they tried. To keep their failures a secret. To be ashamed for even giving it a go.

I do not mean to infantilise you. I mean to open your eyes to the way you treat yourself. If you think it’s wrong to talk to a child that way, why is it suddenly okay to

speak to yourself like that? Do you believe that because we are adults, we lose the privilege of being treated compassionately?

I also do not mean to say you cannot create beautiful things — fucking hell of course you can, you are made to create beautiful things. But you cannot make them without making mistakes, and you cannot make them to perfection.

Perfectionism means that every time you show up for your art you disappoint yourself. Which means you become a constant disappointment in your own eyes. You cannot thrive, because every single time you set yourself up to fail. You cannot have a good relationship with yourself because there is no support, no compassion, no space for your messy magic.

How to repair the relationship?

That's what this whole book is about. Because, while the answer is simple: Give yourself room to be messy. Give yourself permission to make shitty art. Give yourself grace as you grow. Be in awe of yourself, now. That answer is also deeply complicated and requires self-compassion, self-investigation, forgiveness of self, forgiveness of others and the diligent noticing of what you are saying to yourself and how you treat yourself.

Giving ourselves constant permission to fuck up is the only way to repair the relationship with yourself and your art. Your creations and creativity shouldn't be synonymous with disappointment and shame. We need to re-associate. We need the thought of your art to be linked with the idea of potential, magic, play and surrender.

Reflection:

Is your perfectionism hurting your relationship with yourself? Do you have a consistent pattern of disappointment in your life? As before, I want to look at the narratives when we show up for our art. How do you speak about your art? Write it down.

Here is my own example found in an old journal: *I'm so confused about my novel. It's too messy to look at. I cannot fix it. I do not have the energy to go in there and make it better. I'm not good enough. I need a whole day to deal with that fucked shit. I want to wait I have a whole day to deal with it. I feel so embarrassed about the state it's in.*

Once you've identified some of your internal narrative and emotions surrounding your creativity, ask yourself the question, how do my narratives impact my relationship with myself?

For example: *I can see that I am avoiding my art because I do not feel good enough for it. I recognise that by avoiding my art, I am confirming this story. By avoiding my art I confirm and further entrench the story that I am not good enough to be an artist. This is damaging my relationship with myself because I feel incapable, and small. I realise that I am expecting to fix everything that is 'wrong' with my book in one session, which is unreasonable and once again makes me feel incapable, disappointed and stupid. I am expecting too much from myself, I cannot live up to my expectations. This is unfair and is, once again, damaging the way I relate to myself. I am afraid of my own expectations and therefore I am afraid of myself.*

If this way of creating dialogue with yourself resonates, you can have this

conversation with your inner child. This can encourage a softer and more compassionate approach.

For example:

Me – I'm sorry for the way I have treated you and I am sorry for the things that I have expected of you, they have been unfair. I want to fix this. What can I do to help mend this relationship?

Inner child – I just want less pressure around creating. I want to remember what it is like to play and delight in my imagination.

Me – I hear you. This stresses me out because I want to take my art seriously, and the word 'play' makes me think we are just being silly and we will never get to share our art.

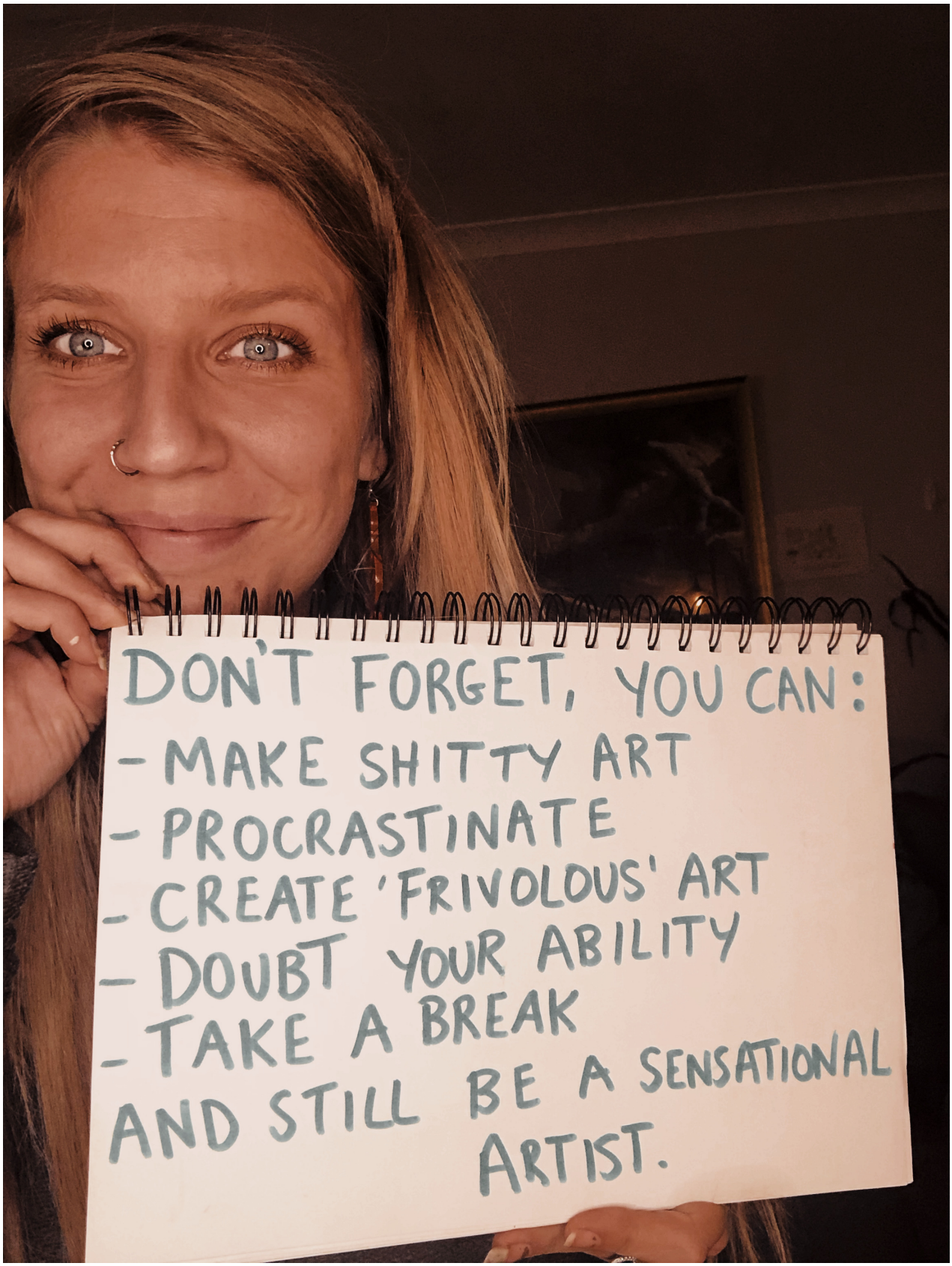
Inner child – I want to take this seriously too. I know that my art is meant to be shared. But I need less pressure around the creating, otherwise I feel too scared to do anything. We will never get to share our art if we keep going this way. I will never finish because you are being too mean to me.

In this reflection, you might want to make a tiny promise to yourself. For example, "I will endeavour to make a shitty piece of art each week, with no pressure on it." Choose a promise that will allow you to begin the reparation of this relationship. Choose a promise that will endeavour to reverse the consistent pattern of disappointment. We want to bring pride back into your craft.

A little word of caution, as perfectionists we are really good at making massive fucking promises to ourselves in order to 'make up' for the way things have been

going. This is not the time to make a massive promise to yourself, like ‘I will write 2000 words a day from this point on!’ This is the time to make a small promise that you *know* you can follow through on.

Chapter Four: How Perfectionism Impacts Performance.



Why the pressure to be perfect makes your art crap.

We've looked at how perfectionism will destroy your relationship with yourself. But I know that the shiny allure of perfectionism still lingers. Because while perfectionism might fuck up the way you relate to yourself, a part of you still believes it might still get you out in-front of the pack. There is a story that perfectionism might push us to work harder than the rest, and do better work than the rest. Maybe it's worth hating yourself if perfectionism can help you achieve your dreams? These are the stories I want this chapter to address. I want you to look at how perfectionism impacts performance. Because, although we are sold the story that perfectionism is the thing that will get us far, that will push us to achieve our dreams, that will keep us on the straight and narrow, it does nothing of the sort.

"But if I stop asking myself for perfection, everything will crumble and I will never show up ever again and I will never to do good work and I will decay and become the big, lazy, unsuccessful blob that I know I am deep down." – Story I've told myself.

One of the reasons narratives around perfectionism are so hard to dismantle is because we have a belief that perfectionism is the only reason we are showing up at all. We believe that if we loosen our grip on ourselves and lower our standards that we'll either just spend the rest of our days making abysmal art, or not make any art at all. There is a belief, unconscious or not, that perfectionism is what is holding us together.

The internal narrative that I have held — and that I have witnessed many other

artists cling onto — is that our high standards are the only thing that keeps us showing up. Our perfectionism is the only thing that will create good work. Without our impossibly high standards we won't achieve the big goals, we won't achieve the dreams we desire, we will never be seen, we will never deserve to be seen. Our art will never connect.

Are these internal narratives ringing any bells? None of them are true.

The idea that you have to crack the whip and be infallible to achieve your dreams is soaked into our culture.

It isn't your fault if you cling onto these beliefs. But it is your responsibility to dismantle them. And you will need to dismantle them in order to find true creative abundance.

Do you trust yourself to show up and make good art if you aren't being a dick to yourself? Without your cruel task master voice, do you believe that you would show up for your creativity? Do you believe that you could make art that is magic without the inner critic in your head berating you and asking you to do more, more, more?

Ask yourself: do you believe that if you were kind to yourself, if you let yourself off the hook, allowed yourself rest, made room for mistakes and room for bad art — that you would never achieve your dreams?

In a culture where everything is hustle, where the idea of getting up each day and working our asses off is the sexiest thing we can do, reprogramming these beliefs is really hard. But it's time to understand that being an artist doesn't require you to bully yourself. Discipline isn't bullying. It isn't guilt. It has nothing to do with shame and

disappointment. Discipline is important, it is necessary, but it doesn't have to be administered with cruelty, with perfectionism as its heartbeat.

You need to learn to trust in kindness and compassion. You need to prove to yourself that you can show up in your own name, because you know what you want, and you know you have something to offer. You need to remind yourself that mistakes and imperfections are not what is getting in your way. You need mess in order to be successful. You are so much more likely to create consistently if you are compassionate to yourself. Studies show it, my clients have proved it, my own creative practise has been testament to this fact.

Reflection: How can we change our internal narrative from shame inducing perfectionism to disciplined, aligned, compassion?

First step is noticing. Always. Do you have a little perfectionist task master in your head who is firm with you? What sort of things do they say? What language do they use?

For example, here is a moment I personally witnessed and recorded the other day:

Feeling in alignment on a walk

Sudden feeling of perhaps I am forgetting something, perhaps I shouldn't be feeling so good

Not exactly internal voice but definitely a feeling of, 'do you deserve to feel this good, what have you done today?'

Then a much clearer internal voice. "You aren't really getting a lot done at the moment!"

Then I got a random image of an acquaintance and then the envisioning of what he would think about my current work in progress.

Feeling of being an idiot and an imposter

"This project isn't good enough. Why am I even trying?"

Can you see that it's not always clear internal monologue? Be sure to be on the look out for images, feelings, emotions, semi-conscious ideas. Witnessing ourselves in these moments is so integral to understanding how these moments are playing us, why we have these moments in the first place, and how we can heal and grow.

More questions to consider:

- Is any of your inner critic's language inherited? Do you see your language within your parent's language? A teacher perhaps? You learnt this language somewhere. For me, a lot of my perfectionist narratives and cruel disciplinary inner critic comes from our culture. I've picked up language from social media comments, from overheard conversations, from acquaintances giving me their opinions. I have internalised cultural narratives and used them to compile a perfectionist, hustling, inner critic who has little room to forgive, allow for rest or mistakes. It took realising where this voice had come from, to realise it was not mine to hold onto.
- Does the way you treat yourself, and treat your inner artist serve you? (You are allowed to think that it does!) In what ways does it serve you? In what ways is it a disservice to you?
- Do you trust yourself to show up and make art that connects? Why / Why not?

- Could you prepare some alternative compassionate language to use when you find your internal voice cracking the whip? What do you wish someone would say to you when your perfectionism is flaring up and you don't believe that you are enough?
- If this new language feels uncomfortable, that's okay. It might even make you angry. You might feel like you don't deserve it! Or that it is stupid. Honour those reactions — this is not an easy transition. I'm going to ask you to notice the feelings and resistance that comes up and acknowledge that resistance is a sign that you are moving in a direction that is deeply needed. Healing is on the horizon. Push through the resistance. Keep seeking out the alternative compassionate responses that are triggering you. Keep being curious about why it evokes the emotion it does.

I am going to put a few examples of how we can change the disciplinarian internal monologue into compassionate responses:

Instead of: "You need to show up to do your 2000 words a day. If you don't, you'll never make it as an author."

Try: "I am going to show up to do my 500 words minimum today. Because I respect myself, respect my creative calling and set achievable goals. These words do not have to be good. I know that mess is the stepping stone to magic."

Instead of: "You are so lazy, you never show up for yourself, we will never

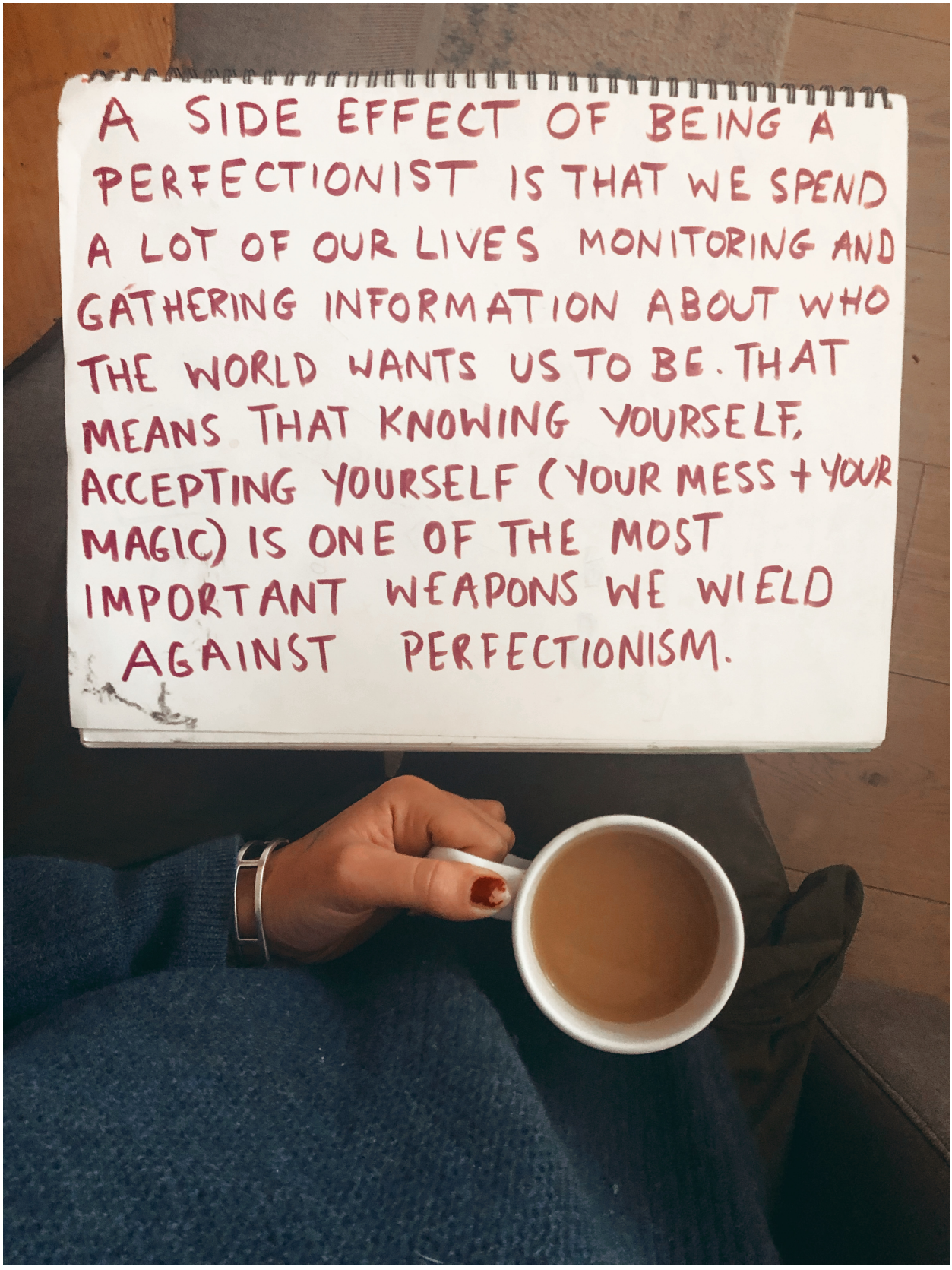
achieve anything because you are too slack."

Try: "I acknowledge my pain and disappointment, but I grant myself compassion. This path is not easy. I forgive myself for not showing up for myself and for my art. Tomorrow I make myself a promise that I will follow through on: I am going to spend 5 minutes with my guitar."

Instead of: "Your goals are so unrealistic. If you ever want to be a successful artist you're going to have to work so much harder and better than you currently are."

Try: "I have been called to live an abundant creative life. I trust that this is my path, even though sometimes it can be really challenging. If I wish to connect with my creativity, I know that I must make room for mistakes and mess. I know that I must show up for myself consistently, but that I must also be gentle with myself. Whilst I ask myself to show up and create - there is room for rest and compassion. This is the route, and the only route to true creative magic."

Chapter Five: Identifying where perfectionism comes from.



In order to challenge our patterns of perfectionism we need to understand the root of our behaviour.

It's time to dive back into our journey and start identifying where the expectation of perfectionism originates from.

Do you have any memory of creating freely as a child? Of loving mess? When was the last time you allowed yourself to create something that was a little bit useless? Shitty? Without high expectations? Was it recently? Or can you not remember?

I think it is safe to say that there was some point in your life, when you were a little'n, where you picked up the paints and made a god damn shitty mess of a creation and didn't give a fuck. What happened between then and now? I can't tell you what happened, this work is yours. But I am going to guide you towards considering how certain events, people, systems and structures triggered the transition of a child being free to create shitty art, and you, now, with all your heavy expectations. This chapter is going to be one big reflection, so have your journal nearby if you're choosing to write, because whilst we can discuss the nature of perfectionism, I cannot tell you how you personally got here in your journey. There will be lots of questions to consider, and they won't always be easy. As always, I want to remind you that you are so so needed, exactly as you are. I want you to know that you're not alone. I want you to know that you deserve gentleness, big cups of tea, and joy. Go slow if you need to. Get messy if you need to. Ironically, this journey won't be perfect, and that's hard for us perfectionists to accept.

I'm sorry, but we've got to start here.

Parents, parental figures, your guardian/s as a child. Over the years, as I have witnessed creatives battle with their perfectionism and as I have dealt with my own high expectations, I have noticed that all these issues stem back to how we were raised. Take a deep breath, put on some soothing music, get a snack. We need to look at this. Our parents / guardians leave us with a lot of baggage. That doesn't mean we need to be angry with them. We might have a great relationship with our guardians — this truth doesn't need to come with judgement. That's just the deal with raising a kid, we leave our children with baggage.

It's time to start investigating how our parental figures may have impacted our impossibly high expectations. Instead of telling you how **your** parents impacted **your** standards, (spoiler, I have no idea), I'm going to ask you questions, and suggest a few things that you can unpack, evaluate, agree with or disagree with. Never hesitate to disagree with me. That's an important part of the journey.

Untangling our perfectionism from our parents' expectations.

When did you get attention from your parental figures? It is important to notice whether we had to excel as a child to get attention, because if you were a child who either had to excel to get attention, or had negative repercussions doing poorly, it is highly likely that you carry that experience with you today. We learn to treat ourselves, as we have been treated. We learn to reward ourselves as an adult, or punish ourselves as an adult, just like we were rewarded or punished as a child. It might not have been an overt or obvious situation and your parents might not have

been intentionally doing this. But whether it was obvious and intentional or not, there will be repercussions.

Most of us grew up in a culture that celebrated achievement.

Did your child-self realise that if you excelled at school, sport, extra curriculum activities, music, art - that you would receive praise, attention, recognition? Whether you were someone who excelled and got hooked on the feeling of achievement, or someone who perhaps didn't do as well and was either not rewarded or punished, can you see a reflection of your past in the way you approach your art today? Are you craving the approval, or fearing the disapproval of your art's audience, just as you did with your parents?

If none of this is resonating, that's okay. If you felt loved and supported by your guardians no matter the achievement, that is magic, write that down. Acknowledge it. It doesn't invalidate your perfectionism or make you an anomaly, there are no right answers in this investigation.

Specifically, we need to investigate how we felt as a child when we failed.

What were the consequences when you came home with a bad grade? Apathy? Disappointment? Support? What happened when you decked yourself on a hurdle at the sports carnival (*shivers at the memory*)? Missed a line in the school play and stood there awkwardly? What happened when you didn't do well? We need to investigate whether the way in which our guardians reacted to failure is reflected in the way we react to creative failure. When you are imperfect does your internal voice

sound like a parental figure? Does your emotional state mimic the state you would find yourself in as a child?

Be careful as you investigate this, it can be alarming to suddenly recognise that you are treating yourself in a way that used to scare or upset you when you were a child. Spend time with your inner child if you need to, remind them that you are on their side, apologise, ask for forgiveness. Let yourself know that you are on the path to making change. If you don't recognise your internal voice as the voice of your parents or authority figures, that's okay too. My voice doesn't mimic my parents. But get curious about whether you can see your inner critic's language mirrored in any other parts of your life.

Here are some further questions to unpack:

- Did you have siblings who were 'better' at you academically? Or in some other field? Did you notice this? How did it make you feel as a child? How did your parents treat you differently? Or, were you the "best" sibling and loved it?
- Did you have parental figures who put pressure on perfect presentation, perfect looks, perfect behaviour? What happened? Detail what sort of perfection they expected from you. What high standards did they keep for you? And, possibly, for themselves? Do you maintain the same high standards? Is it in alignment with you?
- Were your surrounded by perfectionists as a kid? Do you know anything about the way your parents spoke to themselves? Can you retrospectively see any hint of their perfectionism? Could you ask them about it? Even if your parents

did not require high standards from you, even if they did not actively preach it — did they teach perfectionism by practising it themselves? Can you empathise with the way they held themselves to account? Can you see where it perhaps failed them? Or, conversely, do you feel like it benefited them? Perfectionism can look very seductive if it was modelled as an ideal way of living by your role models. Was it seductive to watch them always succeed? Did they ever show you or let onto any of the trials and failures they experienced? Do you believe that they truly never experienced failure? How does this impact you?

A lot of the perfectionists that I work with and witness can identify that their inner critic, and high standards, are born from wanting to be seen and recognised as a child. They only got approval from authority figures when they excelled. Therefore they can only give themselves approval when they excel. Some people only felt loved when they did well, and therefore do not love themselves unless they are doing well.

Untangling our perfectionism and our education.

Our schooling systems are a big part of the culture of perfection, and we would be remiss if we didn't investigate how our schooling impacted us as creatives.

Schools are designed to praise and uplift those who do 'well'. Therefore, I want to invite you now to start looking at how your schooling system might have impacted your perfectionism. We will look at this further in the reflection but for now, just think about these questions: Did you have experiences with teachers, who can often act a lot

like our guardians, that could have cultivated your need to achieve? Did you excel at school? Struggle? Muddle along? A bit of all three?

We are literarily graded in our education system — rewarded for 'better' work. In my school we were ranked in each class from first to last. Isn't that incredible? I still can't believe that can be seen as a functional system to help kids develop a healthy relationship with themselves. I was an aggressive achiever at school, and the very idea that I could literarily be labelled Number One, was a driving force for me. But once I achieved my coveted number one spot, I would be distraught when something went wrong and I slipped down the rankings. This has, without a doubt, impacted my own expectations of myself as an adult. I wanted to be 'the best'. I wanted to be 'number one'. And for a long time I had very little room to slip, to fuck up. I have no doubt that systems like this in our education system played a massive role in issues I've experienced as an adult.

If we didn't feel the pressure to succeed, or fear failure, the quintessential schooling mantra 'do your best' can be just as harmful. Were you told: *Do Your best*? In so many ways this approach seems like a remedy for perfectionism. You are not required to be best, just do *your* best. But it is worth looking at how we interpreted this phrase as a kid. How could we understand what our best was as a kid? What is our best? Is it someone else's best? Does my best mean working until I am exhausted? Is my best work the same each day? How can we hold ourselves to our 'best' both as a kid and an adult when 'best' isn't quantifiable. We are so malleable as human beings, as creatives. Our best on a Tuesday, will look vastly different on a Wednesday. Our best in the morning, will look different in the afternoons. We rarely give ourselves

room for our undulating creative capacity.

These questions and investigations are so important as we discover where our standards have come from, where our internal monologue has adopted language from, where our inner child has their wounds from.

How has the external dialogue that we've heard throughout our entire lives been internalised? Do you need to let some things go?

Perfectionism and Rejection sensitivity.

Just as our parental figures and education can be a source of our perfectionism, our experiences of rejection can feed and sustain our perfectionist. This is an invitation to investigate how rejection in your life could have encouraged the perfectionist narrative. Rejection sensitivity is something I know intimately. Without a doubt, the creative rejection that I have experienced in my life planted seeds of perfectionism, when it comes to releasing my work, or submitting my writing, memories of my rejections trigger perfectionist behaviour. It took me understanding where the fear stemmed from, that I was able to get a handle on it.

As artists we are going to be intimate with rejection.

I myself sit on a throne of hundreds of rejection letters, and they have taken their toll. I am now extremely sensitive to situations which require me to ask for something, especially when I am asking a 'gatekeeper' for something. I feel hugely vulnerable, small, insignificant. I would use perfectionism to try and protect myself from those situations. I would ask myself: how can I make my art un-rejectable? (Spoiler, I can't.

It is impossible). How can I put off being in that vulnerable situation forever? (By constantly 'working' on my art, and never deeming it 'ready'.)

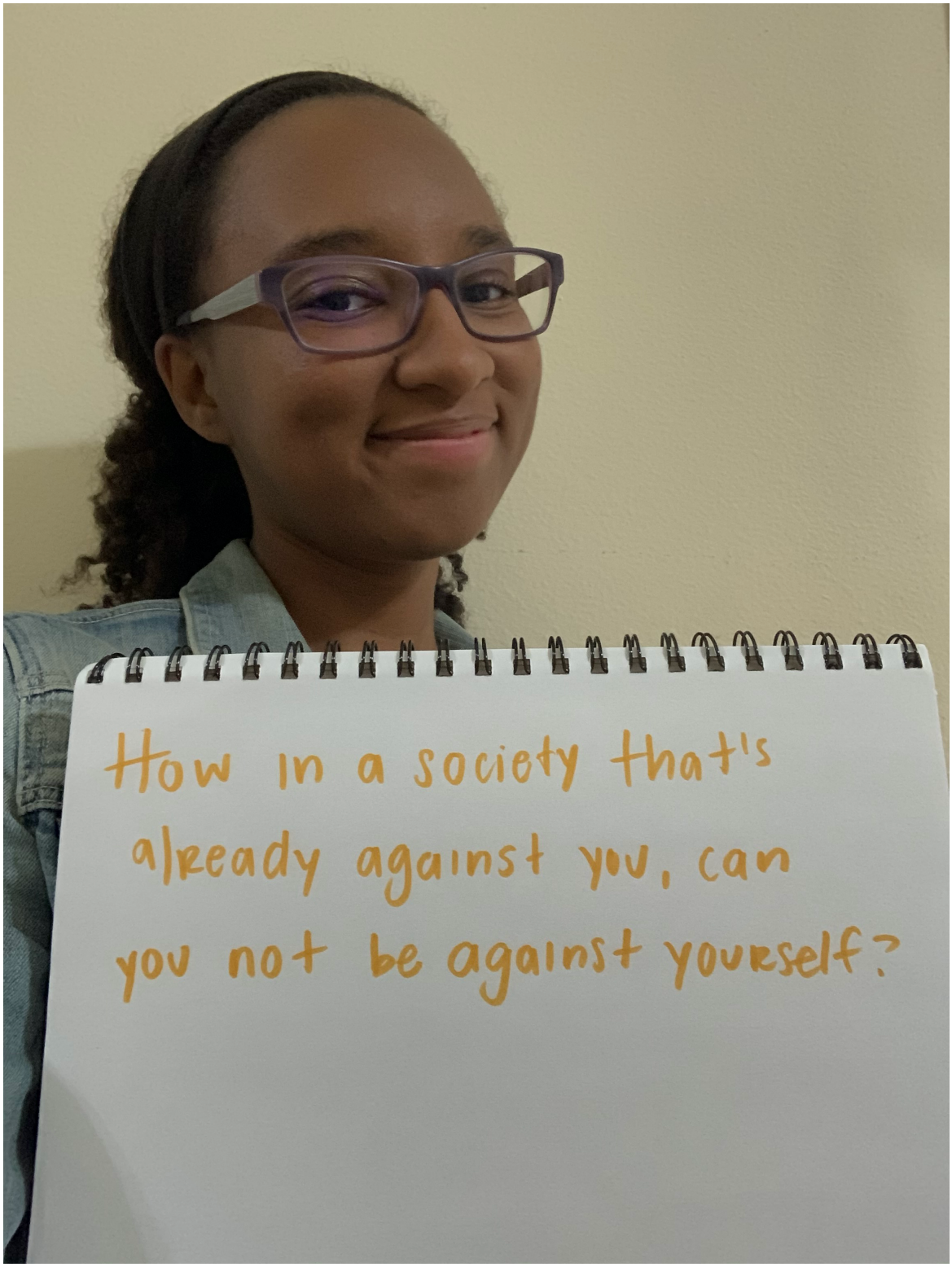
We learn to be on the defence for rejection. Because we know just how much it hurts. We don't believe we'll survive another rejection, not after all we've experienced.

So, I want to ask you - could rejection sensitivity be a root cause of your dedication to perfection?

Further questions to consider:

What is your experience with rejection? Were you rejected in schools? In your family? By your parents? By the systems in our society? Do you actively avoid the possibility of being rejected? Are you armoured up? Nobody likes rejection, but how do you internalise the experience of being told you are not wanted? You might want to recall a time where this actually happened to you and walk through the thoughts you had, the reactions that occurred, and the way it still impacts you today.

Chapter Six: For the BIPOC Perfectionist with Talise Burton.



Systemic issues and perfection.

When asking creatives about where their perfectionism stemmed from it was impossible to ignore the systemic roots that were discussed. Gender and Race were talked about by many artists as the cause, or a heavy influencing factor, as to why they strived for perfection. In this next chapter I am going to let Talise, author and creativity coach, discuss how race interplays with perfectionism. You can find and support Talise on Instagram at @writerambles.

Before we get into this chapter I'd like to take this opportunity to introduce myself.

My name is Talise. I'm a creativity coach, a nationally published award-winning writer, and a lover of all things art & creativity. As a coach & a creative, it's been my mission to empower artists to unleash their creativity, make their art, and live the creative life of their dreams. And it's in this chapter that I hope to continue my mission & empower you. This chapter is my love letter to us, to all the BIPOC creatives & artists struggling with perfectionism. This entire book will no doubt be transformative in helping you reprogram your relationship with perfectionism, but I write this chapter to hold space for the conversations that we need to have on the specific issues and challenges BIPOC perfectionists may face. This chapter is written from the experiences of other BIPOC creatives I've spoken to and worked with over the years, and from my own personal experience as a BIPOC creative and perfectionist. Here I hope to acknowledge & address what you need in order to move forward with your art & creativity. I see you. I am with you. And I am honoured to be

a part of your creative journey.

What limiting beliefs & false stories are you telling yourself?

To start, I'd like to take a look at the false stories & limiting beliefs we tell ourselves. What doubts, worries, insecurities do you have when it comes to your art & creativity? What thoughts & feelings come to mind when you feel creatively stuck? It's these doubts and worries you have, these things you fear to be true that your inner critic feeds off of and that your perfectionism is born out of. See, the perfectionist is the artist who's been taken hostage by their inner critic, by these false stories & limiting beliefs. The critic, the worries, the doubts, the stories, they've all become too loud, and they overtake our voice as the artist. They keep us questioning, hesitating, second guessing, nitpicking, criticising, and obsessing over minuscule things. They have us feeling like we can't make mistakes or messes, like our drafts and sketches have to be instant masterpieces, like we need to have everything together before we start. And this perfectionism halts our creation. The great news about perfectionism is that it can be combated. We can recognize our limiting beliefs & false stories and begin to rewrite them. We can learn how to work through the fears, doubts, & worries at the core of our internal beliefs & stories. And with practice we can free ourselves to create confidently, joyously, and more easefully again. That is what this entire book is here for, but for this chapter I want to look a little bit deeper at what happens when you have evidence to prove your fears and worries right. What do you do when the stories are true?

What do you do when the stories are true?

Perfectionism feeds off your perceived truths. It uses what you fear to be true against you, filling you with doubt and worry and fear until your art can't move. When it has factual evidence to latch onto, personal experiences or information that prove your worries & fears right, it can be that much more difficult to combat. And as BIPOC creatives there's a pretty blatant truth that our inner critics can latch onto, that our perfectionism can thrive off of. Systematic & systemic racism is deeply embedded within our societies, our creative industry, and our creative community. As BIPOC creatives we are forced to face unequal access to creative resources, materials, supplies, equipment, education, and opportunities. We are forced to face the truths of racial bias, prejudice, and systemic racism influencing mass appeal, sales, and exposure. This can make the already societally deemed "risky" decision of pursuing our art & creativity that much more difficult & daunting. And it gives our perfectionism abundant worries and fears to feed from because these limitations and disadvantages are very real. I'm here to help you debunk your inner critic and it's a compelling case for perfectionism, to help you quiet the noise & reclaim your voice as the artist. In this chapter, I will help you work through 2 common stories that show up for the BIPOC creative struggling with perfectionism. And it's my hope that by the end of this chapter you will know how in a society that's already against you, to not be against yourself.

So how does systematic & systemic racism influence the perfectionism we face?

In a society that scrutinizes almost everything we do and will discredit & oppress us

for simply existing, it can be hard not to fall into the perfectionist trap of conforming. Many of us have been taught from an early age how to adapt to the racist systems in our societies. We've been shown & told how to conform, blend in, be as in line and rule abiding and "perfect" as possible. We code switch, we straighten our hair, we do what we can to assimilate. And we're taught that this is how to protect yourself, how to gain approval or acceptance in a society where safety and acceptance are not readily given to you. And this conforming habit is built on the belief that if we're perfect enough, we'll pass. That even if we aren't perfect enough and don't pass and are met with discrimination, bias, and racism, that it's still safer to conform as much as possible than to blatantly not. And this belief can show up very prominently as perfectionism in our art.

When we struggle with this belief nothing feels good enough. We nitpick ourselves, our art, the equipment & materials we use, our creative workspaces, how much time we put into creating, our creative income, etc. We conform to art trends, styles, & forms of expression that aren't our own & that we don't enjoy. We doubt our own artistic wants & ideas in favor of trends or themes that seem more "palatable" to the masses. We cast off our names and rebrand ourselves with a more liked image or a stage name that's more easily pronounceable & remembered by audiences. We're told & taught that by conforming will get more opportunities from the industry leaders, more exposure to audiences, more sales. And this can make you feel like you alone are not enough, like your ideas & unique style & your message & voice are not enough. You are more likely to break through, to be successful & liked, to get opportunities if you conform. This form of perfectionism is a micromanaging of

yourself, your creativity, and your art. It's built as a form of insulation, under the guise of helping you get further & do better. Under the guise of keeping you safe & getting you approval. But, this form of perfectionism doesn't allow you to feel safe & comfortable with yourself, with creating how you want to. It makes you doubt yourself & your creative voice. It makes you fear that on your own, as you are with your creative ideas and goals and interests and work ethic that you won't be enough to get opportunities or pay or recognition. It makes you fear that you being yourself & creating what you want will make you a creative failure or a bad artist.

Your freedom to express

With this form of perfectionism your inner critic uses that story against you, nagging on about how no one will relate to the experience you're trying to share, that your art is not palatable for the masses or on trend, that you and your art won't be liked, that your art won't sell well because it's based on your life narratives and no on wants to hear those, that one mess up and you could ruin your chances of getting your art seen or getting sales or getting signed. And that hurts. It stunts your creative process, it dulls your art & creativity. It persuades you to censor yourself and your art. It makes the process of creating art frustrating and painful. This is perfectionism impacting your freedom to express. This is perfectionism acknowledging that in this society there is inequality that you face that impacts the opportunities you have, how you and your art are perceived, and how your art is marketed & sold purely based on your race. And perfectionism is using this knowledge against you to get you to dull your art down and censor your creative voice under the guise of helping you gain approval by

mass audiences & get picked for better opportunities.

It's up to you

The thing is, you can do all this. You can conform, settle, dull your voice and your art down to potentially reach wider audiences. You can get better opportunities and pay, and you can still be faced with negative reviews, backlash, dislike, bias, and prejudice. Worse still, you may find success creating something you don't even like, that doesn't resonate with you, that you didn't enjoy creating. This form of perfectionism numbs you, it doesn't save or help you. You could check all the figurative boxes focus on trends, pander to audiences, rename yourself, etc. and you can still not make the cut to someone else. And that's not to scare you or discourage you but to remind you that creating your art is not up to them. It's up to you. You won't create art with this belief limiting you, by cruelly telling yourself that you and your art aren't enough. To create art you love & to enjoy creating it again you need to love & embrace who you are, your creative ideas & vision, your unique art style & form of expression. You cannot control how other people perceive you & your art. But you can accept that what you love creating is far more important than creating for others. Your message, your voice, your expression, your style are worth exploring, sharing, and honouring. Your art is as unique as you are, and it deserves to be cherished by you, despite how others may feel about it or about you. Don't dull yourself and your creations to make things more "palatable" for others. Instead embrace all that makes your art unique. Know that your most beautiful creations and your most joyous times creating will come when you are making what resonates who you are and what you have to share.

So many great works of art from BIPOC creators would not exist if they fell to this form of perfectionism. I implore you to not give in either. You may feel some resistance to it at first, know that this is a sign you're moving in the right direction. It's time to let loose, to practice opening up & taking up space & being wholly yourself. Your art is your opportunity to say and show what you want to, it can be the bridge to you embracing more of yourself. Invite this in. Know that sometimes the best way to fight back against the injustices in this society, the best way to make a difference is to simply enjoy your life, to do what you love, to embrace who you are, to express yourself to the fullest. So have fun, allow yourself to experiment & make mistakes with your art, explore your curiosities, play with your creativity, & express yourself without restriction. What is one thing you can start doing to express yourself more freely?

Hustle: The Second Story

Let's talk about the second way that systemic and systematic racism influences our perfectionism: hustle. When you know you're at a disadvantage it can be instinct to push yourself harder, to overcompensate. You want to catch up because you know the disadvantage has you behind. And you know you have more to do and less to help you do it with. This is how I and countless other BIPOC people have lived. Knowing that we are at a disadvantage in this society, and that we have been for generations, hundreds of years down the line. And this generational truth can easily seep into our creative practices.When you've experienced, when you've been taught, told, and shown that it takes more for you and people like you to get the same opportunities,

approval & acclaim, pay, support, respect, acknowledgement, access to materials & equipment & education & resources, etc as a white creative it can be hard not to overcompensate. It's so embedded in your history, in your life that it feels like instinct. You have to work harder, finish faster, do more in order to get a sliver of the same. When it's already a societally deemed "risk" to pursue your creative passions & dreams, what feels like a hurdle for others becomes a mountain for the BIPOC creative. And this adds pressure & stress to the practice of creating art. It makes us feel like we can't make any mistakes, like things have to work out perfectly. That there are limits to what we have access to in terms of opportunity, and that if we mess up, if someone doesn't like our work, if we say the wrong thing, or look the wrong way it could ruin not only the one chance we may have currently but future potential chances we could've had. So we push ourselves more, we work longer hours, we go harder, and hustle and grind. We nitpick here, critique this, scrutinize that in hopes that it will be enough. In hopes that if we get it just right, just perfect, it'll be enough. We'll be enough.

But, the issue (or the blessing since we are looking to unravel this habit) is that art cannot be made that way. Art is not joyfully, confidently, or plentifully made when it is hustled and critiqued in this way, when it is under this weight of perfection. This approach of hustle, struggle, grind fills our creative process with stress and pressure so large and overbearing that art crumbles beneath it. It makes creation frustrating and unenjoyable, full of second guessing ourselves and holding ourselves to vague standards and comparisons and expectations that we can't keep. Not only is this hustle strategy & mindset unsustainable for our art but, it will lead to creative burnout for us.

We crumble under the weight too. We won't finish what we're working on if we are overcompensating in this way, and even if we do we won't like what we've created because we didn't enjoy creating it.

Go at your own pace

So, I want to invite you to allow yourself to go at your own pace. Not a pace dictated by lack or comparison, where you feel like you lack something and are constantly in need of catching up or keeping up. No. I'm talking about a pace that works for you, your art, and your life. Find the pace that brings you joy, that makes creating art enjoyable & sustainable for you in the long-term, and that allows you to make mistakes & take time with your art. What does that pace look like for you? How can you begin following that pace for yourself now? I know you may feel resistance to this. It has been my greatest creative challenge to allow myself to go at a pace that works for me, to slow down & trust in myself and the process. It can feel like being behind, like going too slow, like you're not doing enough. But in reality it's actually when you're doing the best, because you've finally accepted that you are good enough, that your art and creativity are enough, and are worth taking time and space for. It's when you've come to trust that there is no need to hustle or grind or hurt or burnout for anyone else and their terms. No, you are blissfully maintaining a creative pace & practice that's best for you and your art. One where you're making true progress and you're enjoying it.

This is not a call to push through, to ignore the racial inequities that exist and how they impact you. This is a call to be compassionate with yourself & acknowledge that

while this society does make life harder on you and your art, you don't have to make creating art harder on yourself. You are no machine, you cannot avoid making mistakes and messes with your work, and you cannot uphold unsustainable practices of pure hustle and grind. You don't need to be perfect for anyone else. You don't need to pressure yourself, stress yourself out, push yourself harder than another. Don't define your creativity, your creative potential, what you can make & achieve, the process you take to creating your art, or your creative life on someone else's terms. Your pace is unique to you & your art. And irregardless of the hurdles you my face in this life, creating art will always require space, mistakes, and time. So, step back and really look into what is best for you and your art. How can you make creating more easeful & enjoyable for you? How can you make space for self care and play in your creative practice? How can you begin being more compassionate with yourself through the messy, mistake ridden, magical ride of creation?

Reflection:

Here are a few prompts to help you work through these stories & begin quieting your perfectionism. You can journal these out, talk them through to yourself or with a friend, whatever works best for you.

- What limiting beliefs & stories come to mind and as you create? Where did these beliefs & stories come from? Have you experienced something to reaffirm this belief & story within yourself?
- What can you say to rewrite these false stories & beliefs? What encouraging messages can you give to yourself now?
- When you create, are you often thinking about how others will react/perceive

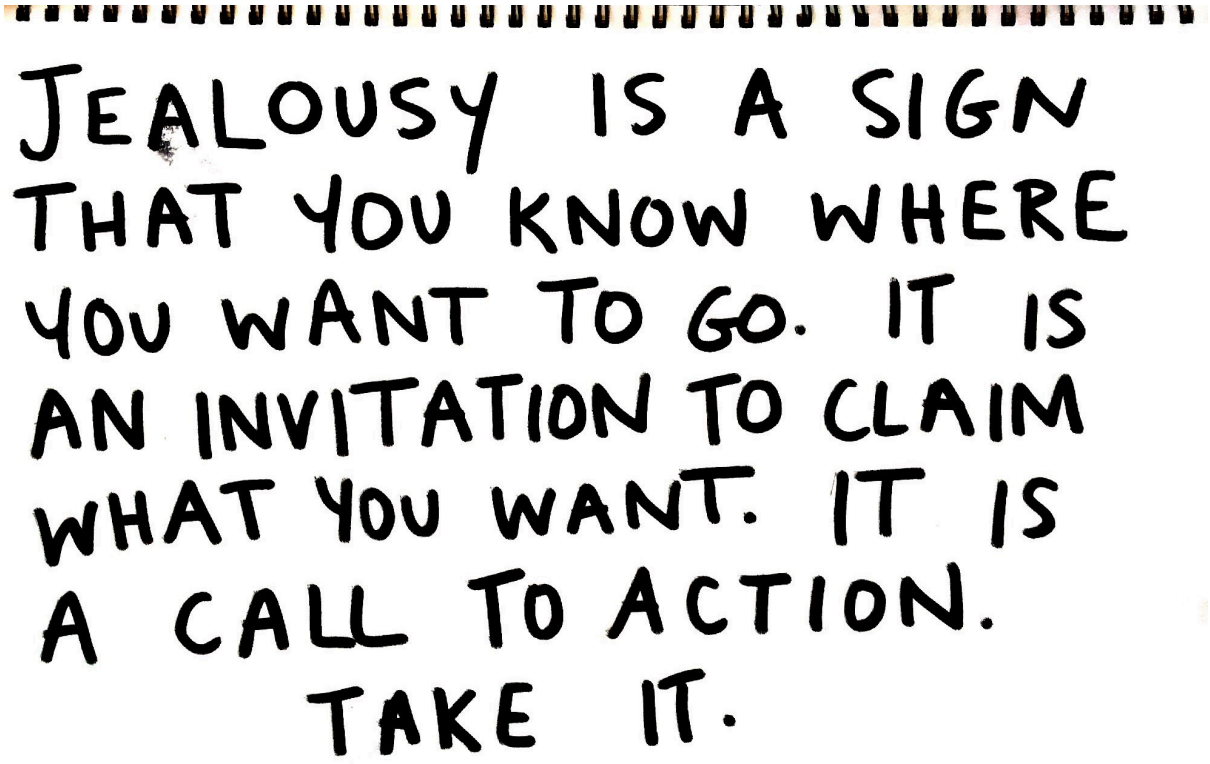
you and your art? Why is this? Why is what others may think so important to you?

- Does expressing yourself more fully & creating art the art you want make you feel uncomfortable? Why is that? How can you encourage yourself to feel more comfortable about it?
- When you create do you often worry about others not understanding your work or taking it the wrong way? Why do you feel that they won't understand your work? How does this need to get others to understand your work impact your art & creative process?
- Do you feel like you don't have everything you need to start creating your art or to continue creating it? Why is this? How can you begin to help yourself to create art when you don't have all the answers or everything together?
- When have you felt like you had to create or do something perfectly in the past? What happened and how did it make you feel?
- If you didn't have to create it perfectly what would you create?
- How can you give yourself approval and encouragement and support right now?
- What expectations & standards do you hold yourself to when it comes to your art & creativity? Why do you have these expectations & standards for yourself & your art? Are they realistic? Where did they come from?
- How can you begin to express yourself more freely in your art?
- Do you find it difficult to slow down, take breaks, and rest? Why? How can you begin cultivating more self care & rest into your work and life?
- Despite working long hours, do you often find your projects incomplete and

your to-do list overflowing? Do you often feel like you didn't get enough done? Why is that?

- How can you add some fun and play into your creative practice?
- How can you make creating your art a little more calm, easeful, and enjoyable?

Chapter Seven: Comparison induced perfectionism.



Comparison triggering perfectionism.

I think a lot of us can be trotting along nicely, making, creating, even giving ourselves permission to be a bit scrappy, to write bad first drafts, to make mistakes — and then we witness someone else's art. Comparison is one of the biggest triggers for perfectionism, and can send us into a tail spin.

I want this chapter to look at what is happening when we compare our art. I want to look at the stories that erupt from seemingly nowhere when we become jealous. I want to investigate how we can alter our narratives about being an artist amongst other artists, and thrive as a community of creatives all making our imperfect things.

But first, I want to acknowledge just how hard it is to witness someone's art and to feel like it is 'better' than yours. As always, I do not want to suppress or invalidate emotion. It can be painful feeling like you pale in comparison to 'them'. I see you. I see that pain. This chapter is not about invalidating the feelings. This chapter is about making sure that comparison induced perfectionism isn't keeping you back from the life you are made for. This chapter is about finally understanding how unique you are, and how powerful that makes you.

We are not accountants.

Well, you might be, but we are talking about you as an artist. Creatives need to break the narrative that we are actually in competition with one another. You do not need to be perfect or make perfect art in order to fix your issues with comparison, because your art is incomparable. You are not doing what they are doing. We are not accountants, all doing the same work, easily comparable because there are right and

wrong answers. You are making art. And that means you are creating art that is important because it is irreplaceable and entirely unique. You need to start focusing on how you can infuse your art with your own unique magic, rather than how you can be 'better' or 'comparable' to artists you admire. You need to start recognising how powerful your art is, because nobody does what you do. And I can basically hear your inner critic talking to me right now: I know their art is similar to yours, perhaps you're both potting coffee mugs, and more people buy their mugs, therefore they're 'better' than you, and there's something wrong with your mugs and you need to be MORE PERFECT.

But perfectionism isn't the answer. Leaning back into our perfectionist stories will not help you be like them. It will make you feel more and more less than. If you lean back into perfectionism, you are giving airtime to stories that at their core insist that you will never be enough. Instead, you need to believe that you have something to give that other artists cannot give. You need to honour your uniqueness. You need to honour what you have been called to do, and it isn't what they are doing, and it isn't being perfect. Yes, you might like to relook at how you're marketing, what's working with your patrons, what they like, what they don't like. You might want to make some changes. As a creative you always need to be adapting, learning, growing — but you do not need to demand infallibility of yourself, and you do not need to be like them. You need to be like you.

How to be like you.

I think the statement 'be yourself', is a far larger statement than it initially appears.

What is being yourself? What is your magic? What is your mess? How can we discover what makes us unique? A side effect of being a perfectionist is that we have spent most of our lives monitoring and gathering information about who the world wants us to be. How can we show up 'perfectly' when the parameters of perfection have been decided by the external world? Perfectionism means that we are trying to be someone who the world wants, which means we have spent an awful lot of time ignoring who we actually are. A massive part of changing the narratives of perfectionism is recognising and discovering your magic, mess, and brilliance *right now*. Self acceptance, understanding the self, recognising where you're brilliant, where you're shitty and accepting it all — this is one of the most important weapons we wield against perfectionism.

But how do you get there? When you've spent so long demonising your bad qualities, and cultivating 'good qualities' under the strict guidelines of the external world? It's time to start witnessing yourself. Just as you notice the narratives of perfectionism, you need to start witnessing **you**. We are going to unpack this below.

Reflection:

Exploring, witnessing, noticing — You.

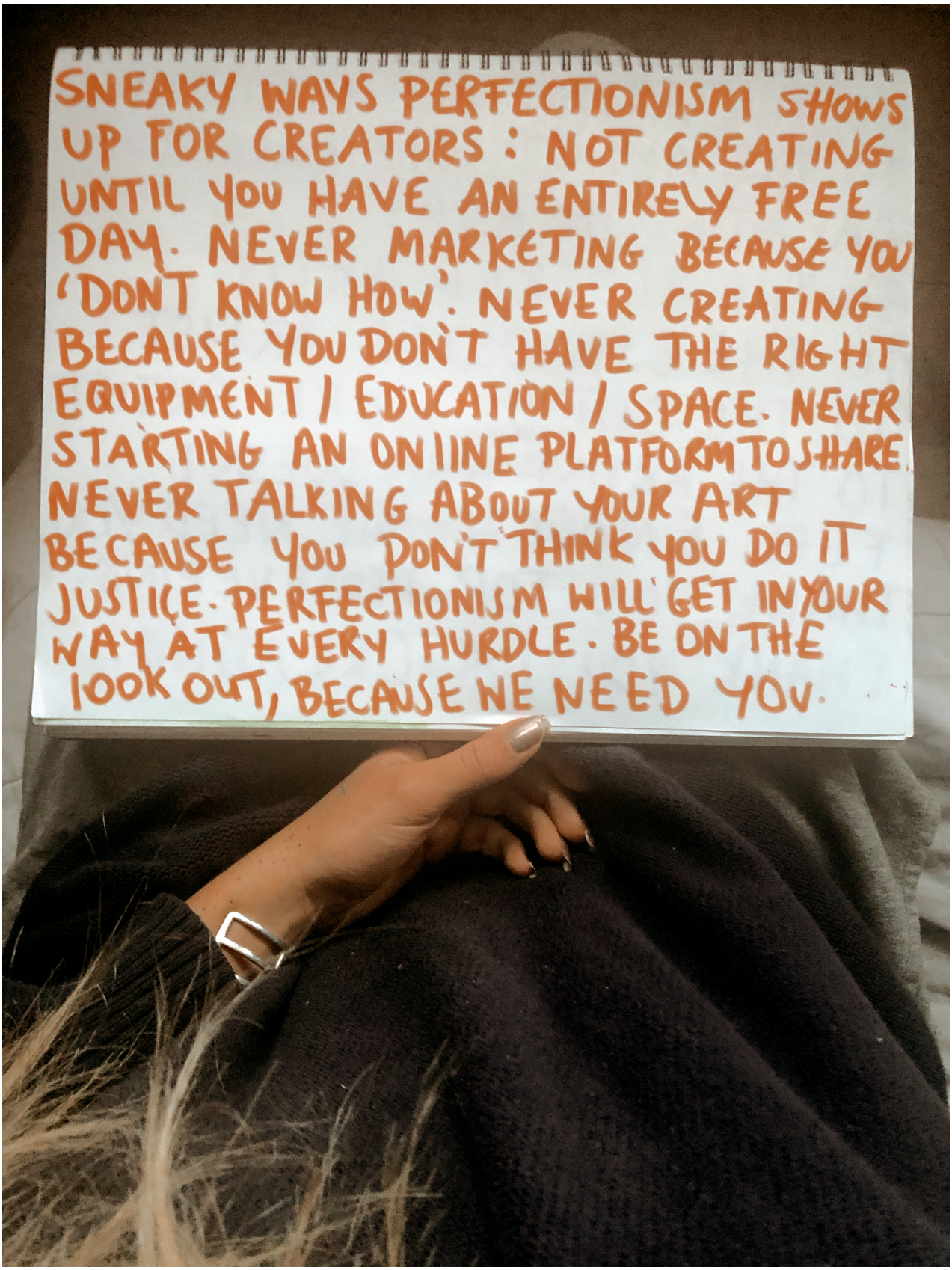
- List, describe, mull over the things that you feel make you, you. This could be character traits, books you like to read, ways you like to self soothe. How you are in relationships? How do you choose to create? What do you value, what do you dislike? What are your dreams, your fears, your quirks?
- Is there someone in your life you feel very yourself with? Why is that? What

does that look like? Can you use this relationship to dive deeper into witnessing yourself? Conversely, is there a relationship you have where you do not feel yourself? What parts of you don't feel in alignment? What parts of you do you feel you have to ignore? Detail them. Investigate.

- When you look at the things you create what part of it is totally unique to you? For example. Within my own fiction writing, I have a way of writing internal dialogue that is unique, some people might do it similarly, but there is an indescribable way I do it that feels unique.
- Can you recognise a part of your creative practice, or a part of your personality that you feel has developed because of your perfectionism. For example, my reputation for being a 'really hard worker' is something I developed because I thought that in order to be a worthy artist, I had to work ridiculously hard to the point of burning out. Even though I cannot be sure, I speculate that the 'hard working' part of my personality is here because of learnt perfectionism, not because it is inherently who I am. Conversely, the way that I love to stop, breath in the air, dig my bare feet into the ground and be present in the moment feels very in alignment with who I am. Can you see what I am doing here? I am getting you to recognise how perfectionism has formed your perception of self. This will likely be hard, and can make you feel like you have an unsteady sense of self, so go easy on yourself.
- Can you honour a creative that you like? That perhaps you are jealous of? And recognise their brilliance whilst also honouring yourself? For example, I honour Elizabeth Gilbert, author of creativity book, Big Magic. She does

similar work to me. She is world famous, incredibly talented, successful and connects with millions of creatives. As I write this - I feel the stir of the little green eyed monster. But simultaneously, I know that Liz cannot be like me. I know I have something to offer that she cannot. I recognise that my mess does not make me ‘worse’ than her. I know that I am not perfect, and nor is she. There is space for both of us. I do not need to be perfect to be comparable to her. Have a go at this exercise. Notice the emotions that come up.

Chapter Eight: Sneaky Perfectionism.



This chapter is here to ensure that we are covering all the ways in which perfectionism can sneak up on you in your creative process.

We've touched on this subject in the first chapter, but we are going to dive into perfectionism within the whole creative process. Because creativity isn't just about the first draft, it isn't just about the actual making. Perfectionism shows up in a lot of different ways within our journey as artists (and as human beings.) Let's make sure we are aware of it. Perfectionism is so driven into our narratives, our culture, our way of being that it can be hard to identify it in all aspects of our life.

Perfectionism in our creative schedule.

My perfectionism flares when it comes to organising my day. For years and years of my creative life I did not like to write my books unless I had nothing else on that day. Literarily, if I had to go to the gym or if I had a thirty minute phone call I would say shit like 'I don't have enough time to focus' or 'Now that I've been interrupted, I might as well stop'. I was obsessed with the perfect free day, perfect for writing. Oh baby did I waste time with this bullshit. I was playing myself. I was enchanted by the idea of a full day of continuous writing. I was overwhelmed by the pressure of having to squeeze creativity in. I wanted my creative schedule to be perfect.

Here are all the ways perfectionism in my scheduling fucked me over:

- My perfectionism stopped me from recognising the fact that, in reality, I actually hated to create for a full day straight. When I did have a full day to create, I would panic with the pressure, procrastinate, and get very angry at

myself.

- Perfectionism stopped me from recognising that I could get as much writing done in a thirty minute block, as I would when I had twelve hours to write.
- I was idolising an image of being a full time writer by having the full day off, instead of honouring where I was at now.
- I was self-sabotaging. It was the perfect excuse to avoid doing work that scared me. Perfectionism convinced me that wanting a full free day to write was perfectly reasonable, but in reality I was using it to avoid doing work that scared me.

Watch yourself when you start getting really pernickety about the scheduling of your creativity. Don't get me wrong, it's important to respect your creative time. Having boundaries around your time and space are important. You might get in the habit of asking your kids to entertain themselves for thirty minutes, or you might need the kitchen to yourself. You are allowed to demand space and time for your creativity. And. You. Should. But are your requirements getting in your way? Are they unreachable or rarely achievable? Are you able to create consistently with the standards you have in place? If the answer to any of these questions is no, it's time to ask whether perfectionism has infiltrated your creative scheduling.

Your schedule needs to be there to support your art. It needs to be there to allow you space to create freely and frequently. You need to ask why you are so wedded to schedules that prohibit free and consistent creativity? The answer for me was that I was using my 'I need a full day to create' as an excuse. I wasn't just afraid of doing

imperfect work — I was afraid to admit that I wasn't further along. Part of me liked the excuse that I hadn't had time to create. My perfectionism was giving me an excuse for how long I was taking, for how difficult I was finding it. It validated the ways I was letting myself down. These excuses soothed me. These excuses sabotaged me.

Reflection:

- What is your ideal day of creating? Explore this guilt free; we need permission to desire.
- Is this ideal day something you wait for in order to create?
- Assess the rules surrounding your schedule. Do you like to only create in the mornings for example? Do you like to have a certain amount of time? Are you specific about your space? Sound? Who is there? Who isn't there? Don't judge any of your requirements, a lot of these may be beneficial, magical practises. You just want to start getting curious as to whether any of these requirements are not requirements at all, but self sabotaging perfectionism in disguise.
- Are you able to validate your ideal day of creating while simultaneously acknowledging that it cannot look like this right now? For example, can you give yourself space to acknowledge your desire to have a large quiet studio to paint in, with no muggle job to distract you, and simultaneously respect the fact that the only way you can paint right now is if you do it in the kitchen after work for thirty minutes? It is important to validate your desires, but not let our desires stop us from creating. Detail any resistance, I know it can be frustrating. You're allowed to feel annoyed and frustrated.

Perfectionism on social media.

We live in the connection economy: sharing our journey and sharing our artistic process is easy with the internet. We do not need to be 'someone' to share our story. In my opinion, getting to see the artist behind the art — getting to witness the artist's creative journey — is an incredible way to connect with people and to be SEEN as the artist you are. But perfectionism and showing up on social media often come hand in hand. Perfectionism doesn't just stop us from making art, it stops us from showing up as artists, sharing the journey, and creating a presence.

Ironically, I also believe that social media is a really good method of coming face to face with your perfectionism each day, and beating it. We can work on our perfectionism post by post, rather than dealing with it during one big elongated art project.

Now don't get me wrong, I know that showing up on socials is a dicey game. I live this life. Fretting over what to share, how to share it, how to keep your Instagram grid neat, how to make sure you're perceived 'correctly', how to speak to the camera, show your face, be authentic, share the journey. Honestly, it's a lot. There's a lot of pressure, and with pressure comes resistance, and with resistance, we see perfectionism. I know a lot of creatives whose perfectionism is a lot stronger when it comes to their social presence in comparison to their art. So, as always let's take this slowly. I'm not asking you to do anything, let's just examine how we can work with this.

Reflection:

- Do you want to / do you enjoy having a social media presence as a creative?
- If the answer is no, or complicated. Unpack that, why not? What about it makes you uncomfortable? You're allowed to not want one, but we want to make sure the reason is in alignment with you, and it's not perfectionism and fear in disguise.
- Are you controlling what you choose to share? Do you often make restrictions about what you are "allowed" to share? This is not a bad thing. We need to control what we share. But are you getting stuck and staying quiet because of your arbitrary standards of what is 'shareable'?
- Do you wish you could share your journey like someone else? Do you have an artist that shares on socials that you love? Why can't you share in a similar way? Listen to that excuse and write it down. Is it true? Is it perfectionism? Is it high standards? You can show up like they show up. Witness the way you're getting in your way.
- Do you have perfectionism around how many likes you should get, how many followers you should get, interaction stats etc? Does this perfectionism hold you back from showing up consistently? Do you, to just share without expectation? How do you think you could make this happen? If I feel my perfectionism rearing its head with the amount of growth or interaction I am getting on my socials, I choose to actively put my phone away. I turn off my phone notifications. I step away. I need the space. Otherwise, my perfectionism will lead to obsession.

- Does your opinion of your work change from being pleased with your creation before you post it but disappointed when It doesn't "do well". Notice that. Notice how external validation can totally change your perception of your art and sharing. I personally have a practice where I witness the post I have made before I share it, I say. *"I am content with this. I give it to the world to do what she is meant to do."* Then if it doesn't "perform well", I take myself back to the moment where I was content with it, and I was happy to surrender it to the world.

Perfectionism in the marketing, launching and selling of our art.

Ah this one is a real kick in the dick. Just when we finally allow our beautiful not quite perfect art out into the world — just as we do the truly brave thing — now our perfectionism rears its head again in the launching and marketing of our art. Selling our art, business, or selves is an extremely vulnerable thing to do. Not only did we just have to bare the weight of vulnerably creating something with our heart and soul, now we have to tell people that it's good and that they want it.

So many creatives hide away at this part of the journey. They've done the making, now they want to tap out. Perfectionism and fear take the wheel, excuses start flowing:

- I can't launch until: it's a certain time of year / I know more about my market / I have enough money to afford more marketing.
- I will spend weeks and weeks creating and recreating ads, and never be happy with them.

- I will avoid showing my face, showing my product, telling people about my art because I can't "do it justice" / nobody will understand it / nobody will see it anyway.

There are a lot of ways perfectionism can kick into high gear on the other side of finishing a project. And it's just as, if not more, important to make sure you're allowing yourself permission to make messy mistakes. *Putting your art out there requires mistakes. There is no such thing as the perfect launch.* You need the flexibility and compassion to alter course; to try something else out; to play and learn; to be brave with that strange marketing technique that really might not work out, but might just be brilliant.

Launching your art into the world is scary as fuck, and the prospect of it being unseen or ignored is terrifying. The idea of the world being quiet after you gave something your whole heart is nauseating. I understand why you want to get this perfect: the stakes are high. But, the truth is, you just might fail. You might tell everyone that your etsy shop is open and nothing might happen. The beautiful thing is, if you let yourself be messy — if you let yourself fail — you give yourself so many more chances at success. Perfectionists tell me that they launched their book, no one bought it and so they failed. This rigid perfectionist mind frame sends your art to an early grave. Because your beautiful book baby isn't anywhere near dead. It's just time to reevaluate. It's time to try something new. A new platform to launch, a new marketing campaign, new new new, risky risky risky, no chance of perfection.

Perfectionism has no place in the selling of your art. A beautiful messy, flexible, dogged, highly creative approach is a must.

Reflection:

- How do you feel about marketing, or selling your art? What's your emotional experience with it? Or if you've not gotten there yet, what're your preconceived ideas?
- What standards, or rules do you have around your marketing / how you put your art out in the world? Do you have rules that you don't even realise you follow? I am not insinuating that these rules are unhelpful, you simply need to notice how you approach this element of your creativity.
- Is there another creator whose marketing or 'post production' process you envy? Or respect? Would you ever do it like them? Why? Why not?
- What part of selling scares the shit out of you? Are you prepared to try and get it wrong?
- Are you prepared to try different things, having things not work? Does the idea that you can fail and try again liberate you? Or terrify you? Why? Explore this.
- How does the concept of failure make you feel? Determined? Defeated? How does getting up and trying again after failing feel to you? All answers are holy and true to you. They don't need judging.

Perfectionism in the way you've planned out your creative journey.

God damn she turns up in every nook and cranny of our lives doesn't she? Yet again, I have an intimate acquaintance with this special brand of perfectionism.

Planning out your creative journey is fun. Goal making, vision boarding, and ten-year-plans give us such a huge endorphin hit that people actually get addicted to the practice of goal making. Personally, I had planned out my creative career. It was all there, I knew the way I wanted it to go. I saw it all, the moment the publisher rang to give me the news. I even knew what they would say to me. I would cry, with gratitude and relief. Then my books would publish, I would move to the UK, because that's where they will sell best. Bla bla bla.

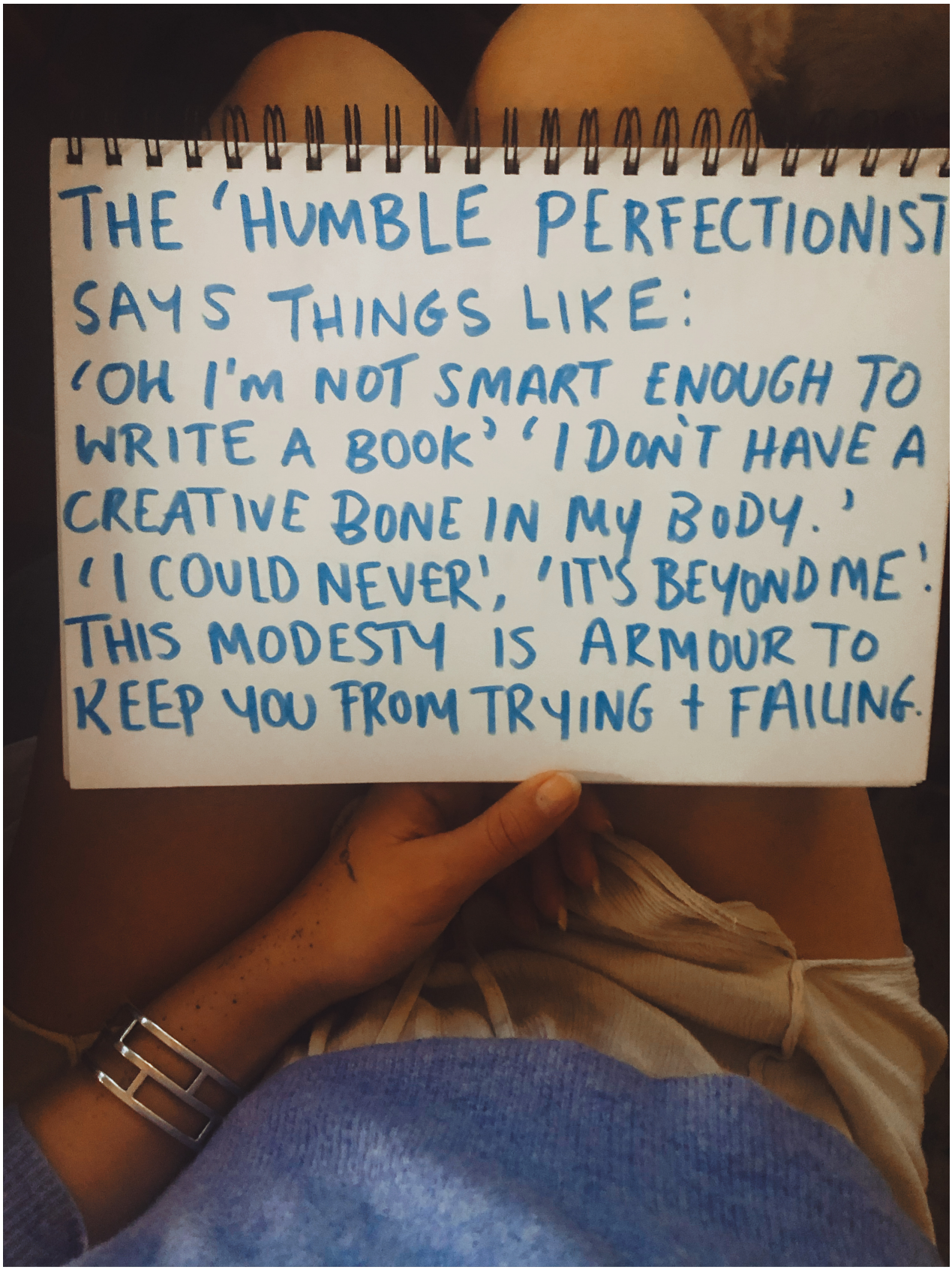
Perfectionism created rigidity for me and my creative journey and I was unable to deviate from my planned perfect path. To my deep, deep detriment. I stood in my own way for so long, committed to the story I told in my head about how this was going to play out. Publishing my work myself was not in my perfect plan. Writing about creativity was not in my perfect plan. And I did not want to deviate. Deviating from my initial perfect plan felt like admitting defeat. This wasn't how it was meant to go! But it was only by allowing myself to break up with my long held plans that creative abundance seeped into my life.

Your creative journey might not look exactly like you planned it. That is not to say you shouldn't have goals, or dreams, or vision boards! Do it! Relish in it. Fuck it's a joy to dream and to want. I validate all your big dreams, may they come true. But I also want you to be aware of how perfectionism is getting in your way here. Be on the lookout for alternate routes, opportunities that are gifted to you that look a little different, risky, messy — consider them, let them in, play around with where you're going. It could be more wild and wonderful than you've ever imagined.

Reflection:

- What are your goals and dreams? Validate all your desires. This conversation is NOT intended to make you feel like you can't dream and want, feel free to detail all your desires. We need to know what we want, in order to get what we want.
- Are you rigid with these goals? Is there wiggle room? Can you see some alternate routes? Discuss, or write down some potential alternate routes for your creative journey. Notice your reactions to this. Is it something you struggle with?
- What is a route you really *don't* want to go down? Eg. self publishing / selling online / going a more traditional route / doing work for free / doing different art all together. Is there room to question **why** you don't want to do this? Is having a hard boundary on these potential creative routes a form of perfectionism? Are you potentially getting in your way?
- I want to remind you and affirm you: being an artist isn't easy, I am in awe of you for choosing to follow your calling.

Chapter Nine: The Humble Perfectionist.



It's not: "I try to be perfect" it's: "I could never be perfect so I don't try".

Perfectionism under the guise of humility is, in actual fact, martyrdom and it is crap. This chapter is going to dive into the perfectionism that stops us from even trying. The perfectionism that causes us to completely sacrifice our calling in the name of humility and modesty. This chapter is here as a wake up call.

Nearly all of us have at one point in our life witnessed another artist talking about or sharing their art, and we've responded with, "Oh I could never do something like that!" Though it's harmless in the moment, and is often used to flatter another creative, this way of thinking can sink into our being, and become a way to completely opt out of creating. This is the humble perfectionist, they never try to do their art, "because they could never".

The humble perfectionist often says things like this:

- "I am not smart enough to write a book."
- "I'm not creative enough to do X."
- "You should've seen me in art class * self-deprecating laugh*"
- "I didn't finish school so…"
- "I didn't even go to university so I couldn't…"
- "I'm not co-ordinated enough."
- "I could never!"
- "I'm a maths and science person."
- "I don't have an artistic bone in my body."
- "My sister got all the creative genes."

- “I’m too logical.”
- “I’ll leave that to you.”
- “I don’t know how you do it.”
- “It’s beyond me.”

This sort of perfectionism is often born from a genuine belief that you cannot create. It comes from a binary way of thinking that says, ‘they are perfect, and you are not’. There is an ingrained narrative, inherited from parents, or school, or a figure of authority that you just couldn’t ever possibly be a creative. If you recognise yourself in any of these comments, I want you to take a deep breath — you’re here reading this book. You’re being called to create. And there is no arguing with that. You are made to create. You are made to create. It is time to create.

This sort of humility and humbleness is protection. It is fear in disguise. All of this modesty is armour to keep you from trying and failing. It works really well, and it is clunky to take off. You are sacrificing your creative potential in the name of looking unassuming and modest. This is self betrayal and martyrdom. You deserve so much more. This way of hiding is so damaging to your inner child, who is so creative, who has so much to make. But, you keep telling them that they are not good enough. It is big work deconstructing these stories, but it is the most important work you will do.

Before we begin the reflection, I want to remind you that in those moments where you use humility to protect you from the possibility of being imperfect, you are not being a good person. It doesn’t make you virtuous to be self-deprecating. The bravery needed to make the art calling your name is true humility, the ability to be vulnerable

and be bad at something is being deeply humble. Learning, starting from scratch, having to be at the beginning is really humbling, and it where all artists must begin. You're not too old to start. You're not too broken to learn. You are not too **insert that thing you're thinking of right now** to be an incredible and successful creative. You are enough. You are imperfect and still - very enough.

Reflection:

How can we deconstruct these stories? How can we repair our relationship with our inner child after using these excuses and engaging in this sort of perfectionist martyrdom?

Let's start by asking some questions:

- Once again, we are going to look at the roots: can we understand how we came here? Has anyone in your life told you, or insinuated that you aren't good enough, that you don't have enough education, that you're not a 'creative type?'.
- Where did you learn this language of 'humility'? It doesn't have to be one individual it could be learned from watching tv, watching your parents' social circle, just by observing the culture. It could also be a big ass combination of all these things. By identifying where you think this behaviour and rhetoric might have originated from, you will begin to understand that this belief, this form of protection isn't inherently you. It is learnt behaviour, that is here to 'keep you safe'.
- Is it really keeping you safe? Or is doing more harm than good?

- How do you think this self-deprecating, ‘humble’ language has affected you over time? Do you recognise it as self deprecating? Or are you committed to it being inoffensive and modest?
- Is this language and narrative keeping you from being seen?
- Are you afraid to take up space?
- Do you like being the centre of a conversation? Why? Why not?
- Who do you put on a pedestal? Why? Is it useful having them up there?
- Why is it so hard to believe that you have so much to give?

Saving time / optimising time / ‘not wasting’ time Perfectionism.

For a lot of us, perfectionism is excused and validated by saying that you are ‘optimising time’, ‘saving time’, or ‘avoiding wasting time’. We convince ourselves that our perfectionism serves us and gives us more time to make good art. This is yet another way we let perfectionism fly under the radar, but it is the *perfect* way to waste all your precious, un-promised time.

I’m going to list a few of the narratives we love to tell ourselves:

- By researching for a year, I am saving time in the long run because I won’t have to go back and fix mistakes.
- I’m going to wait until I can afford the really good paints. Painting with my shit paints will be a waste of time.
- I am going to wait until my children are older, it would be unproductive trying to create while they are little.
- I might as well wait until I get a new laptop because what will happen if I try to

transfer my story over and I lose it!

- I want to wait until I get a study, because I won't be productive creating in the kitchen. Everything I write will be a waste since the quality will be lower.
- I want to wait until I have a whole day to create, because I won't be productive creating for thirty minutes at a time.
- If I haven't started by 11 am then what's the point! A waste of a day! I'll make up for it, and then some, next week by starting at 9 sharp.

Do you recognise yourself in any of these? Perfectionism is a time waster, even as she parades as a time saver. I know this sentence can be a real fucker, but… you've been wasting loads of time. That is not an invitation to beat yourself up. This isn't a time to be angry, this is a time to get excited. Because the reality is that the time is -now-

You needed those lessons, nothing that has happened is to be regretted, but now is the time to start realising how much you have to give, and all the time you have to give it.

Reflection:

• Do you have a belief that your high standards around creating saves time?

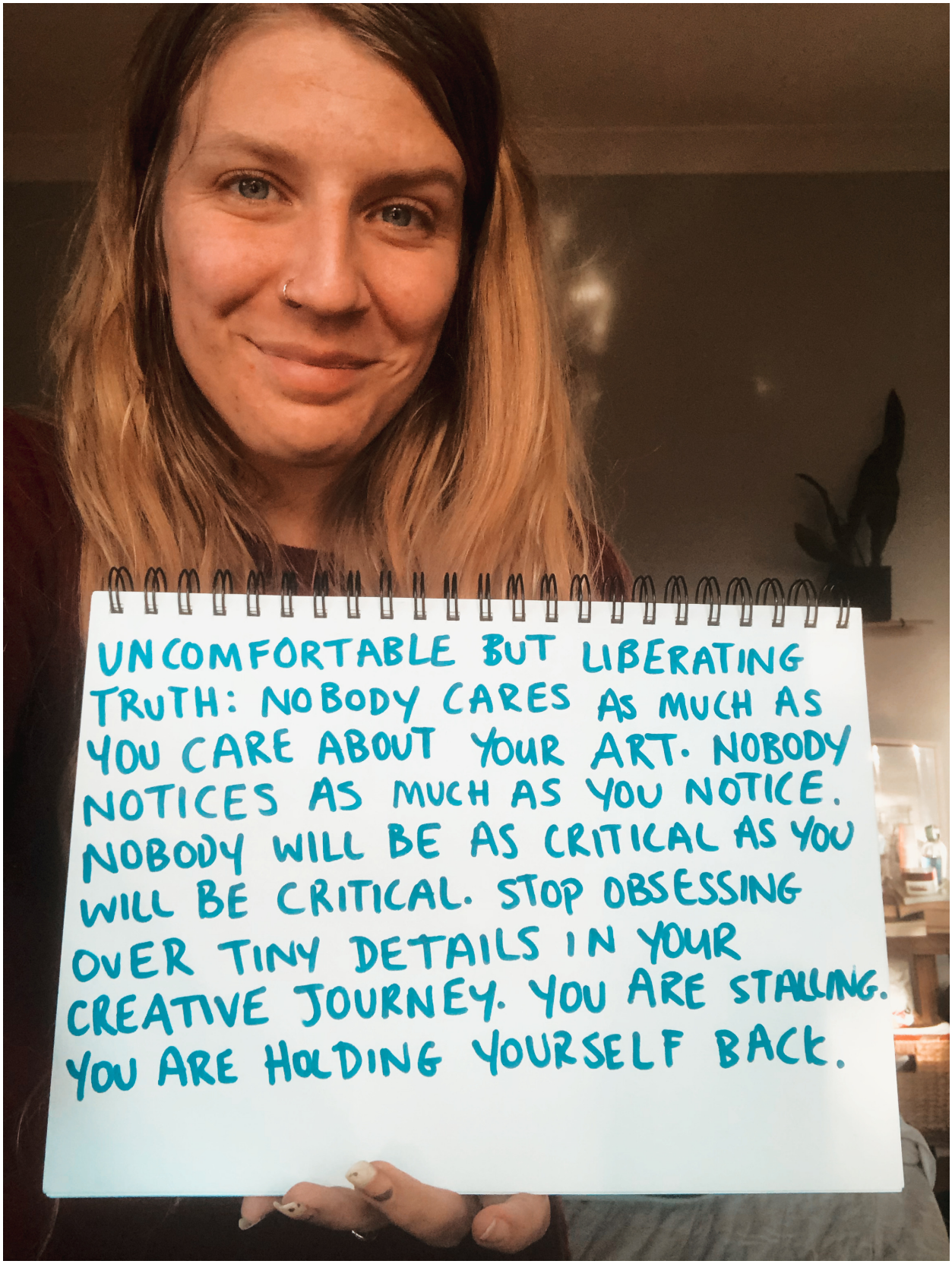
• Do you have any habits around 'saving time' with your art? Do they serve you? If yes, how do they serve you? If no, can you see why you felt that they might have? Can you understand the story you told yourself around it?

• Do you panic at the idea of 'lost time'?

• If you find yourself feeling stressed about the concept of having wasted time, I

want you to try to talk or write to yourself gently and calmly about extending compassion in this moment. None of this has been about blame or anger at yourself.

Chapter Ten: No one cares as much as you.



This is a wonderfully brutal chapter. It is meant to liberate you. But it might wound your ego a little first. Before we begin: Ego, you're precious. I love you and we need you. I understand that this is difficult and that you are being required to let things go. You are safe. We are not angry at you. We are just making some alterations.

Okay here we go.

Nobody cares about your art as much as you care.

Nor does anybody notice as much as you notice, critique quite like you critique, or invest energy like you invest energy. I have personally experienced and witnessed full creative break downs over things that literarily nobody would give a fuck about other than you. This is when our perfectionism just takes over and we have no perspective. We are so obsessed with proving that we are enough, that we lose sight of what actually makes an impact. We lose sight of what actually matters. We overthink and obsess over strange minutiae that only we would notice, when in reality, nobody cares, nobody will notice and you are wasting energy and time on something insignificant. All we are doing is exhausting ourselves, depleting our creative magic, and re-affirming the story that we are not enough.

Here are some examples of when our perfectionism causes us to lose sight of what is important:

- When you are coming back to sharing your art on socials after a long break and you feel the need to apologise for your absence. You do not need to excuse yourself, or apologise. You don't owe anyone shit. Also, people weren't

waiting for you. Not really. They might've missed your presence a little, but I promise you nobody was consumed with concern. You don't owe anyone an explanation. You don't owe anyone anything.

- Having to move the release date of your project. There is nothing shameful about this move. If it serves you and your art, do it. Notice if you are spending hours considering what 'people will think of you' because you've had to change the date. They care when they receive the art but their life doesn't change when you elongate the time they don't have it. Let it be. It's okay. You are not perfect. You're allowed an extension.
- Obsessing and changing character names in novels. I've witnessed authors spending weeks and weeks labouring over names of characters. This is a waste of time. Same goes for other small character details that you find yourself repeatedly changing: outfits, physical traits, obscure backstory. This is all important, yes. But notice when your perfectionism is taking over and you're losing perspective on what is truly important.
- Fonts on your website. Again, all of this matters to a degree. Give it some consideration. But are you the sort of person who will be sidelined by details like this? When no one else will ever even consider it? When it doesn't impact sales, connection, or your actual art?
- Feeling your art is too 'similar' to someone else's art. It can be alarming when you discover that your art looks, feels, sounds similar to someone else's art, but I have coached creatives who have completely and utterly given up fully formed creative projects because the thought of it being too like someone else's

creation just rocked them entirely. No one cares as much as you care that your art might be similar to someone else's art.

- An artist recently gave me five different versions of a single piece of art. She said she had redone it five times because they felt that each one wasn't quite right. For the life of me, I could not have told you which one was which. I couldn't even tell the evolution between one and five. They all had minute changes within them.

That isn't to say you shouldn't challenge yourself and ask yourself to do better and be better. But are you able to start noticing when the changes you are making are so tiny that nobody in god's earth could tell the difference? Can you draw a line in the sand when it turns from 'making improvements' to 'obsessing'. It's not easy to tell when that line appears. It might be a good idea to get some outside input. To paraphrase the author Hank Green: get your work to where you think it is 80% finished, leave the 20%. I don't mean leave your book before the climax, I'm talking about those twelfth and thirteenth drafts. Chances are, you're just going to make inane and unnoticeable alterations that are fueling your perfectionism, and playing into your ideas that you'll never be enough. Leaving your work when it is 80% done is not an easy feat for a perfectionist. You might want to practice it with art that you're not entirely invested in. Stop and show someone your creation before you've done all that last minute fiddling that you're so very good at.

Reflection:

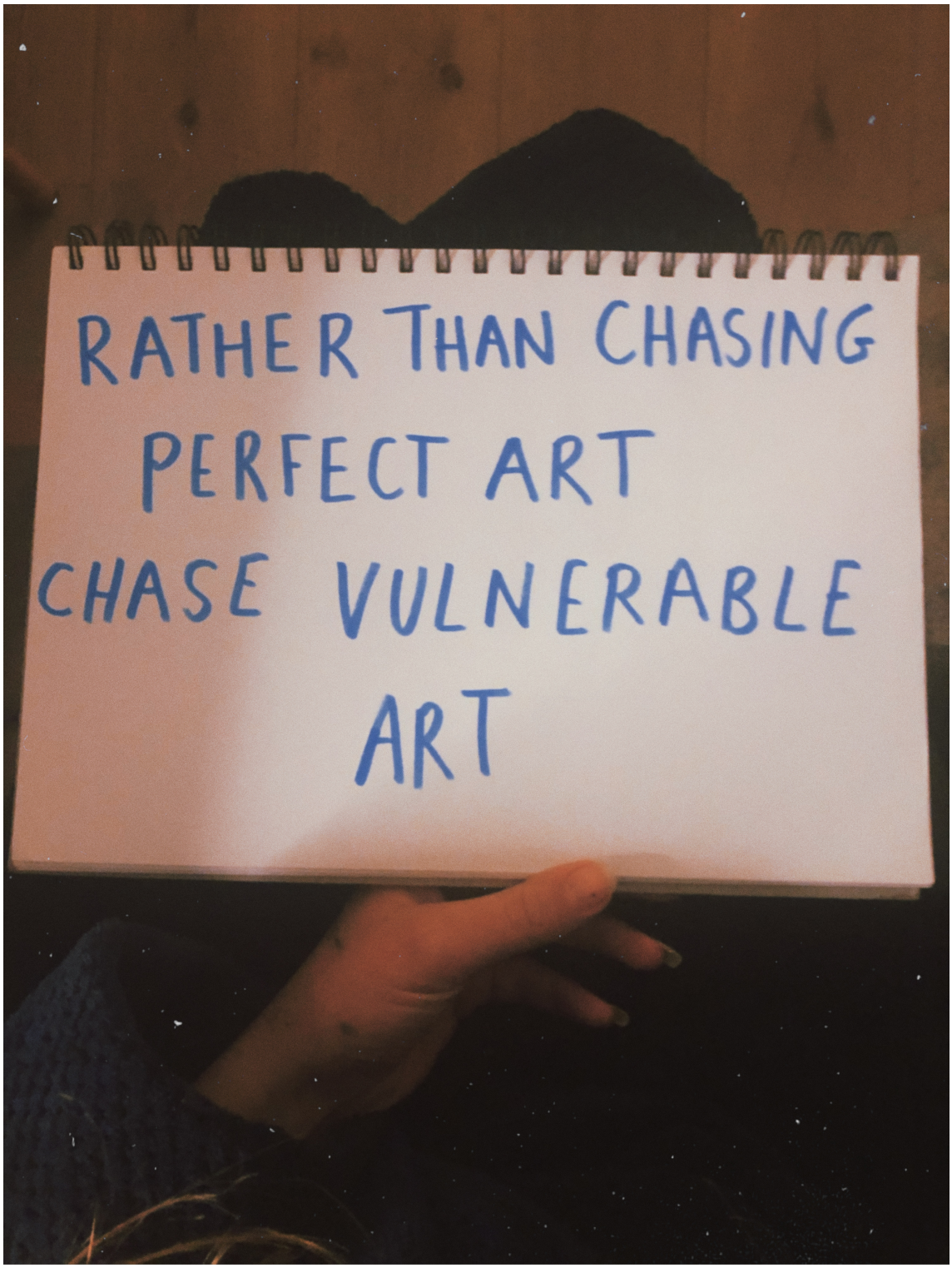
- Do you recognise when you are obsessing over issues with your art that perhaps not that noticeable to the outside world? It's okay if you're not entirely

sure, write about that.

- If you think you do this, can you name some occurrences? If you're not sure, look at a circumstance in which you obsessively edited your art, or the marketing surrounding your art.
- What was happening here? Can you identify the fear? Or were you convinced that these matters were important to your artistic integrity? If you feel defensive, that is okay. Just notice it.
- Have you ever left something at the 80% mark? If you did, how did it feel? Did you share it at the 80% mark?
- Does this reflection feel scary? Am I taking away an element of control?
- What does control have to do with your art?
- How do you see control pop up in your creative practise?
- What do you think the consequences would be if you left your art at 80%?
- What narratives are occurring when you imagine releasing or selling your art at the 80% perfect mark?
- Write them down, look at them.
- *Eg: It would be a load of shit, I would harass myself, and obsess over the things that are not finished. Everyone would notice. I would feel deeply embarrassed.*
- Simultaneously, are you able to see that these thoughts are not entirely of service to you? Can you unpack that? Could you use a soothing and mothering voice to talk to the part of you that is afraid?
- *Eg. I understand that you believe it would be shitty. Are you sure that we are*

the best person to make that judgement? Because we are incredibly harsh on ourselves.

Chapter Eleven: It's time to honour your way of doing things.



It is time to honour your own way of doing things.

This is a hard truth to swallow. There is no rulebook for your art. You can pretend there is — and lots of people will tell you that there is a rule book — but there isn't. This is your divine practice, and it is entirely over to you. This is terrifying. Because making up your own rules and listening to your own soul is not something we are taught. We are taught to follow rules, we are taught to listen to other people's deadlines, we are taught to stay in line. But what are the lines for your art? What happens when there are no official deadlines, and the quality of your art is entirely subjective? These blurry lines are fertile ground for perfectionism. You have to make the rules. You have to be your own boss. You have to be the one to make deadlines. You have to be the quality control so you've created a voice inside your head that holds you to account, that requires certain standards. This voice isn't listening to your own internal rhythms. It is an internalisation of all the shitty bosses you've ever had in your life and it doesn't serve you. This voice is an internalisation of hustle culture, of perfectionist culture, of someone else's rules.

So what are your internal rhythms? What are your internal processes?

How do you like to create? How do you create? You may have ignored this truth and buried it deep for so long that you have no idea what the answers are to these questions. You may not know what your rhythms, processes, and desires are. And if you don't know them, you can't even begin to think about honouring them.

I am still investigating, unpacking, and brushing away the layers and layers of other people's expectations of me, to discover how I like to create. I've ignored this

part of myself for so long that my own way of doing things has only recently gotten a chance to develop.

So how can you rediscover your rhythms? How can you discover your creative alignment? It's trial and error. It's noticing how you are currently creating and making and recognising what is working and what isn't. It is the questioning you have been doing throughout this whole book. You must continue to notice when your perfectionism is flaring, and investigate what stories are at play. Only then will you form new stories, new patterns, new practices. It is radical permission giving, allowing yourself to practice your art in ways that might seem strange, or that might require boundaries, or that might get weird looks. It is effort, and discipline - as you commit to **you**.

But what if your life doesn't allow for you to dictate your own rhythms and practices?

What if your job, your kids, your responsibilities, give you only a little amount of time to create? You're fitting your art around your life, and sometimes there just isn't a lot of wiggle room. I honour how difficult this is. It is exhausting to give everything you have to your day to day life, to then find you have only crumbs of energy and morsels of time to give to your creations. I see you. I know this. This is not an excuse to ignore your own preferred processes and your own creative rhythms. In the hour you give yourself on Sundays to paint, there is room to look at how you are approaching your creativity. I want you to consider tempo. Do you like going slowly, do you like pumping out pieces quickly? Would you prefer to experiment with other forms of art.

Consider collaborating, with other creatives, would you prefer to. If you are a writer, do you feel the need to start at the beginning of your project? But would it better serve you to start at the end? Do you need time to plan? Or would you rather make mistakes along the way? Consider how you like to rest, what times of day you prefer to create. None of these things are have a right or wrong answer. This is your process, there is no perfection. You just have to check in, experiment and ask yourself what is serving you? Try something and fail. This is the process of finding your unique rhythm and process.

Reflection:

How do you create? What goals do you set in place? What do your creative sessions look like? What sort of time periods do you create for?

- Take a moment and then consider where these standards come from. Do they reflect a 9-5 work day? Are they goal orientated? Are they holding you to standards you cannot possibly keep?
- Do you know how you like to work? A lot of us don't. Acknowledging that we are not sure how we like to create can be an important step.
- Have you ever experimented with different ways and timings of creating? How did it feel?
- Could you be someone who works slower than 'everyone else'? How would that make you feel? Shitty? Why? What story is that? Why is creating slower, an inherently bad thing?
- What time of day do you work / would you like to work? Take a beat, are these

the times you feel most creatively alive?

- Do you feel like external circumstances dictate and trap you into a way of creating that isn't your natural process? Air out any pain. You are allowed to be angry, or frustrated by this. Get angry. Do not belittle, or minimise this.
- Are some of these external situations actually in your control, could you put up boundaries that would aid you? Are you getting in your own way, because you don't want to make a fuss? You don't want to seem 'selfish'? Do you feel embarrassed taking your art seriously?
- If these things resonate, let's go deeper, why do you feel embarrassed to prioritise your art? Are there inherited stories at work here?
- What feelings and thoughts does the following sentence trigger: 'I am allowed to ask for time to create. I am allowed to put up boundaries to support my creating. I will ask others to change their schedules, so that I may focus on my creativity.' - Notice what's happening here, start unpacking it.

Chapter Twelve: Permission to be wholly you.



My Final love note.

Throughout this book we have investigated and gotten curious about the root causes behind our perfectionism. We have looked at how we mend the damage we have done to the way we relate to ourselves. We have combed over all the ways our perfectionism can infiltrate and manipulate the way we view ourselves and our creations. We have been doing the work. I am so proud of you. In this final chapter, I want to ground yourself in the magic that is you. Right now. In this moment.

I truly believe that the way to vanquish perfectionism is to be in reverence to where we are at now. It is an acknowledgement of the mess, and the magic, now. It is knowing ourselves. And respecting ourselves. Now.

Below are some permission slips that I want you to practise giving yourself.

- I give myself permission to make mistakes during this process.
- I give myself permission to be wholly myself, including when I (insert something you struggle with, or an imperfection you have been trying to 'fix'.)
- I give myself permission to embrace my magic and my mess.
- I allow myself to stop at 80%
- I give myself permission to strive for greatness, but also give myself permission to make many mistakes along the way.
- I give myself permission to LEARN.
- I give myself permission to celebrate work that is imperfect.
- I give myself permission to bask in my own uniqueness.
- I give permission to my inner child to play and be messy.

Following through with these permission slips is important. It is all very well writing out these permission slips, or saying them to yourself, but following through is where the magic will be. Ask yourself how this permission will actually manifest itself in your day. Write down these permission slips before you start a creative session and be very specific about how the permission slip is going to affect your work ethic.
Eg. I give myself permission to make mistakes during this process. This means that every time I make a ‘mistake’ or do something I don’t like in my art, I am going to take three breaths, and leave it there to deal with later. I will not correct mistakes immediately. I will also write down all the thoughts I have around said ‘mistake’, so that I can learn to witness my perfectionist thought patterns. I will then use mothering language towards my inner child to soothe myself and remind myself that I am being brave and I am on the right track.

Changing patterns takes discipline and practise. Healing wounds and changing your stories takes time and commitment. Have a plan my darlings, and catch yourself when you want to avoid the work.
Also, I want to remind you yet again, don’t be a perfectionist about your perfectionist recovery :)

This will be messy. How wonderful is that? Lean into it, let yourself struggle, let yourself fuck up, let your perfectionism flare up, catch it and get ahead of it again.

I accept you fully as you are now. I see you and love you wholly as you are right now, with all the imperfections and mess.

In reverence of you, creator.

Amie.

About our Guest Author

Talise is a creativity coach, a nationally published award-winning writer, and a multi-passionate creative. She currently works as a coach for artists & creatives, helping them to reconnect with their creativity, make their art, and live the creative life of their dreams. When she's not working with her creative clients you can most likely find her sharing her creative content and journey online, snuggled up reading a good book, or working on her debut high fantasy novel. To learn more about her, her coaching services, and her free content, head over to her IG account, @writerambles.

Acknowledgements

To my husband, Jimmy. Who embraces all my mess, laughs at it, loves it, wonders at it. Thankyou.

To Talise, who gave us her words. What an honour it is to witness you and to learn from you.

And to every treasured, messy, magic soul who has followed me on this journey, thank you for embracing me and all my imperfections.

A note about sharing For The Perfectionist.

I am so grateful for your patronage and that we can go on this journey together.

You are always welcome to share words from this book, as long as I am credited clearly.

Thank you for respecting and understanding the work that went into creating the this book. I ask you not to steal or pass on my work without paying for it. This is the culmination of years and years of work. Thank you for respecting that and for seeing me.

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