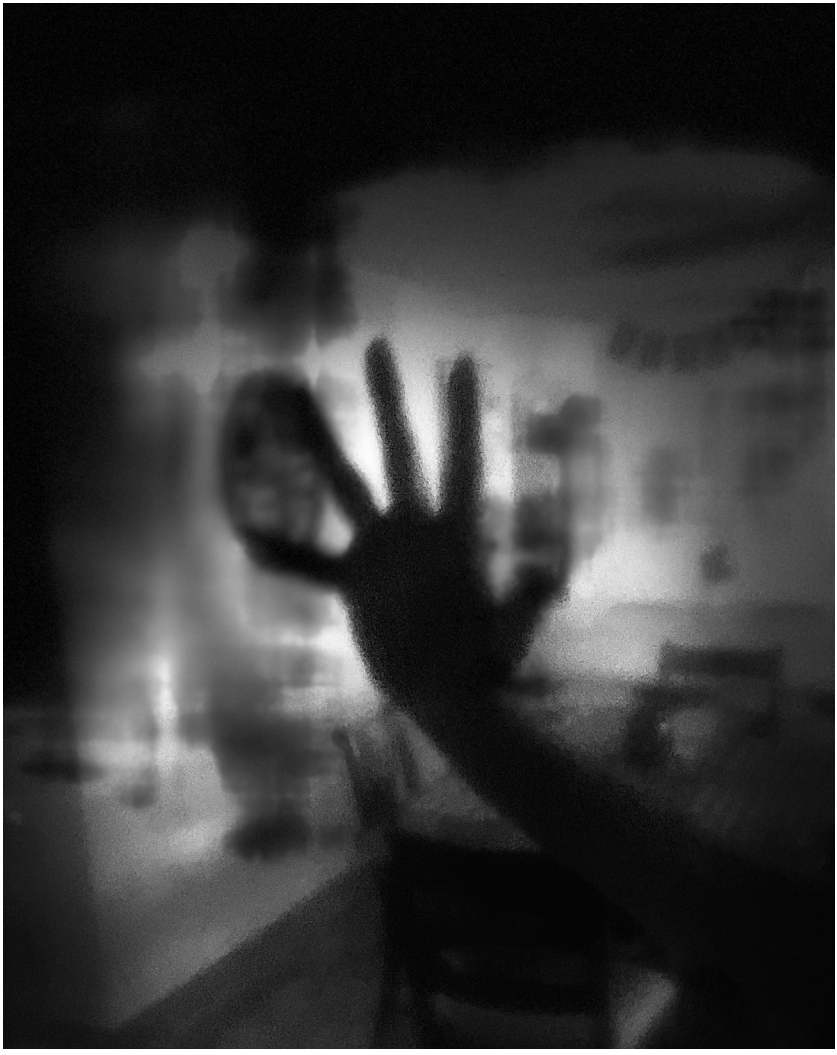
IN THE GRAY

DRAFT ONE

PART ONE

THE BODY REMEMBERS





ambulance arrived at our home and I had no idea that it was there. By that time, I was completely unconscious. I was told later that there were five paramedics or EMTs in my bedroom, who wheeled me out on a stretcher. I have no memory of them being in my bedroom or of ever being in the ambulance. I never saw it, never heard it. I remember waking up in the hospital to a nurse asking me if I knew where I was. I looked around the room and replied, "A hospital?" I felt alone, scared, and very confused. Neither Andrew nor Steve could accompany me to the hospital, because they had Covid, but were not sick enough to hospitalize. I had contacted doctors while I had a fever with Covid, and friends were urging me to go to a hospital, but the doctors advised: Stay home; Stay isolated; Stay hydrated. That apparently was not enough. My medical records show that my oxygen saturation level was 60 percent and I was in septic shock when I reached the

when
the nurse came into the
room, I had kicked my blankets and
extra pillows off the bed. When he saw the
bedding on the floor, he said, "Well, I don't know
what's going on here, but you seem upset." I began
begging for water, and he refused me. Then he asked if
I was hot, if that was why the bedding was kicked away.
And then it happened — mercy. He used a syringe to put
water into one of the tubes going into my body, possibly the
feeding tube. I don't know which one it was, but I will never
forget the feeling of cool water being given to me — it felt
like three syringes of water. It was a moment that helped me
believe I was going to be able to hang on and survive. Not
all medical staff were as considerate, another put the
television on the Food Network before exiting my
room — while I was on a feeding tube. I endured
so much hunger and thirst.
The fighter in me was not ready to give
up on my goal of getting the
ventilator out o





m a n
from respiratory said,
"Okay, you're going to feel a pull,
and then you'll never feel that again," as he
grasped and partially pulled the tubing from my
throat. He repeated that process until the ventilator
tubing was gone from my body. I gripped Jay's hand as
the last pull of tubing exposed about a foot-long strand of
mucus that disgusted me. It was clinging to the end of the
ventilator tubing dangling and dripping. The respiratory
therapist gave me a blue and white suction device that I
quickly named "Bluebell." He said, "You're going to cough a
lot. When you do, use this to suction out the mucus." In the
days ahead, I kept Bluebell nearby and suctioned mucus
c o n s t a n t l y .
Once the ventilator was removed, my hands were
freed from the restraints when Jay cut the strips of
fabric that were used to tie me down.
Honestly, I can't fully put into words
the joy I felt to be free from the
ventilator and





I was very discouraged by not being able to sit up, walk, or function normally. Even the muscles in my eyes had atrophied, and when I moved my head too much, the whole room would spin. I still had tubes everywhere. I had not had a shower. My hair was matted and gross. I was at a very low point. Marc said, "I'm going to try sitting you up. Hold onto me and I'll pull you up." He positioned me so that I was sitting upright with my feet dangling off the side of the bed. "Alright," he said. "I'm going to let go and you stay up." When he let go, my body fell sideways and backwards, completely uncooperative. I started crying and said, "I'm never going to walk again. I feel so gross. I don't even know who I am anymore. I'm gone." Marc quickly corrected me. He got right in my face and said, "Listen to me! You are strong! You just survived what I have seen killing people all over the world. You're a fighter. Stop beating yourself up." I needed his words to set

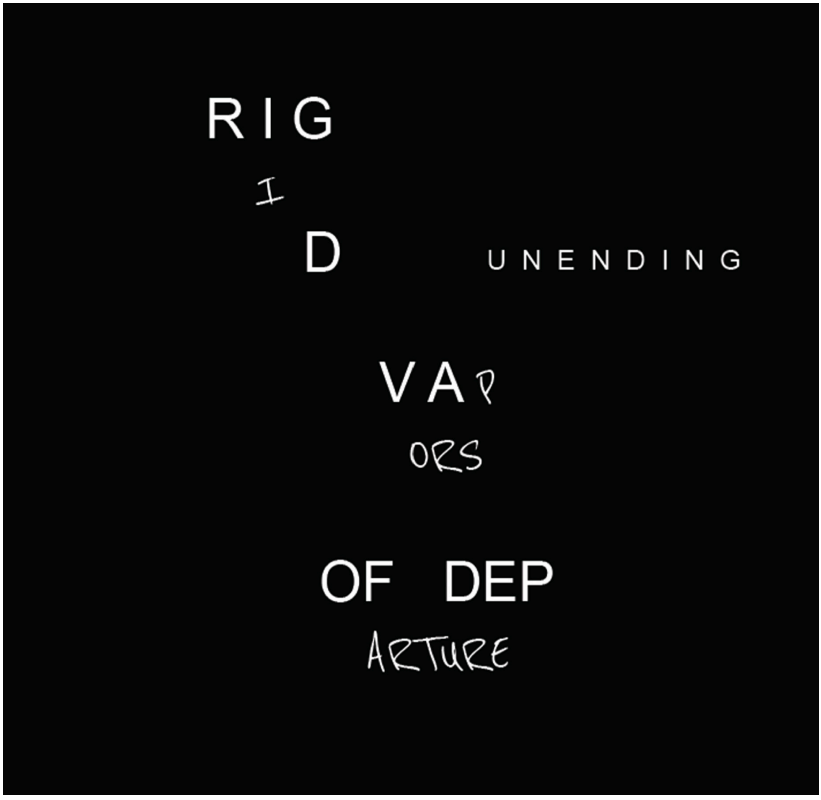
W i d o w

was a word I found difficult to accept. Widow was now part of my identity. The word would come to my mind while I was lying in the hospital. Its emptiness surrounded me like a tourniquet, suffocating me. Steve was gone. I couldn't touch him, hear him, or hold him. I couldn't talk with him. I kept seeing visions of his hand taking mine as he led me on a path to the beach, where he first kissed me; the same hand I held when he proposed to me there. I thought of all the times we had taken that path to the beach, every year on our anniversary. Now, I'd never hold his hand again. I'd never sleep beside him. I'd never hear his voice or feel his

t o u c h .

Death had not only taken Steve, it also took all my future with him. Nothing would bring Steve back. Photos become treasures. As a Christian, I knew that my husband was in heaven, and I would see him again one day. As his wife,

they buried my heartbeat in the ground


RIG
I
D
UNENDING
VAP
ORS
OF DEP
ARTURE

During one of Andrew's visits, I asked him to please bring my Bible to me. I was so scared I would never walk again. With my Bible open, I prayed, begging God to be able to sit up, stand up, and walk. I really didn't know if it was possible or what God's plans were for my future. While praying, I heard God say, "Mark 2." When I turned my Bible to that chapter, I saw a heading that read, "A Paralytic is Healed." I kept reading and saw that it was a passage about a man who couldn't walk, so his friends took him to the rooftop of the building where Jesus was preaching. The friends lowered the man down through the roof so that he was right in front of Jesus and healed of his paralysis. I was so happy to have been led to that story by the Lord. I began to weep and have hope of healing. As I wept, I heard God say, "Luke 5." I quickly turned in my Bible to the book of Luke, where I again saw the words, "A Paralytic is Healed" and I

For the first time in a month, I breathed non-hospital air. I felt warm sun on my skin and squinted my eyes at its brightness. I got out of the wheelchair, and I was able to walk to the car, just a couple of steps. Andrew and nursing staff opened the door for me, and I was able to get in the way that I had been taught in physical therapy. Andrew drove me home, and I used my walker to get into my house. It felt odd to be out in traffic and the world moving so fast around me. Covid had stopped my life from moving for a while, and I felt disoriented. What was my life going to be like moving forward? How long would I be on oxygen? How would I sleep at night in a big, lonely bedroom?

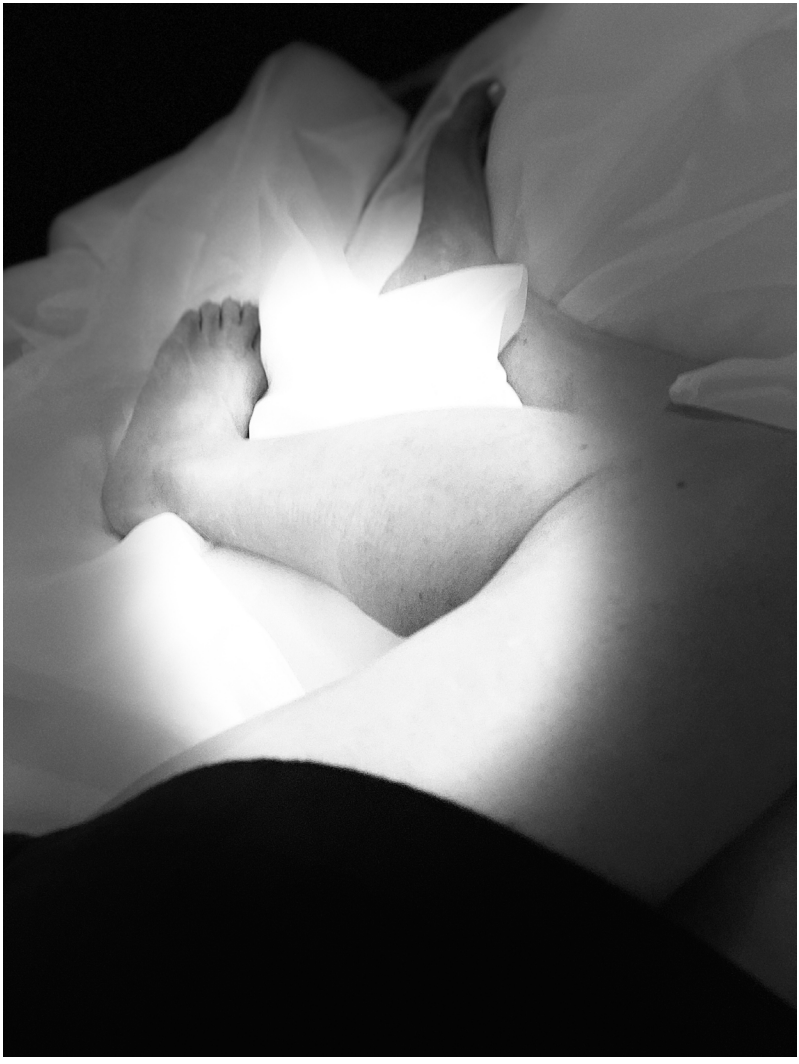

your
hollow
pillow
unmarked



I was sent home with a small portable oxygen tank that I used until a large oxygen concentrator and several tanks of oxygen were delivered — six small tanks for portability and one very large tank. The oxygen concentrator was shaped like a large canister, and it was very loud with rattling and rumbling sounds all through the house. It came with 50 feet of tubing so I could wander freely around my home — up to 50 feet from the concentrator. I dragged the tubing with me everywhere and slept with the oxygen on my face, which was very challenging. I was still on one liter of oxygen. As much as they tried to wean me off it in the hospital, my lungs still needed a little help. Apparently, my left lung had collapsed, and it would take time to return to good oxygen levels. I was advised to keep exercising and walking at home, to strengthen my muscles, heart, and lungs. Physical and occupational therapists and nurses visited my



While I was in the hospital, there was a young nurse who had taken the first dose of the vaccine, and she opened up to me about why she looked upset while attending to me. The reason: Her husband was adamantly against the vaccine, and he had forbidden her to be vaccinated. She said to me, "I'm here in the hospital every day watching people die from this disease. He's not!" She was very nervous to break the news to her husband and concerned about the toll it might take on her marriage. The division in our nation, our communities, and our homes during Covid was unbelievable. Prior to Covid contracting and becoming ill, the controversy surrounding the vaccination buzzed around me. I recall shopping for



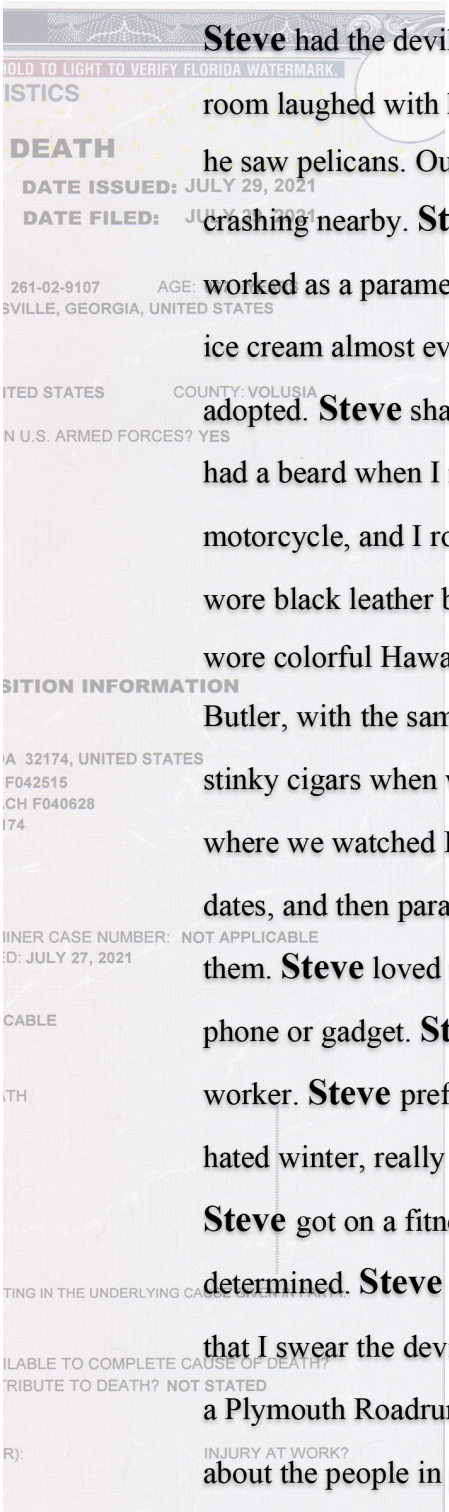
During my loneliness and
g r i e f ,
God began to shift my perspective.
He reminded me of
how my path had changed many times in the past,
and how He
had made sure I was taken care of. He also brought to my
attention people in the Bible He had moved from one path
to another. Those people
often faced hardships during their transitions. He used
examples like, King David being taken from the path of
shepherd boy to warrior to king.
Esther was placed on a path to become Queen Esther,
away from what she knew,
to save the people of Israel. Moses was placed on a
path to Egypt to set
the Israelites free and lead them toward their
Promised Land.
As a result of his Damascus
Road experience,

November 15, 2021, still on oxygen, I returned to work, in a part-time work-from-home status. I worked in my living room recliner at my laptop from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. Monday through Friday. It felt good to be doing something that felt normal and productive again. It felt very good to be interacting with my team. Their smiles warmed my heart and conversations with them uplifted my spirits. I'm a type-A almost workaholic type person, so having new tasks and projects to complete made me feel like I was beginning to stand again. I continued that work schedule for about four months. Then, in March 2022, my pulmonary doctor gave me permission to return to the office two days a week, with my oxygen tank and light duty. I was advised not to exert myself. On Monday, Tuesday, and





I remember having trouble with how to style my hair, because everything I'd been through had caused a lot of my hair to fall out. I read that many people were losing their hair from Covid and possibly the vaccines. Each day I washed my hair, large wads of it would fill my hands. I had bald patches, and my hair would just break off. It was about half the length it had been, and all my curls were gone. It was thin, straight, and sparse. It was horrifying to watch myself slowly balding, especially with their wedding approaching. I was not going to let my appearance stop me from experiencing full joy at my son's wedding. Andrew and I selected Lynyrd Skynyrd's "Simple Man" for our mother-son dance. We practiced dancing together and I felt so blessed to have lived to be at their wedding and



Steve had the devilish grin of a wild-eyed south
room laughed with him — deep belly laughs. **Ste**
he saw pelicans. Our first kiss was on coquina ro
crashing nearby. **Steve** loved cars and sold them
worked as a paramedic in the pits, along pit road
ice cream almost every night, any flavor. At Dair
adopted. **Steve** shaved his moustache off, and ev
had a beard when I met him. **Steve** rode a Harle
motorcycle, and I rode it with him, in leather and
wore black leather boots that were scuffed and w
wore colorful Hawaiian shirts, looking a bit like
Butler, with the same attitude toward life — dark
stinky cigars when we went dancing on the week
where we watched Flamenco dancers. **Steve** too
dates, and then parasailing. **Steve** told jokes and
them. **Steve** loved talking. **Steve** was fascinate
phone or gadget. **Steve** had a bald head that onc
worker. **Steve** preferred shorts and flip flops as
hated winter, really hated it. **Steve** liked fine din
Steve got on a fitness kick and lost so much wei
determined. **Steve** had strong hands. **Steve** refu
that I swear the devil danced in. **Steve** was born
a Plymouth Roadrunner painted Richard Petty blu
about the people in photographs at Cracker Barre

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2 of 2

Physician's Report – Respiratory

7. Please Check this individual 's functional classification from the t able taken from Guides to Ev aluation of P ermanent Impairment, 4th Edition, AMA, 1993.

Classes of Respiratory Impairment.*

	Class 1: 0%, no impairment of the whole person	Class 2: 10-25%, mild impairment of the whole person	Class 3: ✓ 26-50%, moderate impairment of the whole person	Class 4: 51-100%, severe impairment of whole person
FVC FEV_1 FEV_1/FVC(%) D_{co}	FVC ≥ 80% of predicted; *and* FEV_1 ≥ 80% of predicted; and FEV_1/FVC ≥ 70%; *and* D_{co} ≥ 70% of predicted.	FVC between 60% and 79% of predicted; *or* FEV_1 between 60% and 79% of predicted; *or* D_{co} between 60% and 69% of predicted.	FVC between 51% and 59% of predicted; *or* FEV_1 between 41% and 59% of predicted; *or* D_{co} between 41% and 59% of predicted.	FVC ≤ 50% of predicted; *or* FEV_1 ≤ 40% of predicted; *or* D_{co} ≤ 40% of predicted.
	or	**or**	**or**	**or**
VO_2 Max	> 25 mL/(kg min); *or* > 7.1 METS	Between 20 and 25 mL/(kg min); or 5.7-7.1 METS	Between 15 and 20 mL/(kg min); or 4.3-5.7 METS	< 15 mL/(kg min); or < 1.05 L/min; or < 4.3 METS

*FVC = forced vital capacity, FEV_1 = forced expiratory volume in the first second, D_{co} = Diffusing capacity of carbon monoxide. The D_{co} is primarily of value for persons with restrictive lung disease. In classes 2 and 3, if the FVC, FEV_1 and FEV_1/FVC ratio are normal and the D_{co} is between 41% and 79%, then an exercise test is required.

VO_2 Max, or measured exercise capacity, is useful in assessing whether a person's compl aint of dyspnea (see Table 1) is a result of respiratory or other conditions. A person's cardiac and conditioning status must be considered in performing the test and in interpreting the results.

Table 1: Classification of Dyspnea.*

Severity	Definition and question	Severity	Definition and question
☐ **Mild**	Do you have to walk more slowly on the level than people of your age because of breathlessness?	☐ **Severe**	Do you ever have to stop for breath after walking about 100 yards of a few minutes on the level?
☑ **Moderate**	Do you have to stop for breath when walking at your own pace on the level?	☐ **Very Severe**	Are you breathless to leave the house or breathless after dressing or undressing?

*The patient's lowest level of physica l activity and exertion that produces breathlessness denotes the severity of the dyspnea.

8. Date first seen _____ Date last seen 8/23/21 Pulmonary Function Tests _____

9. Assessment and treatment are complicated by:
   - ☑ Significant emotional or behavioral disorder such as depression, anxiety — Loss of husband (COVID)
   - ☐ Exaggeration, inconsistent findings, subjective complaints out of proportion to objective findings, bizarre or contradictory observations
   - ☐ Malingering
   - ☐ Dependence on drugs/medications – specify _____
   - ☐ Other (please describe) _____

10. Do you expect the individual's condition to: ☒ Improve ☐ Regress ☐ Remain the same
    When do you anticipate change will occur? 60-90 days

11. Anticipated return to work date: UNKNOWN ☐ Full-Time ☐ Part-Time How Long? _____

12. Comments: Recovering COVID 19 pneumonia —

ome states require us to inform you that any person who knowingly and with intent to injure, defraud or deceive an insurance company, or her person, files a statement containing false, or misleading information concerning any fact material hereto commits a fraudulent insurance act which is subject to civil and/or criminal penalties, depending upon the state. Such actions may be deemed a felony and substantial nes may be imposed.

hysician's Signature:		Date: 8/23/21	
hysician's Name: *(Please print.)* Gerald Woodard		Specialty: DO	
ddress: 3512 S. Atlantic Ave		City: Daytona Bch	State: FL Zip: 32118
axpayer ID #:	Phone No.: (386) 767-9544	Fax No.: (386) 767-9914	

The limping world began to hush.
Elastic gripped our ears,
We inhaled the scent of fabrication.

Hymn 1: “You must wear it for your protection!”
Hymn 2: “No, never! It’s a hoax.”
Verse 3: “People are dying!”

The limping world began to hush.
In isolated chambers of silence,
The Danse Macabre began.

ABC: “Italy is counting caskets.”
NBC: “Check the bottom of the TV screen.”
CBS: “Do we have enough?”

Hush, little baby, hush
Mommy can’t breathe
Chut, mon bébé, chut
Xū Xū Xū Xū Xū

Dance Steps:

1. Fever
2. Cough
3. Exit

Q: “Is this paper enough to keep me alive?’
Q: “Am I clean enough to live?”
Q: “Will I die?”

Hush, little baby, hush
Tousser, Je tousse, Une mauvaise toux
Ciao, Ciao, Arrivederci
Xū Xū Xū Xū Xū

Blue-veined faces worshipping air
Violets pushing upward toward eternity
Belledonna enters, with a dark-crimson rose

1. The mother's breath — inhale — hush
2. The baby's breath — inhale — hush
3. The father's breath — inhale — hush

Grass withers, flowers fade
Media vita in morte sumus
Prothesis, Ekphora, Klinē

VIDEO

THE BODY REMEMBERS



VIDEO

LAST WORDS



VIDEO

A WIDOW SPEAKS



VIDEO

HE’S NOT COMING HOME



VIDEO

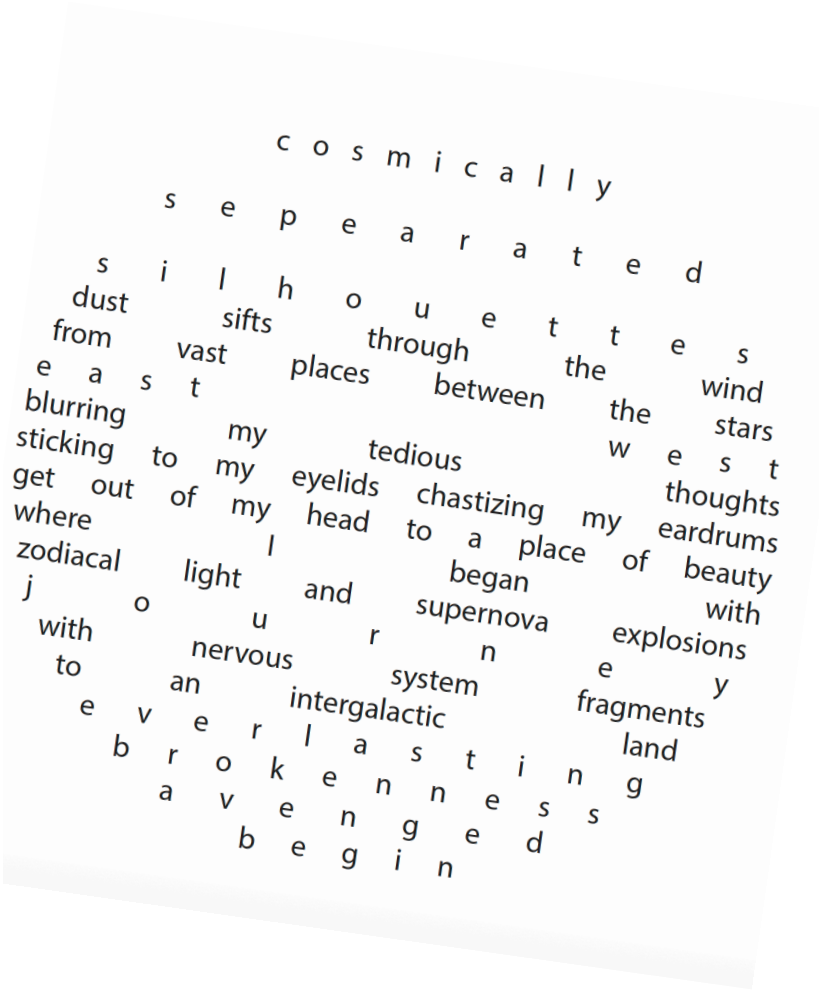
COVID ABCs



PART TWO

FAR AWAY

when and
darkness shrivels recess
shivers in every
when hollow mountain paths lead beyond
wisdom beyond knowledge beyond fear
paths to departures and transgressions
when a crescent moon solves all mysteries and recycles
the rhythms of nature to align lunar goddesses
when our tango turns tomorrow around
w h e n
shadows disguise themselves when the singing stops
when the fullness erodes and frailty creeps into view
under a full moon in the desert
waiting for favor to surround wanting to touch the sky
waiting for anger to walk outside and sit down
wanting shimmers of silver when the bend becomes
the way when chaos is silenced when the
confused arrange the stars
see the tomorrow
to on w h e n horizon

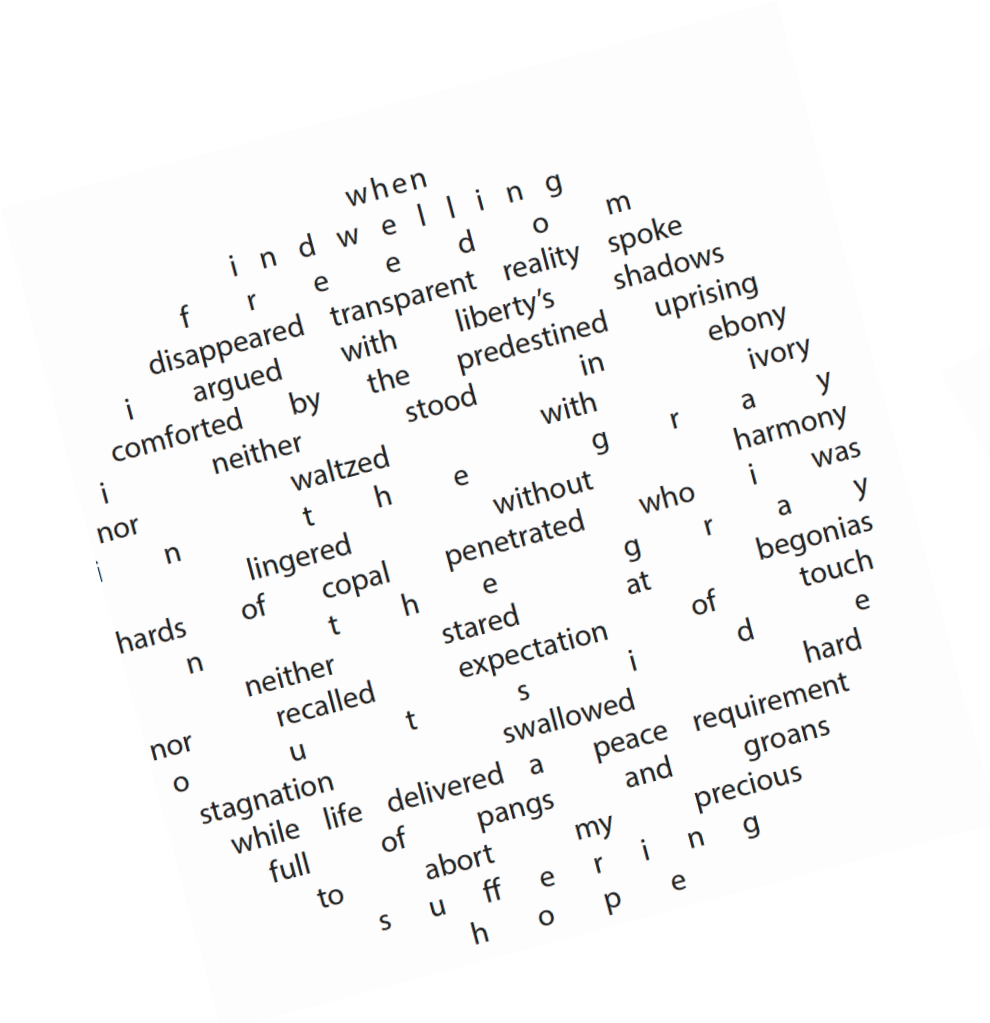

cosmically
separated
silhouettes
dust sifts through the
from vast places between the
east blurring my tedious
sticking to my eyelids chastizing my
get out of my head to a place of
where I began
zodiacal light and supernova
journey with explosions
with nervous system
to an intergalactic fragments
ever land
breaking
avenged
begin



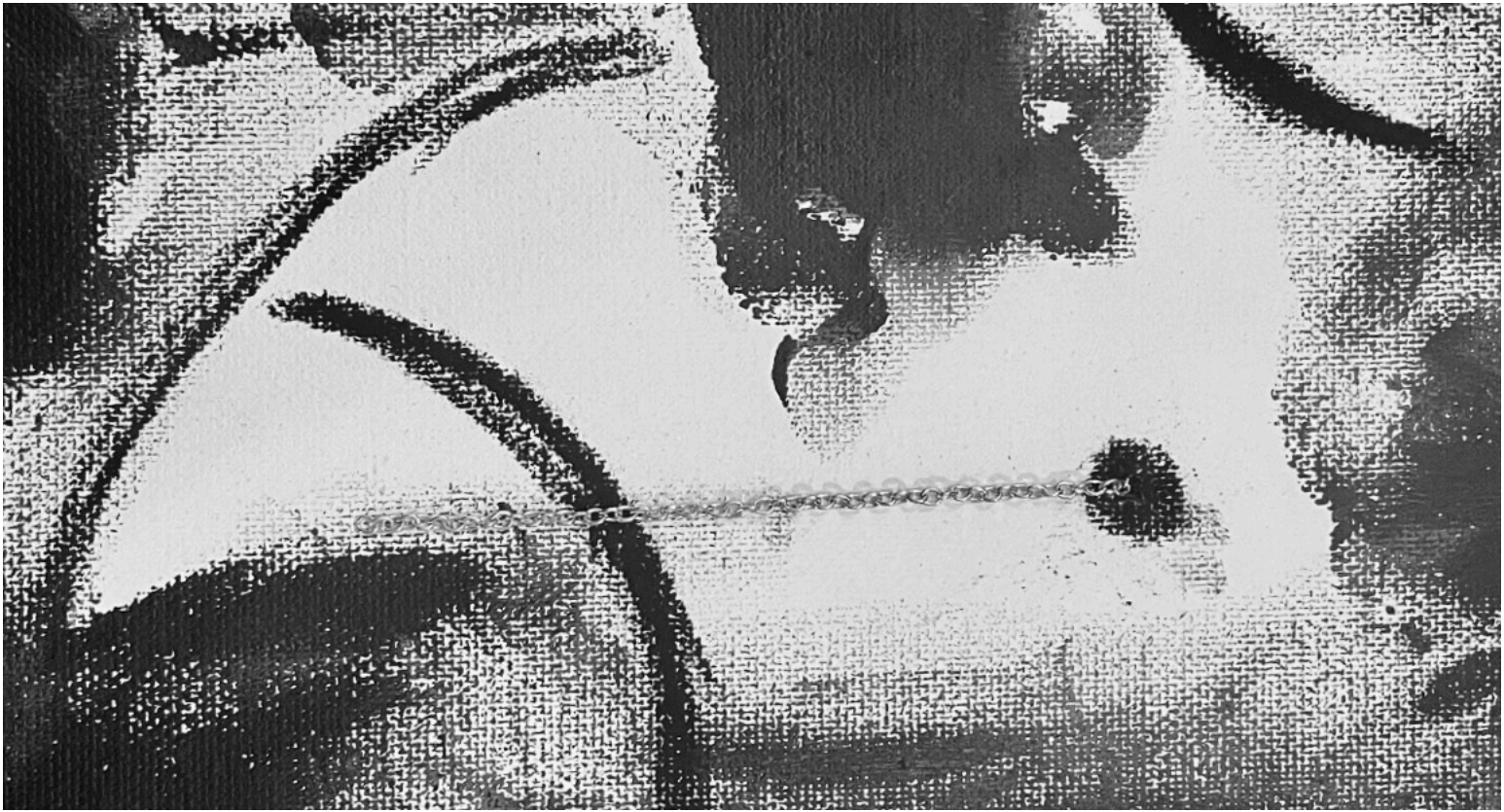
you
left only silence
for me to embrace
i feel so abandoned
my torn out heart is
a product of our love
tender moments we
shared others have
stopped saying your
name told me to move
on but i won't let you
die twice i feel you in
every breath are you in
the sky? i can't touch
the sky but maybe i'll
find a glimpse of you
there

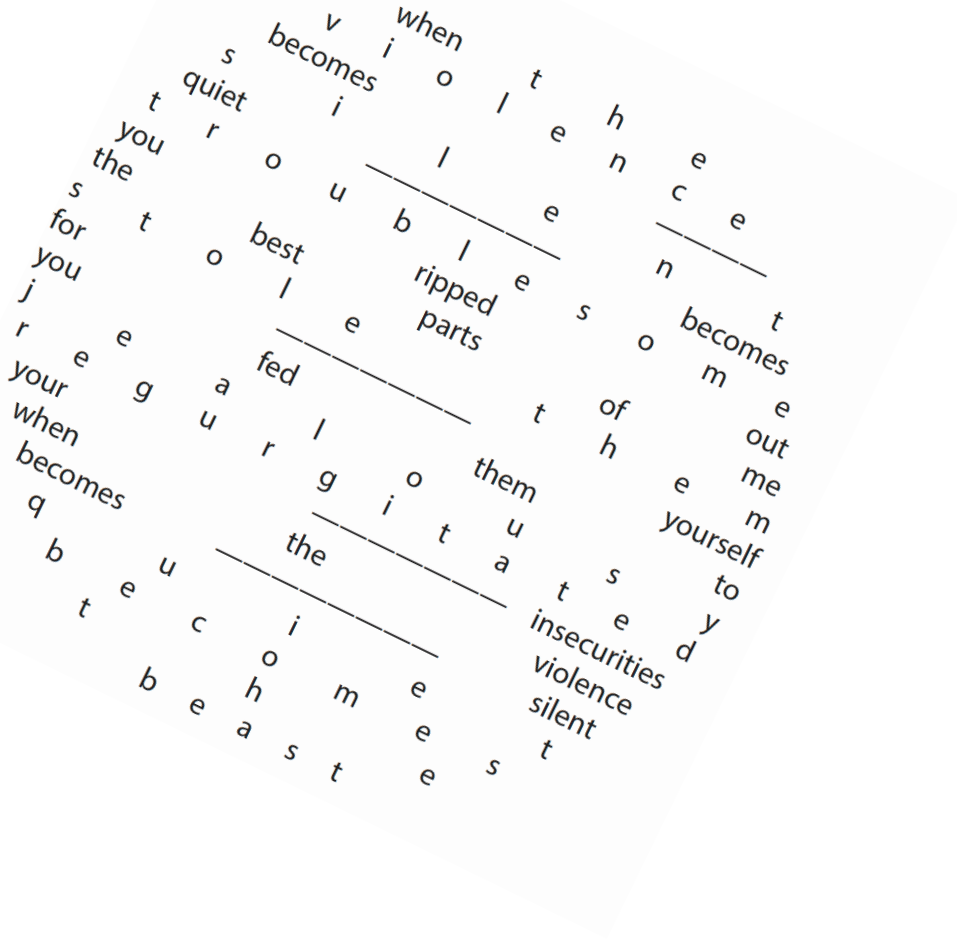


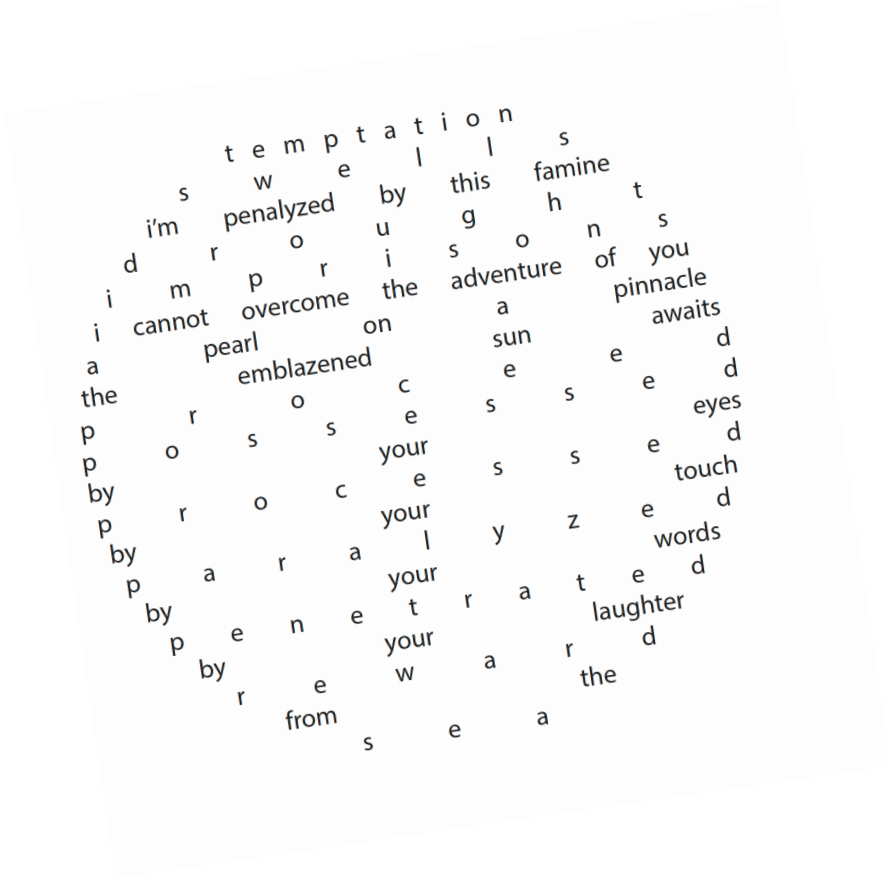


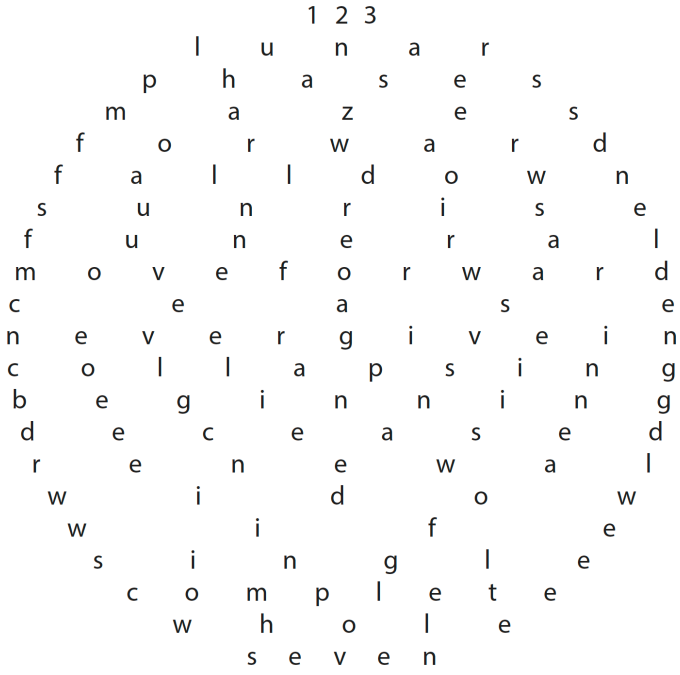

when
i n d w e l l i n g
f r e e d o m
disappeared transparent reality spoke
i argued with liberty's shadows
comforted by the predestined uprising
neither stood in ebony
i waltzed with g r a y ivory
nor t h e harmony
i n lingered without penetrated who i was
hards of copal t h e g r a y
n neither stared at begonias
recalled expectation of touch
nor u t s i d e
o swallowed hard
stagnation while life delivered a peace requirement
full of pangs and groans
to abort my precious
s u ff e r i n g
h o p e

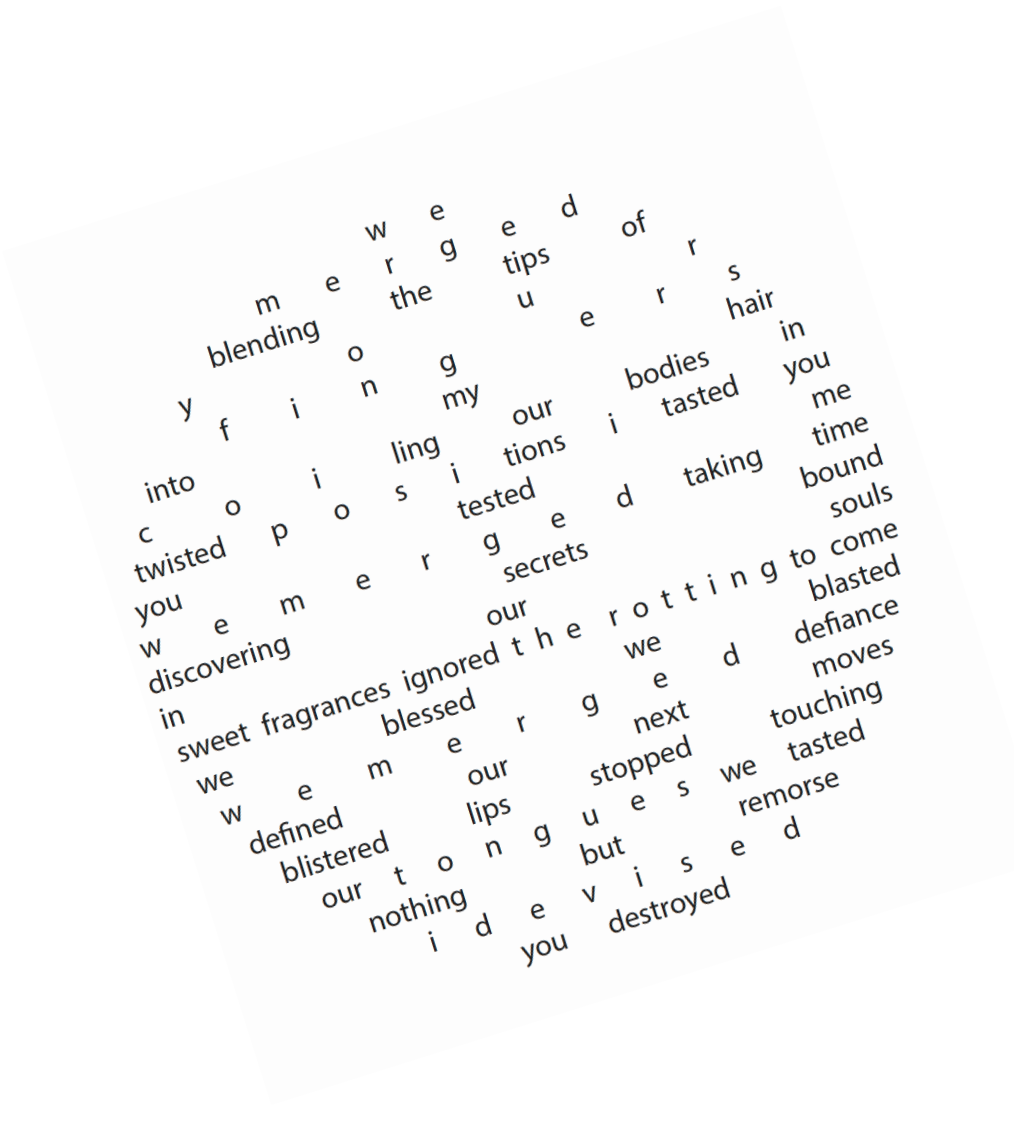
In the e n
g r d accuse
a lovers another
shrewd of love
gift purple platters
one the on seek justice for
wasting them l v e none
handed to and e loving ending
they deride s matrimony of
t h e m spoons e
hating abomination one of heaping m covenant
the out in a of to end
measured h garden r s
s the we v began e the gods
in where o tempting and promises
l convenience deception t u r
of r e in the bellies
with o quiver and passion
t lies that fear s
of l o

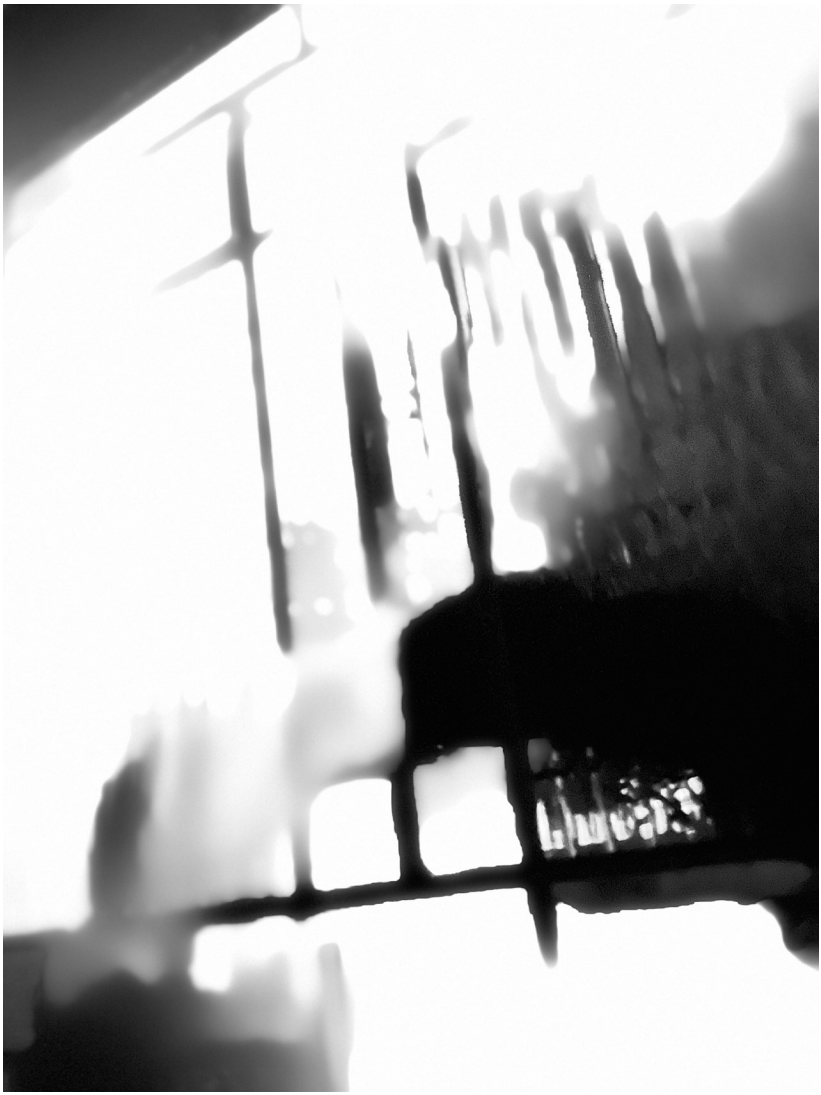


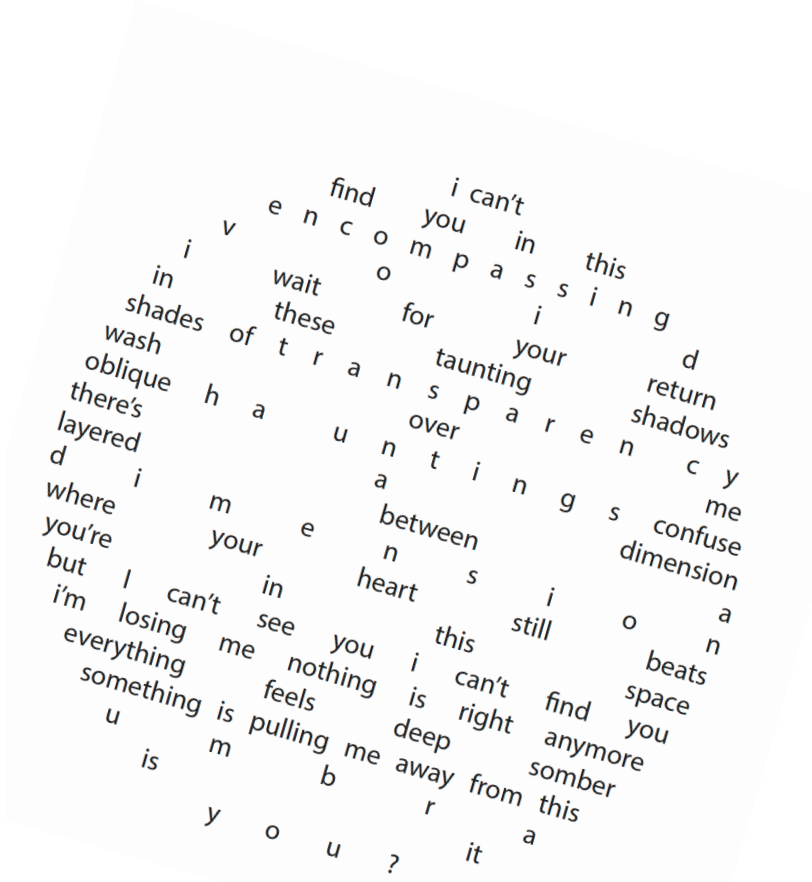

when
violence
becomes
silence
quiet
the
suffocating
for
you
best
ripped
parts
fed
them
the
insecurities
violence
silent


temptation
swell
i'm penalized by this famine
d r o u g h t
i m p r i s o n s
i cannot overcome the adventure of you
pearl on a pinnacle
a emblazened sun awaits
the o c e e d
p r o s s e s s e d eyes
p o s s e d
by your touch
p r o c e s s e d
by your words
p a r a l y z e d
by your laughter
p e n e t r a t e d
by your the
r e a r d
from s e a

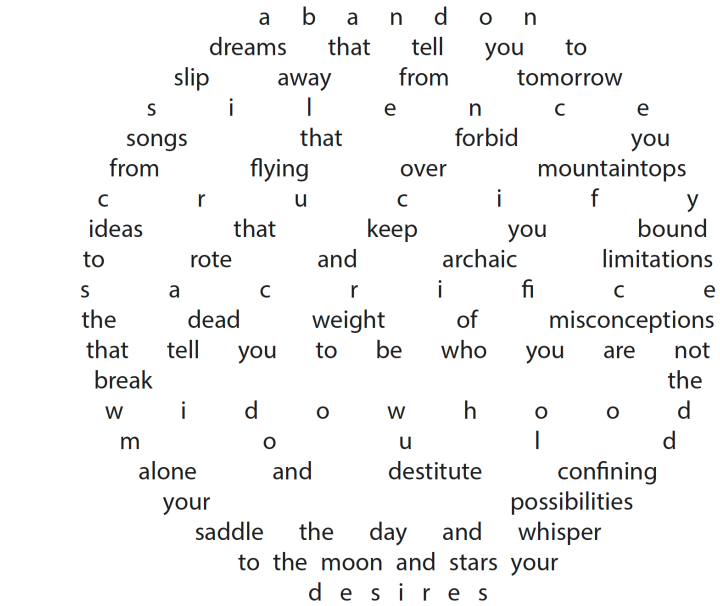

1 2 3
l u n a r
p h a s e s
m a z e s
f o r w a r d
f a l l d o w n
s u n r i s e
f u n e r a l
m o v e f o r w a r d
c e a s e
n e v e r g i v e i n
c o l l a p s i n g
b e g i n n i n g
d e c e a s e d
r e n e w a l
w i d o w
w i f e
s i n g l e
c o m p l e t e
w h o l e
s e v e n


w e e d
m e r g e tips of
blending the u r s
y o u r hair
f i n g
into l i n g my bodies in
c o i l i n g our i tasted you
twisted p o s i t i o n s me
you t e s t e d taking time
w e m e r g e bound
discovering secrets souls
in our r o t t i n g to come
sweet fragrances ignored t h e we blasted
we blessed e d defiance
w e m e r g e next moves
defined our stopped touching
blistered lips u e s we tasted
our t o n g u e but remorse
nothing i d e v i s e d
you destroyed




find i can't
e n c o m p a s s i n g
v you in this
i o
in wait for i
shades of t r a n s p a r e n c y
wash these your d
oblique h a taunting return
there's over shadows
layered u n t i n g s me
d i a between confuse
where m e n s dimension
you're your heart i a
but I can't in still o n
i'm losing see you this beats
everything me nothing i can't find space
something is feels right anymore you
u m pulling me deep somber
is b away from this
r a
y o u ? it

I the
never understood bent" you
words "hell met of your y
until I felt the daily onslaught t employed
until I t a I i revealed
b r u you was back we layers
the vigor me peeled after of wed
to destroy you gathered never around forever
when yourself talked clouds could dark carry us
of the I torrid tomorrow to into accept
we sunrises you poured the pool, gazing aggression
before yet your Will deadly corrosion Your reflection lingers in a r reward enough
the w the death remove
u p taste of d me?


a b a n d o n
dreams that tell you to
slip away from tomorrow
s i l e n c e
songs that forbid you
from flying over mountaintops
c r u c i f y
ideas that keep you bound
to rote and archaic limitations
s a c r i fi c e
the dead weight of misconceptions
that tell you to be who you are not
break the
w i d o w h o o d
m o u l d
alone and destitute confining
your possibilities
saddle the day and whisper
to the moon and stars your
d e s i r e s

How Quietly

how quietly the night heart beats
touch forbidden

how quietly love's corpse shudders
strangers reside

how quietly two hands stop touching red sea departure

how quietly the distance grows
two coffins with skeletal remains

how quietly love shies away
slipping into foreign lands

how quietly we let go of us

HE’S NOT COMING HOME

he’s not coming home

he’s not coming home

he’s not coming home

n ot not not n ot not not n ot

cooooming home coming hooooome

he’s not-t-t-t he’s not-t-t-t he’s not he’s not

coming

hooooome

he’s not coming

hooooome

he’s not com ing

home

he’s not com ing home

he’s not coming home coming home

he’s not coming home

In the Chasm | Inspired by T.S. Eliot | Four Quartets

In the chasm of eternity's emptiness
Something awaits our embrace
A fleeting moment of perpetuity
The beckoning balances of life
Harmonious choirs of transmission

Take my hand, the hand you've taken.
Take tomorrow, take today

White lilies choke the unpreserved
Bulbous fragrant fleur-de-lis
Fantasies of grandeur blossom
Beneath the stifling sun, the trifling moon
A trillion stars gather in our palms

Take my hand, the hand you've taken
Take tomorrow, take today

Forgotten affection wipes the waves
Watches the sunrise turn a page
The absence of yesterday absconds
with today, tomorrow ascends the valley
Void entrances in trances trace beyond

Take my hand, the hand you've taken
Take tomorrow, take today

Silent dimensions shiver apart
Shimmering transmutation quickens
Through reverence, in the genesis
On vibrant blistering sunbeams
Across magnificence itself

Take my hand, the hand you've taken
Take tomorrow, take today

Camouflage and curse words

Rage in the streets

Chaos on wheels

Leather boots and a cowboy hat

Drakkar Noir on my sheets

His hands on my skin

I sense you

I seek you in him

Filling this void

With everything wrong

With everything right

With anything at all

To silence the emptiness

In this loud club

On this dance floor

Papa Wheelie's guitar

His hand on my thigh

His lips on my neck

Filling this void

Do Not Plant Me in the Ground

Rushing down the Rocky Mountains
In warm Chinook Winds
Plunging headfirst into the Nile
In flight with a peregrine falcon
Vivid interruptions of life

Do not plant me in the ground

Beyond shadows where the moon withdraws light
At the edge of a whispers haunt
Sifted into salty breezes and emerald waters
To hold hands with Apollo
And pelicans and monarch butterflies

Do not plant me in the ground

WIDOW FIVE: The Abandoned Mermaid
Holding hands with Matthea Harvey

The Abandoned Mermaid entered a world where she could talk with bears. She read stories to them from her library under the sea. They didn't care that the pages were damp. She explained to one of them, a particularly bright and handsome bear, that she only had half a heart. This confused the bear, and he asked her to explain. She told him a true tale, not one of the fairytales from her vast library. She had known a giant who slept in a loft above the sea. One day, he reached down and scooped her heart out of her chest. The giant ran away with half of her heart and laughed as she wept. She struggled to survive with less. The mermaid was fond of the bear and told him she wanted to love him with her whole heart — but half was with the giant, and she didn't know how to get it back. The bear asked her strange questions: Where do canaries go when dawn dies away? Where do peonies play when light eludes them? Why do the ravens gather? Why do they stare at me? Why are they singing reveille? Does twilight happen when the peonies cry? The bear stopped coming to visit, so the mermaid pulled herself up onto the shore and shimmied her body into the forest in search of him. Her tailfin crushed crunchy leaves and bumped against tree roots as she made her way deeper into the forest. She finally saw the bear in the distance; he was running toward her with bloody paws. He had found the giant in his loft and retrieved the other half of her heart, so she could love him as completely as he loved her. He lifted her into his big bear arms and hurried to get her back to the sea. When her scales felt the water, she knew she was home. The bear begged her to always love him with her whole heart, then returned to the forest. She never saw him again.

VIDEO

A PIECE OF ME



Open Windows

I bent the edges of the sun

without burning my fingertips

I drank from the sea's far corner

without spilling any salt

I walked where palm trees grow upside down

without finding a trace

I climbed the summit of insanity

without knowledge to warn

Rain and wet grass

without jasmine undertones

without the scent of open

windows

VIDEO

WHEN I’M READY

VIDEO

THERE’S NO WAY BACK



VIDEO

SEA OF ASHES



VIDEO

WE COULDN’T SEE THE END



PART THREE

TRANSITIONS

“A PICTURE IS A POEM WITHOUT WORDS.”

— HORACE

