EYES FRONT



ALEKSA CAKALJ

About the Author

Aleksa Cakalj is a writer, performer, and English teacher whose work explores longing, belonging, recovery, and the courage to begin again.

Born in Bosnia and Herzegovina and raised in Canada, he has studied acting and dance and brings an interest in literature and performance to his teaching.

Eyes Front is his first poetry collection.

Preface

For a long time, I wrote to make sense of feelings I could not carry quietly. Some poems began with a person I missed. Others began with a room, a sound, a movement, or a memory that returned without warning. Writing gave those moments somewhere to go.

These poems move through longing, injury, loneliness, friendship, and the wish to belong. They also hold the people and experiences that helped me continue: a mother’s presence, the language of dance, brief moments of tenderness, and the stubborn possibility of a life beyond what hurt me. I did not write them all from the same place or at the same time. The voice changes as I do.

I have kept the difficult poems here because they are part of that journey. They speak from moments of fear and despair; they do not have to be the final word. I hope readers find room in these pages for their own complicated feelings, and perhaps a sense that moving forward can begin before we know exactly where we are going.

— Aleksa

When All Else Is Quiet

It is the harsh sounds,
Of surgical beds,
Braking and moving,
When all else is quiet.
That makes one tremble in fear,
Nay shake in fear,
Gravity is gone,
And we are hollow things,
Floating in space,
It is the blinding lights,
And harsh sounds,
Crepitous sounds,
And the harsh antiseptic smells,
That portray,
The fear and horror,
That is about to swallow you.

The Turquoise Gate

When I close my eyes,
I can see it,
I can see the darkest days,
Of my past,
When I was trapped in a wheelchair,
Restricted,
Limited,
Only to a few locations,
All surrounded,
By this enormous turquoise gate,
As big as gates in asylums.
People came and went,
But I stayed,
For months and months,
Trapped in a wheelchair.
My routine,
Was everything.
If I strayed,
Everything would be a mess.
Wake up,
Make the bed,
Straighten the sheets,
Put the cover,
Make no wrinkles,
For they don’t belong,
Wheel to cafeteria,
Eat food,
Maybe bread with marmalade?
And a cup of tea?
Go back,

Go to therapy,
Connect the dots,
Follow the path,
Go for lunch,
Mix ‘n’ match Archibald stickers,
Go back to therapy,
Everything was the same for nine months.
Oh sweet routine.