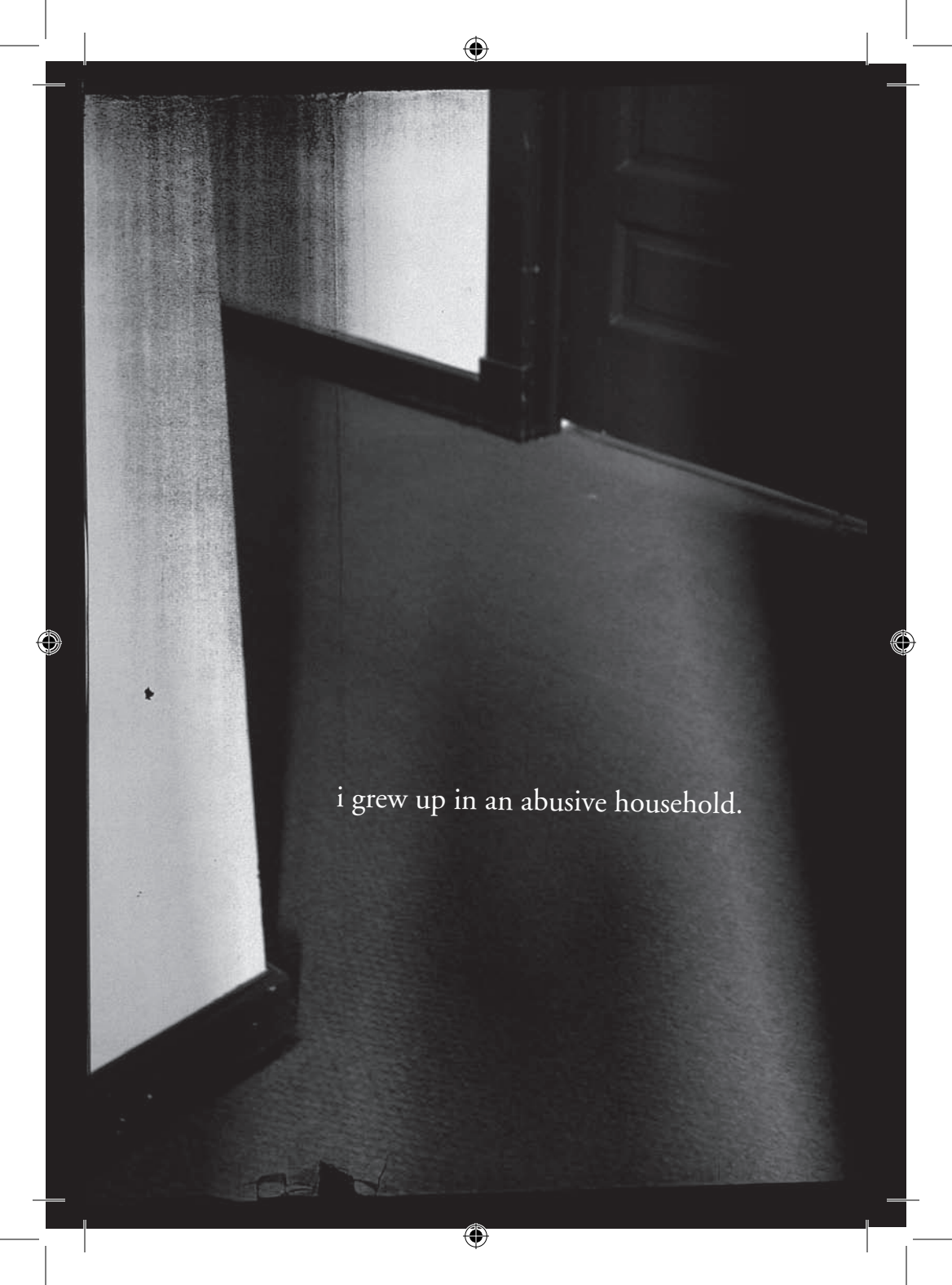


stumbling toward faith

A black and white photograph of a dark, empty room. The room has a dark carpet and a dark door on the right side. A window is visible in the background, letting in some light. The overall atmosphere is somber and quiet.

i grew up in an abusive household.

much of my abuse was spiritual—and when i say spiritual, i don't mean new age, esoteric, random mumblings from half-wiccan, hippie parents. i don't mean that i grew up thinking all the wrong ideas about religion or what it meant to be saved because i was given too much freedom or too many options. i don't mean that my father protested the phrase “under god” in the pledge of allegiance or told me there was more than one way to heaven.

i mean that my father raped me while reciting the lord's prayer.

i mean that my father molested me while singing christian hymns. i mean that there was one way, that i was (literally) “under god,” and that i could never escape my sinfulness.

never.

my father corrupted nearly every single thing that in my deepest moments of belief i see that god created for good or for righteousness.

he did it slyly, without my even realizing it.

he did it deliberately, without regret.

he fully convinced me that god was on his side, that i was bad, that i was lucky to be loved (by god, by him, by anyone), and that i was to blame for things no child—nobody—should ever be blamed for.

i had a strange sense of power because of this. i was terrified of god, yet i felt more powerful than god at the same time. my dad told me that if the sun didn't come out in the morning, it was because it (the sun) “didn't want to look at your ugly face.”

so i felt more powerful than the sun, but i felt powerless under the weight of my father's body.

i made wagers but never followed through on my agreements.

i dared god to kill me (it would have been a welcome relief). i embraced fundamentalism—it was familiar, it fit in with my self-blame, and to some extent, my overblown sense of power.

i wandered through various religions, particularly the ones with strict rules and definitive boundaries. i was baptized a mormon, a jehovah's witness. i flirted with scientology. in the end, i came to one conclusion: the warm acceptance i felt in each of these groups was only there because i was conforming to that group's ideals. the people only loved me because they had to, because it was written in their religion that they treat others well. they only had faith in me because i shared their faith, too.

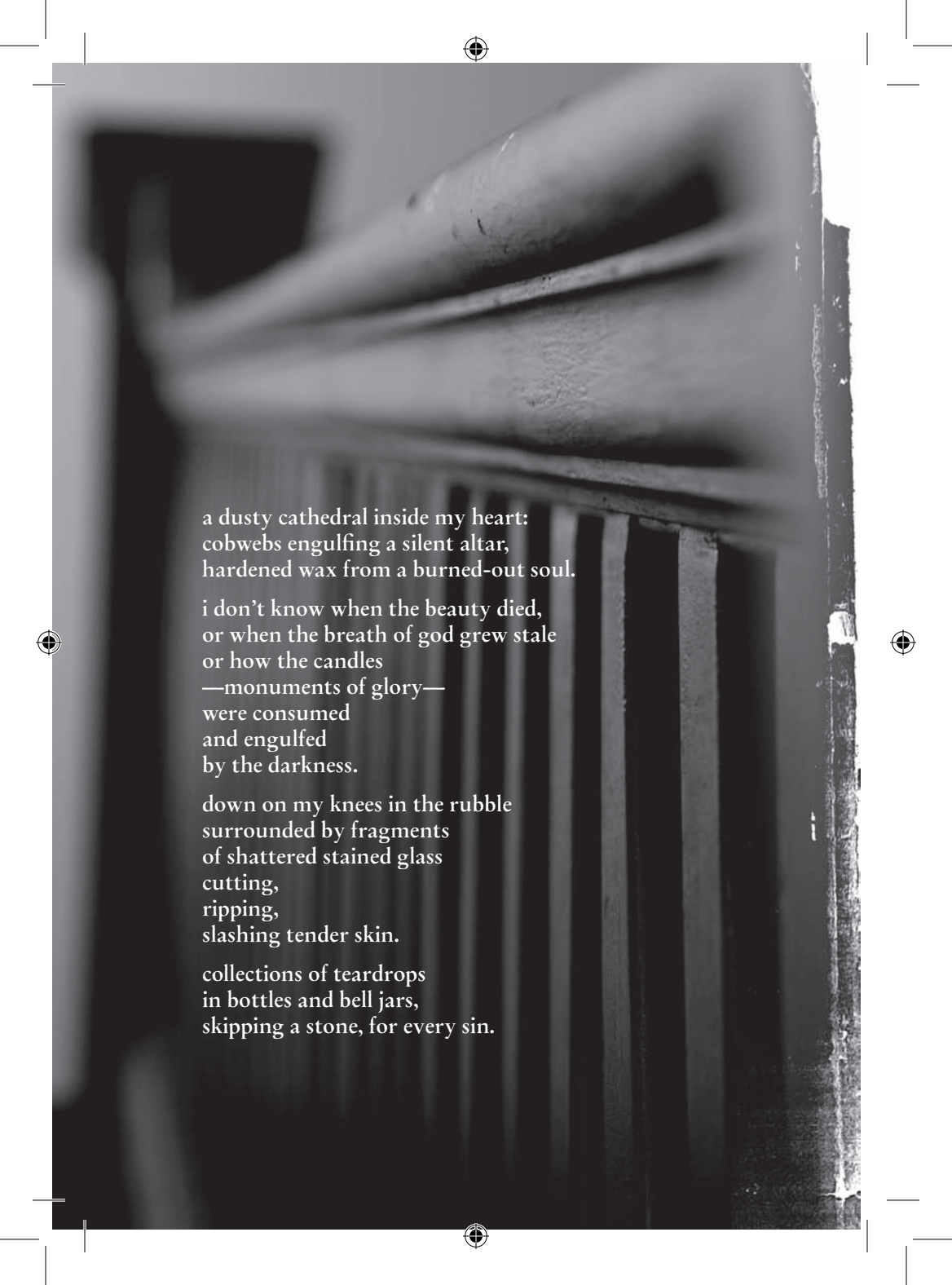
the moment i doubted, or strayed, or showed independence, they became vultures. they told me i was unworthy. it was almost like living with my father all over again. almost.

i don't even know what "home" means, except that i long for it. i long to heal, to have this yawning chasm inside of me filled, to believe in something bigger than me, holier than i dare to imagine, more gracious and full of kindness than i dare to wish for.

this book is an expression

A black and white photograph of a white door. The door features a large, rectangular window at the top, which is brightly lit, suggesting an outdoor scene. Below the window is a traditional doorknob and a lock mechanism. The door is set within a frame, and the overall image has a slightly grainy, high-contrast quality. The text "of my journey 'home.'" is overlaid on the lower portion of the door.

of my journey “home.”



a dusty cathedral inside my heart:
cobwebs engulfing a silent altar,
hardened wax from a burned-out soul.

i don't know when the beauty died,
or when the breath of god grew stale
or how the candles
—monuments of glory—
were consumed
and engulfed
by the darkness.

down on my knees in the rubble
surrounded by fragments
of shattered stained glass
cutting,
ripping,
slashing tender skin.

collections of teardrops
in bottles and bell jars,
skipping a stone, for every sin.

my father prayed with me every night.

he lay on top of me, touched my breasts, and prayed that i would be forgiven.

“father,” he said.

i cringed at the association.

“heavenly father, make my daughter a better person.

let her be good enough for her mother to come back. let her prove to her mother that she is a good girl. we know that her mother left because she was a bad girl. help her to be good enough. make her a better person. take away her sin. forgive her in spite of how awful she is. let your blood cover all her sin. help her to stop being so bad.”

i lay underneath him and trembled. i closed my eyes, as much to avoid his face as to pray properly. i made promises. to stop disappointing him, to stop disappointing god. i repented for all my sins, for all of my wrongdoings, admitted my fallen wretchedness, my guilt, my shame.

i would have done anything to bring my mother back.

i would have done anything to feel clean, feel loved, to have been good.