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Erving and Alice and Sky and Elisabeth

I do not ask the wounded person how he feels. . . . I myself become the wounded person.

—Walt Whitman, "Song of Myself"

Erving and Alice

The life of the eminent sociologist Erving Goffman was punctuated by two personal tragedies. In April 1964, when Goffman was forty-one, his wife Sky committed suicide by jumping off the Richmond–San Rafael Bridge into San Francisco Bay. In 1981 he remarried, and the next year his daughter Alice was born. But he lived to see only a few months of her life. Erving Goffman died of stomach cancer in 1982 at the age of sixty.

When I was a young man during the 1970s, Goffman was one of my intellectual heroes. His classic book, *Asylums*, an ethnographic study of mental patients published in 1961, played an important role in the gathering movement that would lead to the closing of large state mental institutions which warehoused people labeled mentally ill. As fieldwork for the book, Goffman spent a year posing as a recreation assistant at St. Elizabeths Hospital in Washington, DC, which housed over seven thousand mental patients. In the preface to *Asylums*, he wrote, "My immediate object . . . was to try to learn about the social world of the hospital inmate, as this world is subjectively experienced by him." More than the sheer brilliance of Goffman's thinking, it was his ability to take the point of view of people stigmatized as dangerous and subhuman, to take seriously their suffering as human beings and articulate the brutality of their treatment, that won my heart so many years ago—and still does.

Now Alice Goffman comes bursting onto the scene with the 2014 publication of *On the Run: Fugitive Life in an American City*, an extraordinary ethnographic study of how young African American men are impacted by the criminal justice system and repressive law enforcement. Based on six years of fieldwork in a poor Black neighborhood

in Philadelphia, which she started when she was in college at the age of twenty, *On the Run* tells the stories of legally compromised African Americans. Pervaded by a wrenching respect for the humanity of these stigmatized and socially discarded young men—some of whom are dead by the end of the book while others sit in prison for extended terms—this narrative presents staggering incarceration statistics. For example, Goffman notes that about 60 percent of Black men who don't graduate from high school do prison time by their mid-thirties. But numbers by themselves don't begin to convey the actual lived experience, what it really means to be a young man whose life is defined by police pursuit and revolving-door imprisonments. As if channeling the gift of the father she never knew, Alice Goffman brings us the vivid realities of hovering helicopters, of doors knocked down by police at three a.m., of six-year-old boys who play at pulling down each other's pants to do cavity searches.

In a *New York Times* piece in 1972, philosopher Marshall Berman called Erving Goffman "the Kafka of our time." Berman linked the two men through their common focus on functionaries—"clerks, salesmen, petty civil servants"—and on the "horror and anguish [and] absurd comedy" of their everyday lives. But I think the connection to Kafka is even clearer in Goffman's observations of how people entered mental institutions and became transformed into mental patients. He described the process of psychiatric hospitalization as "a series of abasements, degradations, humiliations, and profanations of self" that result in the mortification of the person. The mental patient is incarcerated without being charged with a crime and, at the time Goffman wrote *Asylums*, without recourse to a court hearing. "The prepatient starts out with at least a portion of the rights, liberties, and satisfactions of the civilian and ends up on a psychiatric ward stripped of almost everything."

The parallels to Kafka are hard to miss. The loss of liberty without knowing what your crime is, with no effective means of defending yourself; the attacks on dignity and denial of the most basic aspects of personal autonomy; the maligning of character; the assault on sense of self; abrupt loss of social grounding; transformation from person to vermin: These themes leap straight off the pages of *The Trial* and "The Metamorphosis."

If her father was the Kafka of modern sociology, Alice Goffman is the Daughter of Kafka. During the first eighteen months of her fieldwork, she witnessed daily police stop-and-searches; fifty-two instances of police forcibly entering homes; seventeen times when streets were cordoned off as crime scenes; and fourteen times she "watched the police punch, choke, kick, stomp on, or beat young men with their nightsticks." Goffman was sleeping on the couch in a house connected to her research when two white officers in SWAT gear broke down the door in the middle of the night. She reports, "The first officer in pointed a gun at me and asked who was in the house." The second officer slammed Alice facedown on the floor. "I couldn't brace myself," she writes, "because he was still holding one of my wrists, now pinned behind me. . . . His boot pressed into my back." Then a third officer came in and started breaking china and slashing furniture.

Goffman goes on to describe the routine practice of police combing hospitals for patients and visitors with outstanding warrants. The result was that the young Black men she studied would not seek medical treatment, even when badly injured, for fear of being arrested at the emergency room; and when their baby-moms were in the hospital to deliver, these men had to choose between not being present for the birth of their children or risking arrest by being there. Men who had been close friends for years didn't know each other's last names, because keeping a last name secret was one of many tactics for avoiding arrest. The women in the lives of the young Black men Goffman studied—mothers, sisters, girlfriends, baby-moms—were routinely threatened by police with a long list of repercussions if they refused to provide information or turn the men in. Goffman aptly describes police repression in the poor Black neighborhood she studied as the criminalization of everyday life: "The officers make women realize that their daily lives are full of crimes, crimes the police are well aware of, and crimes that carry high punishments, should the authorities feel inclined to pursue them."

"Someone must have traduced Joseph K.," *The Trial* famously starts, "for without having done anything wrong he was arrested one fine morning." Compare this to Alice Goffman's account of how Tim, at age eleven, was introduced to criminal justice. He was getting a ride to school from his older brother Chuck, in a car borrowed from Chuck's

girlfriend. They were pulled over by the police, who determined the car was stolen and "charged Chuck with receiving stolen property. They charged Tim with accessory, and later a judge in the juvenile court placed Tim on three years' probation." This was Tim's metamorphosis from child to criminal.

Sky and Elisabeth

Angelica Schuyler Choate Goffman, a bright, charming young woman from a wealthy Boston family, met Erving Goffman when they were graduate students at the University of Chicago. The couple married in 1952, and their only child, Thomas, was born a year later.

Dmitri Shalin of the Erving Goffman Archives at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas conducted primary-source interviews with contemporaries of Sky Goffman, summarized in his paper "Goffman's Self-Ethnographies." This material portrays a woman in a difficult marriage struggling with escalating symptoms of mental illness.

The power and culture dynamics between Erving and Sky were complicated: a Jewish man from a working-class Canadian family paired with an upper-class Protestant woman. That said, their marriage followed the familiar gender script of that era and beyond. Erving completed a doctorate, while Sky, whose master's thesis on personalities of upper-class women had been well received, "set aside her intellectual aspirations while spending long hours helping her husband with his manuscripts and galley proofs."

The couple moved to Bethesda, Maryland, in 1954 for Erving to take a job as a visiting sociologist at the National Institute of Mental Health, the position from which he did research for *Asylums*. In Bethesda, Sky experienced psychiatric problems and sought treatment. There was also marital conflict, severe enough that when Erving accepted a faculty appointment at Berkeley in 1957, Sky remained in the East with their young son Tom, possibly for as much as a year. There would be another transient separation after the couple had reunited in Berkeley. Their marital problems and Sky's psychiatric problems were likely mutually reinforcing. "What happened, I think," reported one of Shalin's sources, "was that she began her dissertation, and then Goffman got his NIMH grant supporting his work at St. Elizabeths after graduate school. She

went along with him and got dislocated." Another acquaintance told Shalin that Sky attempted suicide in Bethesda.

We have more specific information about Sky's mental state and behavior during her years in Berkeley, where she seems clearly to have fit the profile for bipolar disorder. A colleague at the Survey Research Center, where Sky was employed doing clerical work (again note the distance she had traveled from her doctoral studies), told Shalin that she "was a very troubled woman. . . . At times she would drive you crazy with all kinds of social invitations. . . . Other times she was in the dumps. . . . Her swings up and down got worse and worse and worse."

Sky was in psychiatric treatment again in Berkeley, and her correspondence shows her own awareness of her condition. "For a variety of reasons," she wrote to a friend, "I am currently higher than a kite. . . . Sometimes I think oh well, this is just the manic phase; occasionally I think my god, maybe a non-depressive life is possible." The conflicts between Sky and Erving also continued. One source told Shalin, "The great part of her problem was that she felt that she had the right to her world and her life, that she was not just to be a devoted, totally subservient wife to Erving."

1963 appears to have marked a turning point in Sky's decline. The assassination of John F. Kennedy in November of that year had a particular impact. According to one of Erving Goffman's colleagues, Sky "went into some kind of psychological tailspin after the assassination. . . . That in turn drifted into a kind of hyper-manic stage, in which she developed a fix on the idea that she, using the money in her family, could . . . launch into some kind of world-saving enterprise."

On April 26, 1964, Erving Goffman is reported to have called his wife's psychiatrist, concerned that she was suicidal. He was told by the psychiatrist not to worry. The next day, April 27, Sky Goffman drove her car onto the Richmond-San Rafael Bridge, got out, and jumped to her death. "She left a note in her car," her colleague Walter Clark told Shalin, "and the note said, 'Erv, Tom—I'm sorry.'"

Like Erving Goffman, I was married to a woman who struggled with bipolar disorder and who, like Sky Goffman, took her own life.

Elisabeth was born in the mid-'50s, and by the time she was five her mother was locked in a state mental hospital—exactly the type of

institution Goffman described in *Asylums*—where she would remain until Elisabeth was grown. Elisabeth's father remarried, and she lived with him and her stepmother until she was seven, when she was taken in and raised by an aunt and uncle. For some holidays her mother got day passes from the hospital to come to family meals, where Elisabeth had to look after her, help her mother behave appropriately, and endure the knowing glances among her relatives, the tense polite exchanges and the atmosphere thick with stigma.

In her early twenties, working in Boston as a union organizer, Elisabeth started to retrieve memories of childhood sexual abuse by her father and his acquaintances—including, she would eventually remember, men her father rented her to. The abuse started, she believed, when she was very little, and went on until she was seven, when her stepmother found Elisabeth's father in a sex act with her and insisted that Elisabeth leave the home. She told me that during those early years of her life, she lived like a wild animal, doing whatever she had to in order to survive. As an adult Elisabeth confronted her father, he denied everything, and she broke off contact with him.

As her childhood memories unfolded, Elisabeth started having episodes of severe depression, for which she was hospitalized twice in the '80s. In the fall of 1988 she enrolled in law school at Northeastern. The next spring she became manic. She hardly slept, went on spending sprees, believed she was being followed by the CIA and boarded her windows. After three months a friend called her doctor, who had her hospitalized.

What followed was a remarkable period of recovery. Elisabeth came out of the hospital, did outpatient treatment and a Buddhist spiritual practice, was allowed to repeat her first year of law school, and went on to graduate in 1992. When I met her in 1996, Elisabeth, at the age of forty, was working as a care and protection attorney, representing children whose parents were charged with abuse or neglect. She continued to struggle with bouts of depression, worked about half time, had days when she couldn't get out of bed, and could experience intense feelings of victimization that were all too grounded in her history. But she also had a lively and richly creative mind, a deep capacity for compassion and human connection, and an amazing spirit. As I learned about her history, as I tried to take in the unbearable reality of what happened to

her as a child, I felt that she was the bravest and most inspiring person I had ever known.

After we married in 2003, Elisabeth went into a long, stark decline. Like Sky Goffman, her mental health struggles became intertwined with marital stresses. Her depression became deeper and more relentless. She went on disability. In 2006 she attempted suicide by overdosing on Klonopin.

The next year, in the immediate aftermath of surgery to remove a huge tumor growing out of her kidney, Elisabeth had a manic episode for the first time in eighteen years. She was agitated and enraged. She hardly slept, spending nights pacing around our small apartment. She pursued the man who lived in the apartment below us, and then flipped and believed that the man and his partner were entering our apartment and putting Haldol, an antipsychotic medication, into her food. She thought the pager I had carried for years for work was an electronic surveillance device. At the heart of the crisis, she insisted that we separate. We did, and in the middle of a horrible night a week or two afterward, she started screaming, banging walls, and smashed a large mirror. She was psychiatrically hospitalized four times in the space of a month.

Then Elisabeth stabilized up to a point—she would not be hospitalized again for over two years—but there was a palpable fragility, and beneath that she was crushed in a way I had never seen before. For a harrowing year we tried to salvage what had become an impossible marriage. In 2009 we divorced. The next year Elisabeth had another episode, even more severe than the one in 2007. Again she was in and out of the hospital, this time for months. There was another overdose. There was an incident when she pulled out her insulin pump and was found unconscious with her body temperature down to 88 degrees. Then she stabilized again.

I had hardly any contact with Elisabeth the last two years of her life, but mutual friends told me that she had seemed to be doing relatively better. She was living alone, working part time as a dogwalker, seeing a therapist and psychiatrist. In 2013, around the beginning of April, she was talking to friends about financial stresses, about feeling overwhelmed because her car had been broken into. Though these friends later told me she seemed sane, on April 9 she was showing enough

distress at a Buddhist meeting that another friend asked if she wanted to go to the hospital. She said no, she could manage and keep herself safe. On April 10 Elisabeth had dinner plans with her two oldest friends in Boston. When they arrived at her apartment, the door was open. They walked in and found Elisabeth, her body already cold. All her pill bottles were empty. She did not leave a note.

Broken Places

In 1969, five years after his wife's death, Erving Goffman published an essay titled "The Insanity of Place." It's a sociological examination of a manic episode, which he characterizes as the manic person exceeding the social limits of his or her "place." Nowhere in the essay does Goffman mention that his wife had manic episodes; nor does he give any hint that his observations may have been informed by his own experience as her husband. But as Dmitri Shalin shows, many of the specific examples in "The Insanity of Place" match accounts of Sky Goffman provided by those who knew her—her house parties, her charitable ventures, her reaction to an assassination, her challenging of the family hierarchy. "Mania," Goffman wrote, "would seem to be a disease of persons with social advantages—money, lineage, office, profession, education, sexual attractiveness, and a network of social and familiar relationships." I don't believe this is true, but it seems to be a portrayal of Sky.

A remarkable thing happens at the exact point in the paper where he starts to describe the details of a manic episode—Goffman abruptly goes into passive voice: "Misplaced enterprise occurs. Family monies are squandered on little examples of venture capitalism. Grand services and equipment are bought or contracted for." By my count, thirty of thirty-eight sentences, spanning three columns of text, go on in this same style before Goffman reverts to his normal prose. Who is performing these actions? What is the sociologist actually describing? Where is he drawing his material from? Something huge is lurking under the surface of this text, which the language both suggests and conceals; the subjects of these sentences are being withheld for reasons he cannot or will not divulge. He is speaking in code.

Goffman uses evocative language to describe how "the family" responds to the manic patient. "The character of a loved one lived with,"

he writes, "appears to be changing fundamentally and for the worse." The family "cease to be sure of themselves . . . cease to be sure of their way of knowing." He speaks of a "deep bewilderment," of a home that has become "a no-man's land . . . where wounds . . . are inflicted." He writes of a family "turned inside out"; of "havoc"; of no one outside the family having "the faintest appreciation" of what is happening. "There is no stable way," Goffman writes, "for the family to conceive of a life in which a member conducts himself insanely." But who exactly is this "family"? He never says. It seems to be a third-person proxy for Goffman himself.

What emerges for me is the image of a man, still in the throes of the devastating loss of his wife, who both approaches and avoids the truth of his own story, his own bafflement and grief, and as a result can only tell it in encrypted form. It is too painful to really lay hands on; too overloaded with the stigma and shame of being so closely associated with mental illness. It feels like yet another tragedy in Goffman's life, the inability to plainly tell his story, the need to simultaneously reveal and protect himself from his own sorrow.

This is all the more heartbreaking because Goffman had shown such an extraordinary capacity to empathize with the sorrow of the inmates he observed at St. Elizabeths. In *Asylums*, in language that transcended sociology to express the bare human experience of confinement, he could write of "the patient curling up in the window, looking outside through the bars, pressing the nose of his whole body up against the outside, and in this way somewhat removing himself from the ward"; describing sixty patients being herded into a day room at dusk, he wrote, "a pall fell on what was already a pall." For me, "The Insanity of Place" is just like that, a pall falling on what was already a pall—the pain of Sky's life and death, and the pain of what Erving lived through as a husband and a parent, compounded by self-confinement: his unwillingness or inability to speak in the first person, to say *Here is what I have suffered*. Underneath the text, there is only an aching silence.

In the starkest possible contrast to her father, Alice Goffman provides an unflinchingly honest and vulnerable account of how she did the research for her marvelous book, and how the process affected her. An appendix to *On the Run*, this section is titled "A Methodological Note,"

and in it Goffman relates how, as a sophomore at Penn, she began tutoring two young people in the poor, segregated Black neighborhood of Philadelphia she calls 6th Street. Then she took an apartment in the neighborhood, a young white middle-class woman situating herself to conduct an ethnographic study. She managed to get taken "under wing" by a young Black man, Mike. Later, Mike and his best friend Chuck moved into Goffman's apartment as roommates. With this entrée into the Sixth Street Boys, Alice spent six years witnessing some of the most intimate details of life in what she calls a fugitive community.

But she did more than witness. Goffman formed deep bonds with the men and women of 6th Street; she makes no pretense of having been a neutral or "value-free" observer. She experienced the trauma of the neighborhood, not only through her identification with its residents, but through her own direct experiences of police brutality, proximity to violence (for example, a man was shot and killed so close to her that she was spattered with his blood), and the deaths and incarcerations of men she was close to. When she started graduate school at Princeton, while still conducting her study and commuting from 6th Street, Goffman had PTSD symptoms. "I feared the hordes of white people. . . . Above everything, I feared . . . white American men who were relatively fit, under the age of fifty, with short hair [fitting the physical profile of white cops]." She had panic responses to sudden noises and quick movements: "At a traffic light, a fellow motorist walked over to our car and knocked loudly on the driver's-side window. I threw up my arms to shield my face when she rapped on the glass."

In 2007 Chuck, the man Goffman was closest to other than Mike, was shot in the head by a man from a rival neighborhood. At the hospital when he died, Goffman says she "crouched on the floor beside his bed. . . . I put my arm over the rail and held his hand. I cried to him and told him I loved him. I told him I was sorry." Reflecting on this, Goffman writes, "Perhaps Chuck's death had broken something inside me."

After Elisabeth and I separated in the middle of her manic episode in 2007, I kept as much contact with her as she would allow. At one point she let me go with her to an appointment with her psychiatrist, which resulted in nothing helpful. But afterward she agreed to my offer to take her grocery shopping. I had been frantic with worry that she wasn't

eating because she believed her food was being laced with Haldol; eating, basic need that it is for all of us, has a whole additional layer of significance for someone with brittle diabetes. We slowly walked through the aisles of Whole Foods, and she ended up buying more than a hundred dollars' worth of groceries. Later that afternoon we took a walk together around our neighborhood.

Under other circumstances, that long difficult day might simply have been bittersweet, the recently separated spouses making a gesture toward some undefined rapprochement, but with no real indication of anything changing at the level that mattered. But spending all that time with Elisabeth, I could feel in my marrow the sheer devastation that she was experiencing. She was as calm as I had seen her in weeks, allowing me to help her, trying to be friendly. But the truth was that nothing about her was okay. It might actually have been her calm, the respite from agitation and rage and delusional statements, that created a kind of opening to her inner state. I felt the presence of something elemental, a state of horror beyond words. I felt the presence of a baffled and terrified child, trying helplessly to make sense of an incomprehensible world.

Standing alone in my kitchen that evening, washing dishes, my mind roaming back over the course of the day, I started to cry, and then, for what seemed like a very long time, I sobbed convulsively. Over and over I thought, I want Elisabeth to be okay, I just want Elisabeth to be okay. In my mind and in my heart I was letting go of the marriage. This was a moment when I was still enormously attached not only to Elisabeth but to the idea of us as a couple, despite the long list of things that made a functional marriage seem so impossibly out of reach. But I stood at the sink bargaining the marriage away in my head, as if it were a bargain I could possibly make, as if it were within my control to exchange the marriage for Elisabeth's sanity, for her to step away from elemental horror and regain the capacity to live some kind of a life.

I am also a survivor of childhood trauma. My history pales next to Elisabeth's, but even so it has been the source of deep and persistent suffering. That we were both trauma survivors created the paradox of our relationship, drawing us together but also evoking levels of pain that were beyond our abilities to manage. When I could feel Elisabeth's devastation in my own body, it's not that I was such a wonderfully

empathic husband, but more that she touched in me a place that is also broken. Standing at the sink that night, sobbing and convulsing, I reached that broken place underneath my sorry efforts to bargain for Elisabeth's recovery, that place where words fall away and there is only silence. Maybe, at bottom, this is why Erving Goffman's silences break my heart: not just because they evade a truth, but because they also embody it.

Making Music of the Darkness

"What drives some men to make music of the darkness," asks Amy Andrews, writing about the suicide of her middle school band director, "while other men cinch it around their necks and suffocate in it?" Some form of this question runs through these stories I have been telling, and while I don't know how to answer it, I do believe that all of us carry in ourselves both of these things—the capacities to either mobilize tragedy and trauma in the service of life, or to turn them destructively on ourselves or others. Sometimes one of these tendencies spectacularly or horribly prevails. More often, I think, we walk in both directions at once, humanizing and dehumanizing in the same breath; revealing and cringing from deep truths; or in many more pedestrian ways walking jagged paths between our best and worst selves.

In 1992, three years after she was sitting hunched in her living room with boarded windows, terrified that she was being pursued by the CIA, Elisabeth graduated from Northeastern's School of Law. That was before I knew her, but I heard stories about how her mother—by then remarried and living with her husband in Philadelphia after her long years in the state mental hospital—came up to Boston for her graduation and just beamed at her daughter the whole time. And I think of our wedding, a moment of genuine and joyous affirmation; of Elisabeth's cousin Kathy, with whom she grew up as a sister, sobbing and saying how happy she was for Elisabeth, how much she deserved this. I think of the many years when Elisabeth far surpassed the life you could have any reason to imagine for someone who had known such relentless, unthinkable brutality when she was so little. It seems wishful to say that Elisabeth's years of decline and manner of dying didn't diminish her moments of triumph. What feels truer is that her moments of triumph

were real and are worth celebrating, diminished or not. Or to say, in the language of Amy Andrews's metaphor, that Elisabeth made music of the darkness even when it was cinched around her neck, before she began to suffocate.

I hope that something similar was the case for Sky Goffman. I can't know if this was so.

We do know that Erving Goffman as a young sociologist spent a year in one of the most wretched institutions produced by our society, and he made music from that darkness through his sheer ability to grasp and communicate the humanity of inmates stigmatized as crazy and worthless. Later, after Sky's death, Dmitri Shalin reports that Goffman began to change his attitude toward women; and in the last years of his life, this erstwhile champion of patriarchy became a proponent of gender equality. We can only guess what pain Goffman might have felt about the role his own sexism could have played in his wife's decline and suicide, and how this might have influenced the change in his beliefs about power relations between men and women.

With Alice Goffman, there is no need for conjecture. After Chuck was murdered, she tells us at the end of *On the Run*, she participated in an attempt at revenge. There were nights when she and Chuck's best friend, Mike, drove around in Alice's car looking for Chuck's killer. Mike was carrying a gun. "I got into the car with Mike," Goffman writes, "because . . . I wanted Chuck's killer to die." One time at three a.m., Mike thought he saw the man they were looking for going into a restaurant. Mike got out and hid in an alley near the restaurant while Alice waited for him in the car. Then Mike got a better look, decided it might not be the right man, and returned with no shots fired.

Goffman had crossed a line, and she knew it. "I stopped seeing the man who shot him as a man who [was] like the men I knew. . . . I simply wanted him to pay for what he'd done, for what he'd taken away from us. . . . At the time and certainly in retrospect, my desire for vengeance scared me." As a reader it frightened me how deeply immersed Alice Goffman had become in the cycle of young Black men killing each other, embodying the horrors inflicted by racism and acting in ways that surely stood in opposition to the values and purposes that brought her to 6th Street in the first place.

And yet, look at what she has done with this. She might have tucked that episode away, persuaded herself that no harm was done and no one really needed to know—and in the process she would have evaded the truth that harm was done, a psychic injury she herself suffered that made her for a brief time a willing accomplice to murder. Instead, Alice Goffman has the extraordinary integrity to speak that truth, and in doing so she offers herself as a kind of bridge between the fugitive community of 6th Street—and so many others like it—and the comfortable worlds of her middle-class readers, who, like me, would shudder at the thought of going out with a gun in the middle of the night to avenge a killing. Look at me, she says in effect. *Here I am, a young white middle-class woman with an intellectual pedigree and a PhD in sociology, and there is no fundamental way that these impoverished, criminalized young Black men, with their guns and drugs and warrants and jail time and cycles of violence, there is no fundamental way in which they are different from me. Take a good look at me, Reader, I am like you, and I am like them. If I am human, they are human.*

It's so easy to distance ourselves from people who kill themselves, from violent young Black men in our inner cities who kill each other, from brutal cops, from people locked away in prisons and mental institutions—to dismiss them as crazy, or deviants, or pigs, or dangers to society. I think we need to do the opposite—to locate the potential for violence within ourselves. This is what I believe Alice Goffman is getting at when she writes, "Looking back, I'm glad I learned what it feels like to want a man to die—not simply to understand the desire for vengeance in others, but to feel it in my bones."

If there is room for choice, we need to accept the darkness in ourselves, to face it and hold it in our hands in order to have any chance to turn it into music.