

The Ghost Girl Poems

by

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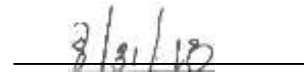
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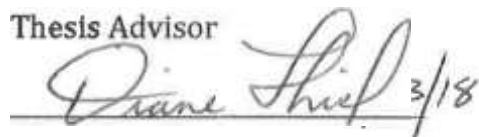
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Nickole Brown



Thesis Advisor



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The Ghost Girl Poems

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Introduction

Seven years ago, the dynamics of my life changed dramatically. My mother died, followed three months later by my wife, Rhonda, from ovarian cancer. My father who slipped into the sad journey of dementia was next. Because of these tragedies, specifically my wife's passing, my relationship and understanding how death becomes an intrinsic part of life became a radical readjustment. Navigating the multiple aspects and layers of grief, and its daily reminder of inveterate pain, became the crux of my existence. This transition was the major conflict in my life; the one left unsolved.

After fifteen months of grief therapy, my therapist transferred to another section of the James Cancer Center. I turned inward in an attempt to survive by the use of compartmentalization, as I had become an instant single parent with a host of responsibilities without any network of support. As Yeats was drawn to poetry as a compensation for the loss of God, I too was drawn to the reading and writing of poetry which took over the prayers that never seemed to be answered and had set me adrift in the human condition. This saved my life, as did the opportunity to attend The Sewanee School of Letters at the University of the South.

The focus of this thesis consists of fifty poems dedicated to my life and marriage to my wife, Rhonda. These poems will include topics of the multifaceted aspects of marriage, change, loss, ritual, guilt, children, forgiveness, truth,

perspective, sorrow, conflict, sexual unity, closeness, awareness, sensuality, denial, recovery, and death's stark reality.

I can only begin to thank the professors who were my teachers, academic guides and mentors during my summers at Sewanee. They allowed me to emerge as a writer whose voice began to take shape via my own poetry.

Charles Martin was well grounded in all the mechanics of craft. He introduced me to contemporary poets, their biographies, and the meaning of their work in historical perspective. His criticism was always focused on making students better writers. He knew the connection between other art forms and poetry and juxtaposed photography with poems in a relationship of intertwining artistic similarities.

Andrew Hudgins helped me to understand every word counts; its poetic substance, word choice was crucial, as well as style. He helped me curb my use of archaic language. His gritty sense of humor and real life situations related to the southern experience and provided the realization that poetry lives everywhere in the everyday interaction of human beings as they are seen through the poetic lens.

Daniel Anderson wrote rhythmic verse and pulled the reader into the detail of any scene using fresh perspective where he probed the nuances of the common experience and wrote vivid descriptions leaping from the page to fortify the reader's imagination. He brought the works of contemporary poets

like Frost and Bishop to life by his thorough knowledge of craft and was gifted in bringing clarity to understanding.

Diane Thiel influenced me deeply by her personality and her authentic teaching style. Her numerous books on creative writing constituted the blueprints for creative thought in a clear student-oriented style, as well as the purity of craft.

Her classroom discussions included the interjection of art, and the opportunity she gave students to express their written pieces led them to find their own voice and rhythm. She enhanced the opportunity to make personal experience fit into the style and format best suited for student expression. Her two volumes of poetry, *Resistance Fantasies* and *Echolocations* remain examples of deeply meaningful poetry, as well as her book *The White Horse: A Columbian Journey*.

Chris Bachelder and Barbara Black were literature teachers who fortified the academic discipline in reading with an acute eye for meaning. They brought to life the characters and their actions as examples of literary masterpieces by the use of novels, novellas and short stories illustrating the excellence of craft in their genre. Many aspects of their instruction carried over to the interjection of poetic craft.

Nickole Brown was invaluable as a poet, advisor, and mentor. She was an excellent teacher who cared about her students and the writing of good poetry over all. Her editing skills were flawless; her use of language was

beyond reproach. She impressed upon her students that writing was a demanding business not to be taken lightly for those who pursue its impact as an art form. She emphasized craft and form, grammar, and correct usage. These aspects of discipline transformed my poetry. She emphasized word choice, clarity, and the avoidance of abstract writing that may confuse the reader, and she was an expert at paring down extraneous writing. She had a penchant for “saying it plain” and always advised to keep the reader in mind and to always look at things anew. She was an invaluable instructor who infused an honest, authentic personality to her instruction while emphasizing the importance of belonging to a community of writers. She forged a deep sense of accomplishment for any student who was fortunate enough to be one of her own.

Another aspect of my thesis was learning from poets who had ventured into themes I pursued. The following authors and their books, as well as authors and their individual poems, had a formative impact on my poetry. This list is not inclusive, but their vision helped fortify mine. They are Stephen Dunn’s *Walking the Light*, Jack Gilbert’s *The Great Fire*, Taije Silver’s *Houses are Fields*, Larry Levis’ *Winter Stars*, Nick Flynn’s *Some Ether*. Edward Hirsch’s *Gabriel: A Poem*, Aldenen Nowland’s “Canadian Love Song,” Tracy Ryan’s “Bite,” Salima Hill’s “Desire’s a Desire,” C. K. Williams’ “Love: Beginnings,” Sharon Old’s “Last Night,” and “True Love,” W.H. Auden’s “Ecstasy,” “Funeral Blues,” and “Lullaby,” Jo Shapcott’s

“Muse,” David Constantine’s “As Our Blood Separates,” Judith Wright’s “Woman to Man,” Meg Bateman’s “Lightness,” Thomas Blackburn’s “Now Light Congeals,” Phillip Larkin’s “Aubade,” Jaan Kaplinski’s “Death Does Not Come From Outside,” Anonymous, “Do Not Stand at My Grave and Weep,” Pam Gillian’s “Four Years,” Jeanne Willis’ “Inside Our Dreams,” Theodore Roethke’s “She,” Pablo Neruda’s “Dead Woman,” Tess Gallagher’s “Yes,” Louise Gluck’s “Wild Iris,” Charles Burkowski’s “My Garden,” “Wasted,” “A Vote for the Gentle Light,” “Be Alone,” “The Singer,” “Stick With It,” “Roll the Dice,” “In this Place,” “ for Jane,” “For Jane: With All the Love I Had, Which was Not Enough,” and “I Taste Ashes of Your Death,” C. Dale Young, “Precatio Simplex,” and Nickole Brown’s “The Dead.”

Besides the impact of the above writings, I reread all of Rilke. The real transformation, most importantly, was when I discovered the writings of the poet Galway Kinnell. He changed my focus in a major way. His book *The Essential Rilke* was the beginning. Galway Kinnell seemed to be the poet I was looking for who provided the style, the communication with nature’s forces and simplicity, and, most importantly, the concept of death as an intricate part of life’s understanding, the dealing with sadness, and the phenomenon that loss requires a critical focus on the vitality of the world missed by so many before it is too late. I am still reading his fifteen books. Sadly, he was a personal discovery, and a poet I would have been more than

eager to have been taught. His poem that ignited it all for me and relates to my thesis is “Guillaume de Lorris.”

In my own work, the search for the right image and setting, as well as the encapsulated story within the content of the poem, make up the crucial components. I attempted to portray these aspects in the following poems: “Normandy Beach,” “The Blue Hour,” “The Last Iris,” “The Last Song of Chemotherapy,” “Ghost Girl,” “Winter Beach,” “My Boys of Summer,” and “Cloud Sculptures After Midnight.”

Putting a collection of poems together demanded the “going back” and reliving some very painful times; it was not an easy task. My advisor, Nikole Brown, was instrumental in supporting me during the times when I had more questions than answers. I often weakened when I had to relive some of the traumatic events. There were times I felt like walking away from the project that seemed to be taking on a life of its own. My intention was that whoever read this thesis would not assume it was too heavily laced with sentimentality. To delve into the looking and writing about traumatic experiences anew had little to do with being sentimental. The enlightenment of new emotions was supplemental to the ones that almost ruined my life. By turning them into powerful words and lines with the impact I had imagined, I wanted to create a forceful thrust and artistic endeavor.

In the future, I plan to publish poems as well as other writings. I plan to travel extensively to different locales and expose myself to different relationships and culture that will hopefully find a place within my poems.

Dedication

Rhonda Renee Dodrill (1956-2011)

“I try to keep time still by stitching even small moments to the page,
and more than once, I dare the dead to come, to sit beside me and speak again,
whispering their names...”

Nikole Brown

Awakening

Monday, 6:00 a.m.,

hard rain is sounding

like flung pebbles

against the window pane.

The glass is cracked in gossamer

lines, refined and thin, escaping

across the surface of glass as if

they fled in flight, but intricate

in their design.

For a few seconds, I mused on

how she smelled like rain when

she passed me on the stairs, where

I hoped for a moment's resolve to

speak but lost the words like sunken

stones.

If only I could watch her sleeping, held

by the petals of her colored sheets,

caressing her like a closed flower before

the sun's silent eye holds its radiant gaze.

My seconds are treasure in our

intertwining of limbs, lost in a tangle of

gratifications's awe, before the world's

awakening call.

Liquid Stars

I lie in bed watching you gaze
at distant stars shimmering
in the night's timeless mystery.

The summer night has cloaked
the village in silence that is clear
and still. We are guests at the Inn
in the village of Oberammergau.

You stand statuesque by the open
window.

I marvel at the smoothness of your
back and slip out from the comforter
to kneel behind you, raising your
nightgown to your waist. I whisper to
you not to take your eyes away from
the stars; surprised, you obey and hold
your place gripping the window sill. I
drink your warm nectar, your liquid
stars, until I feel the sudden quiver,
an angel's wing, losing myself in a

galaxy that is only ours.

Yellow Nectarine

I cup your smoothness
in my hands and press
my thumbs across the
delicate design of skin,
taut and divided by a
slender straight line, an
indentation running top
to bottom in colors of
pink and puce; this is
simply measured equally
in fleshy halves divided
as if sliced by a surgeon's
blade. Then the line stops
at a small nub, remnants
of a sunken stem, chosen by
a harvest hand to eventually
bless the mouths of men.

Distance

I watch the rain's assault on the van's windows as
it slices the night.

It has been a cramped flight from LA to Beijing
and now I find myself on the way to a hotel situated
in the city's center.

I am exhausted after a twenty hour flight.

I squint at the female
official making her way down the aisle collecting the
blue stack of passports
as if they were sacred lotus blossoms to be eaten.

I hand my papers to the red star
automaton; her dark eyes make no contact with
my face as my identity is
placed in a hand the color of wheat.

My stomach starts to turn,
and I feel like a child lost with no recognition of
the familiar,
soon to be one of the eighteen million who navigate
the sprawling city.

Angst creeps into my thoughts as I listen to the wipers

beat a cadence

of rubber slaps against the windshield.

“Why have I come this far from her?”

I thumb the Mandarin phrase book realizing I
can't remember the words.

I thought I had them memorized, but they vanished.

I hold her picture in my hand and miss her this night.

The dull ache of loneliness brings pain to the base
of my skull.

My temples throb in unison, and the smell of wet grass
fills the van.

There are thousands of miles dividing us this night,
and I wish

I could temper my flaws that do nothing but divide our
lives.

I can't figure out why I wander so far from the one
who means the most to me
when distance could be conquered by the closeness of her
skin that was always there
for me to behold.

Walls

I have seen many walls of the world,
the monuments that form barriers
that divide the differences of men.
The remnants of Hadrian's Wall that
took thirty million stones to build in
a mere decades's time. I have seen the
uneven bricks of the Warsaw Ghetto
Wall that formed the prison for those
withered souls before Treblinka was
to be their end. I stuck a prayer in a
fissure of Jerusalem's Wailing Wall,
standing next to pious men rocking
in prayer. I have walked the path of
China's serpentine Great Wall from a
dynasty past; I witnessed the fall of the
Berlin Wall when the concrete scar
came down to blend Berliners from their
separated lives. But the most formidable
wall is the one surrounding my heart,
isolating me from human touch and

ensuring we were destined to grow
apart, victimized by the fortress
of the heart's dimming beat.

Apology

You had me when you
tugged on my shirt sleeve,
and whispered that you
“owed me an apology.”
“You owe me nothing,”
I replied as I peered into
eyes of fathomless blue,
so deep in pools of secrets,
and I realized too late
I had already drowned in
your mystery in the brevity
it took to merely blink.

This Be the Curse

I hope my children never read Philip Larkin's poem entitled, "This Be the Verse," for I have tried my hardest in these tough days of single parenting to try to get my children to see the light that truth depends on teaching them we all possess those indelible flaws that come along with being human, and it is inevitable to the condition to make those mistakes that may appear at the time to be worse than they really are. As the household head, we all deserve the chance to live and learn by our errors, and it was never my intention to "fuck you up" because all my children began as miracles of love, but time transforms everyone, and soon it will be their turn to make decisions for the innocent in hopes that time won't be a curse.

Snake in the Bathtub

I remember hearing the screams from where
I stood at the bottom of the staircase and
bolted to the top of the stairs as they continued.
My wife stood paralyzed in the bathroom, unable
to move, clutching her blouse above her heart,
while gasping in wild breaths of fear. Her eyes
blazed with panic, and she finally pointed at the shower
curtain. I yanked it sideways and I too jumped back!
I saw a coiled snake with fangs exposed from a rose
colored cathedral of menacing mouth. Its eyes fixated
in slanted sards. It took some probing seconds before
I realized it had been posed. Her fool brother in a
twisted plot with my mother-in-law, and with her father's
consent, didn't see the harm in igniting my wife's
lifetime battle with herpetophobia. I raised my voice in
accusation as I heard all three cackling in demented glee.
I flung the snake in its noose-like spring to the bottom of
the stairs in a fleshly thud. They glared at me with hostile
eyes, unable to contain their stifled laughter at the expense
of my wife's sobs.

I knew I wanted them gone from my house as they basked in their country ignorance. It was hard for me to conceive that my wife shared their genes or penchant for such overt cruelty that coursed through the veins of people as these who relished such glee from my wife's tormented freeze and their production of such unnecessary stupidity of heathenized jest.

My Boys of Summer

When I passed the closet door where the athletic equipment was stored and recognized the distinct smell of the summer of my youth and of my boys. It wafted from the closet's depth, the distinct presence of oiled gloves, the dust caked cleats, and metallic scent of aluminum bats stacked in the corner like rifles from a distant war. I forced the door and let my eyes adjust to the pile of gear in a pyramid of artifacts from summers of competitive bliss. Hooks held sagging jerseys with team names and numbers, a basket of crumpled hats had seen better days before the sweat stains; there was an album of teams and cheering fans during playoff games beneath the intensity of an unforgiving sun. My boys, like others their age, had migrated to the diamonds to exhibit their skills, where for just a few innings individual feats became the seeds of memories of glory days and the smiles of watching mothers became etched in stone. These were the moments of focus that reigned supreme, with every pitcher's twitch, the smack of leather and ball

in the grasp of a catcher's mitt, the bellow of the umpire's call that ended in trophies where the symbols of winning above all else left some in tears and others to rejoice.

When those innings came to cessation their lives had changed into other competitions. Chipper Jones no longer seemed so brave in a world of diamond gods who could do no wrong. Much like the closet harboring the dreams of forgotten gear, those diamonds would never display the fire they did in the glare of the July sun when just the thrill of a bat's crack made everyone's blood run until the stands emptied and those shared summer seconds became the memories of the boys' rite of passage that helped make them who they are.

Normandy Beach

We followed the walkway bordered by
the sea grass bending in the ocean breeze.
My son held my hand and said, "It's too cold
for history," as he eyed the beach below.
I disagreed but paused to rub his hands as he
laughed in surprise, "It will warm up when
the sun rises to greet us!" as the walkway ended.
There they stood, white crosses chiseled with
the names of the fallen sacrificed on the D-Day
dawn when the sands had names like Sword, Juno,
and Omaha. I saw the uneasiness eclipse my son's
face. "Why are these crosses here? There are so
many!" "Thousands gave their lives to free France."
"Where are they now?" he softly asked. "Beneath
those stars and crosses." His eyes widened, his
hand slid from mine as if he were suddenly in pain,
he turned and ran down the way we came. He jerked
his neck in my direction and let his admonishment be
known. "There are dead people under those crosses!
Why did you make me see them without warning
me?" Running fast, he looked for my wife at the far end

of the walkway's start. Tears ran down his cheeks. She raised her face, a frowning mask, and stretched out her arms in a "why?" She mouthed the words that sting.

I turned my back and rushed down the safe decline and took refuge behind a dune and sat down listening to the heaviness of my breath. I gazed into the horizon where the shape of clouds had begun to move in like Higgins' craft toward the beach. The foam-tipped waves slid upon the shore like liquid fingers attempting to dig in.

I closed my eyes and imagined them turning pink from all the floating boys, dead in seconds, cut down before they ever got to shore. In those seconds I heard the wailing cries of mothers and sweethearts on their knees in convulsive sobs while they clutched those yellow telegrams, listening to the footfalls head up the walk, having no chance to ever say goodbye.

Cerulean

I won't chase after the tow-headed child

consumed in high pitched laughter.

She escapes in a streak taunting the startled gulls

that react with raucous screams to a child's delight,

who has become the wonder of the ocean shoals.

She leaves her footprints in the shifting sands erased

by each encroaching wave. She is held in the caress

of the ocean breeze, my golden daughter of summer's kiss.

How long will it take for time to guide her through the

changes? When will her glee no longer resonate? When will

she finally succumb to the power of the siren's song and

the child I adored be a woman gone?

Iron Angel

I hope when it becomes my time I can muster
the courage you displayed even though your
family turned your death into a circus of tragedy,
with your mother violating everything you wished
for in our will. The voices blared from the speakers,
the flashing lights of code blue response blinking in
a strobe of disco horror to signify the end. The doctors
and nurses with their tubes and machines, scrambling
to revive you in front of the contorted faces full of fear,
no child should ever have to bear. The doctor looked
into the distance as if to excuse herself from the paradox
taking place and the chaos that was now unleashed.
But, your heart lost its will to beat and surrendered
to the silent sepsis seep, freeing you from pain's grasp.

I felt I was bleeding out, and the meaning of life had
begun to fade as the background sobs were the only chorus
for the decisions made, and I was well aware
I would never be able to breathe the same. A piece of me met
its demise in this night of loss; it could never be revived.

Conversation with our Daughter

I call our daughter every Friday to wish her well.

She is eight months pregnant, and I wish like never before that you could be here for this special day.

Your last words still ring in my ears, “You must take care of your children.”

I have laden thoughts on your birthday.

They vex me all day as it used to be celebrated;

now it turns into sadness for your absence. I

wait for the ringing to cease to hear the voice

of my daughter. Her tone is soft and she hints she

hasn't been feeling well. I apologized

and spoke, “Mom's birthday always brings me

back to sadder times; it does not make me feel

the way it did when she was still alive.” There

were seconds the silence became palpable.

Then she snapped, “You know it affects me, too!

You are not the only one who misses her!” I

was struck by her hard honesty, but she was

right. Grief moves like obscuring fog, and there

is no sole ownership of loss. I needed to feel that

sting of awareness that never seems to be too far from leaving its indelible mark.

The Last Song of Chemotherapy

We languish in a room of the doomed
and watch together as the clear liquid
slides through the tubes and drips its
toxins into the network of your heart.

We speak in soft tones about the common
things, the moments of daily lives, free
from the ravages of terminal disease.

The unfortunates around us recline in
different states of denial, but all know
the curse of the crab of cancer's will.

There is the pall of resistance from all
these women confined to machines who
either close their eyes or solemnly stare
into the depths of timeless space. They
cling to that flicker of hope and ignore
that caustic moment of surrender. They
focus on the fat bags on poles that
help prolong their demise. They appear
like wounded sculptures of the women
they used to be. Now they are the extras

in the fourth stage theater of wait and see.

My wife always loved to go barefoot and has kicked her sandals to the floor. I bend over to replace them next to her chair with their soles turned upward. Suddenly, a woman from India scurries toward us and places her hand on my shoulder and smiles widely with the acclaim of a fortune teller. “It’s bad luck to place her shoes like that?” She grasps them and turns the soles face down and returns to her chair. I glance at my wife as she slowly closes her eyes to the intervention. A group of nurses coming through the doors fan the chemical smells. The head nurse addresses our group and cajoles us with understanding. The second wave of chemical stench burns my nasal passages and enters my mouth where my tongue recoils from the surge of toxic taste. I twist my neck to avoid the unpleasant rush. My wife says she is feeling cold while I am warm. I leave to locate a blanket as I listen to her last request. “I need to sleep for just a little while.”

I walk down the stairs and notice a child at play
in daycare. Her laughter reaches me and I stop
to listen. I think about how much I love the sound
of my wife's laughter which is sacred music to my ears,
infectious, real, and spontaneously pure. I am torn
with the realization her laughter is now gone from
our lives. Desperation stabs me in a sense of
panic of the possibility her music will escape
into the depths of terminal silence, lost to me and
to those who knew her voice, now replaced by the
monotonous drips of chemotherapy's last song.

The Ax

When my wife's fate consisted of those stagnant hours
that ate her days where her flesh seemed to melt away.
Her eyes no longer the color of the sea, but stones of
pain that could no longer see the future. Her bed was
positioned so she could look out her window at the tree
where once the leaves turned a vivid red, but now it stood
in a gnarled stance of rotting wood, a dark sentinel for
the autumn rains. The disease had taken over, root rot turned
its hard bark to soft pulp, a haunted scaffolding of decay.

I stood at her window and decided I could not let her see
something so near to death. My mother-in-law stirred
in the kitchen downstairs, and I glanced at her on the way to
the garage. I took the ax from the wall and swung it in an
arc of attack against the demons who had come to stay, the
ones I was determined to slay in combat that afternoon.

I slammed the blade into the tree as if it were responsible
for the disease that had made its way into our lives. The blade
cut deep into the bark where chips and shards began

to fly. The thud of contact of steel to wood sounded through the hours until only the trunk stood, a stark totem of ruin permeating the autumn air, yet now a splintered crown.

I leaned against the ax and felt the pain from my hands throbbing in a bloom of blisters that forced their attention.

I dropped the ax and looked upward toward her window.

Within the frame I locked eyes with my mother-in-law's disapproving glare and saw her no differently than if she had been the tree.

With Her

Rhonda is sparing with death downstairs.

The couch, the confines of her world.

It is quiet now; her parents have climbed
the stairs to retreat to the comfort of their
beds, and I recline on the floor next to my
wife to be there if she needs help in the night.

I have become accustomed to her faint sounds
when she needs water. If she must relieve herself,
it becomes a struggle to move her dead weight to
the bathroom only a few feet away. She holds
my hand as she sits, so she doesn't collapse on the
floor, unable to control her weakness. It seems odd
that I focus on the contours of her feet, thinking of
the serenity of children listening to the sound of rain
playing perfect music as it hits the bottom of a bucket,
and my heart is as helpless as mewls from kittens
tossed from a bridge to the dark waters rushing
through the confines of a burlap veil.

Lady of the Birches

I dreamed your pale
and pensive face as
you peered at me
through the slender
branches. You held
fast and did not break
away from my eyes.

But you started to
fade and blend with
the black and white
patterns of the limbs.

I was naked inside
with fear as I knew
snow would fall
harder, the flakes
fell fast because of
weight and whirled
in blinding circles
sticking to your hair,

forming a crown of
crystals. I saw the
loneliness emitted
from your eyes, and
no words came from
the winter of your lips
as they parted to release
a silent plume of breath
before you vanished
into silence.

Tolstoy's Grasp

"Is death really light?" The words of Tolstoy moved me mysteriously in his spell. For I had watched you die in agony that no morphine could ever quell when you finally slipped away from death's dark kiss.

I could see the movement of the instructor's lips as the class continued to discuss the final scene. I raised my hand to speak, but my throat began to close as if invisible fingers were determined to silence my words before they could be heard. In my mind I heard your whisper, "Stop talking, they won't be able to understand if they haven't witnessed death first hand ." I dropped my arm and flipped the cover shut. For it had been the opposite for me. Where darkness creeps in all its sinister delight to eclipse life's confusion, death itself could never light that candle for such an understood conclusion.

Touch

People have no idea that when
you left forever that you took
the pleasure of touch that meant
so much to me. You vanished to a
celestial world and left me alone
to muse about the lucky ones who
still can walk hand-in-hand or share
spontaneous kisses when they could
care less if they are observed, or if a
sudden downpour forces others to
flee for shelter when it is so evident
that touching each other provides all
the warmth needed to ever feel alive.

We poor bastards who have been left
behind know intrinsically the loss of
wealth of feeling that has led us to
experience the true poverty of heart,
and mourn for the magic fingers, those
delicate keys that turned with tangible
ecstasy of those simple pleasures now

changed in a altered eluvium of time.

Rhonda Renee

Is she more viable because her presence
has been dissolved into time's Rilkean speck?

Is her absence more intense because
her skin was the pink of flowers?

A beacon of light whose radiance
can no longer warm the universe.

Rhonda said, "The lavender you planted
has kept me from sleep because of its scent
floating through our window and like the
sound of the bees' orchestra urges me to sing."

Night Thunder

I lie awake listening to the sound of the angry storm.

The thunderous claps boom like artillery in the black orchestra of night.

We earthly creatures cringe at bolts striking our deepest fears resonate with every lemon slash across the heaven's changing face when the sinister clouds roll into bury us.

My dog burrows deep in the crook of my arm searching my face for a few seconds of relief from uncertainty.

I embrace her to stop her shivers of fear.

My thoughts drift to when warmth was yours when we made love during a storm where fear changed into intimacy.

We listened to the surge of the driving rain, the susurrations of twisting leaves, and the cadence of liquid beats, everything joined in obedience to quell nature's powerful hand.

We gazed through the window as lightning streaked in duels.

We became melded, naked performers of the tempest's rage that left us smoldering with spent desire.

The Woman who Loved the Crows

Anneliese lived down the street for nearly forty years.

When she was young she lived in Germany during the time when Hitler made the hearts dark for millions with his scourge. She survived the carnage and became a war bride and left for America to start a new life in a brick house on our peaceful street. In her front yard grows a giant maple, towering into the sky with thick limbs.

It is the kingdom for the crows who claim it as their own.

The crows are large and one can hear their unison of caws across the sky or when they stand guard from their retreat to observe the business of the street. They patrol in murder formation to attack the red-tailed hawks to control their hold on territory and litter the ground with their torn feathers, the result of battles that abound. Anneliese loves the crows and feeds them as she mimics their caws and gesticulates her arms as if they were her flapping wings.

The neighbors complain because the dogs rush to scarf the food she leaves for the crows. Her crow-talk frightens the children as

they grasp each other's hands and run to their awaiting mothers who don't understand. As I walked down the street, I saw a child sail past me yelling that, "The witch is doing it again!" Doors close and laughter of the children fades. I know differently. Anneliese is a sweet woman who merely loves the crows. We became closer when she weakly waved as she saw me standing in my yard as an ambulance took her husband away for the last time and left her alone.

Loneliness has made her age with pain and confusion over the responsibilities her husband had always made sure were done. She confessed to me she knew what strength it took to go forward in the wake of my wife's death seven years ago, and only now does she realize how devastating loneliness is to the one left behind. She used to watch my wife from her window when she put our little dog inside the lapel of her coat to protect her from the winds when the weather had become cold. She had saved the funeral clippings from the paper and said she missed seeing her most of all. It was Christmas time and I bought her a bottle of German wine from the corner store. When I returned the crows were in full concert and my sudden presence startled them as they lifted in flight from their branches in a cascade of sparkling dust cawing loudly at the sudden intrusion, their smart eyes watching my every move.

The Last Iris

You referred to it as your secret garden,
even though it was just the backyard. It
was your sanctuary, a kingdom free from the
stress of those gnawing tasks so often
postponed from the rituals of a working life
that knew no personal boundaries. It was
a space free from contempt where you could
shut the gate on the unmitigated noise of the
world.

After you died, I couldn't enter your domain.
I only ventured there once after the funeral
where I wandered through the flower beds,
pulling up the flowers by their roots. There
would no longer be the hues of yellow, corn
flower blues, vivid reds or purples. I wanted
all traces gone as I filled the summer air with
the acrid stench of a weed killer's finality.

I locked the gate and left it to the weeds and

English ivy to replace what I had done in anger.
The rains returned with a winter's curse which
seemed to know when yards were not attended.
I figured everything would take its course of
becoming overgrown in the scar tissue of time.
Two years passed, when I reentered the yard, the
beds remained dung brown while thistles adorned
the dirt like so many discarded crowns. Then I
stopped where I stood. A single iris had flourished
where the other flowers ceased to be.

The iris drooped in its regal purple staring directly
at me, its deep beauty haunting in its solidarity with
the summer's growth of debris, a beauty
frightening in its isolated renewal of singularity.
I remained still and silent and then turned to leave,
but glanced once more in a moment of gratitude
for the iris in its stance of silent reprieve.

Stones Under Stars

In the winter, I used to place roses on the bench
before the brass plaque that bears your name. This
year, I watched the wind steal one of the petals and
turn it into a wing of a garnet butterfly before it
vanished from my sight. These roses seemed as if
they were about to weep because of their fate of
quickly wilting into black from their plush red.
I wanted to leave something that would remain.

I thought how we had walked along the shore of
the Outer Banks and collected white stones that
had shone in the aftermath of the receding waves.
We collected these stones as the powerful spray hit
the rocks and showered us. We looked to the sky
of the Carolina dusk as you pointed to the dark
silhouettes of the island's horses whose shadows
vanished beyond the dunes and left us in our sanctuary.

Now when I come to visit, I place one of the smooth
stones for the light to find, hoping, perhaps, for a second's

unclear glimmer, that it would reach you in your distant paradise
where it would remind you of another time shared under
the sanctity of the silent stars.

The Search

I walked beside the cemetery wall.
The chiseled names in silent rows
of lichen decorated tombs of the
deceased, buried deep beneath an
expansive sky. The markers, some
large, others small, provided a sense
of sanctuary from the souging trees.
Few visitors can be seen.

When my wife died of cancer and I was
left to sift through her personal things,
I wanted to find something written about
me in her personal hand. There had to be
a hidden note, sacred remarks unknown,
her guarded cursive about special loves,
or memories of passion's quest revealed in
a secret drawer, the traces of intimacy that
had changed with the passing of years that
caused familiarity's drain.

I checked the pockets of her coats which

revealed her grocery list, concert stubs,
dry cleaning slips, teacher memos, her tasks
to do. There came no moment of surprise or
any sudden epiphany, but there was nothing
revealing found, nothing, not even my name.

Paper Trail

In my bedroom there is a cardboard box
full of papers from the memories of your
life. It is square and heavy in its silence,
but inside there is a puzzle of questions
that weave a fabric telling who you were.

Inside there is a paper trail of your life,
the children's Mother's Day cards
that celebrated you that lay in the shrouds
of colored envelopes, those college
acceptances that included a Baptist college
in rural Tennessee before I even knew you
breathed. There are my cards from birthdays
that reaffirmed my love, the pulp medical
prescriptions, the enormous cost of dying,
the messages from high school boyfriends
and articles about middle school and cheer
leader events. Honor Rolls, postcards from
Berlin during those exciting days, recipes
left to obscurity, prom pictures, and faculty

telephone numbers, just to name a few.

I can't remove the box from its resting place
or burn the papers until ashes fly, for my
plight is to never forget the woman who
became my wife, the mother of my children,
who now resides inside my heart where still
there is not a night where devotion doesn't
thrive.

The Prussian Vase

You lie still in the last hours of your life,
turning on your side to search for my face
and whisper, “I worry about what happens to all my
things when I am gone; please take care of them.”

My mother had given her a gift of Prussian teacups
that belonged to her grandmother, white porcelain
decorated with pink roses on a green background
stamped with the word “Prussia” on their base.

My wife researched the pattern and purchased a
vase of matching design and said how meaningful
it was to her. It adorned the top of the sideboard.

After her death, the vase never moved from the
resting space where it was placed. I was lost
in thought when I rushed through the doorway
and bumped hard into the sideboard with force.

The vase burst into small shards on impact with
the floor, sending small pieces in all directions. I
stood staring silently then reaching for the pieces.

My eyes began to well as I swept up the remnants.

Sleep did not come and I was up at midnight still lost in thought about what I had done. I then retrieved the pieces from the bin and headed to the backyard carrying a shovel, a flashlight and a small tin.

In the ink of darkness where she once tended to her roses. I dug until I was two feet deep. I put the pieces in the rusted tin and placed the little coffin in the grave. A sudden light from the neighbor's house made me stop pounding on the mound of dirt. I thought in a century the tin would be unearthed and the person would wonder who had buried it here with a scribbled note that begged for forgiveness.

A Toast to Renee in the Extreme

I lift the etched glass to my lips
to toast the memory of your face,
now lost in the swirls of red wine.
I sip in slow swallows of Pinot Noir
and recall how if you walked away
you always looked back to see if I
were watching you with intensity.
Your smile that attracted attention
and drew others to your flame, but
it didn't matter because you always
returned to me. You possessed the
radiance to brighten my sullen
days because you knew I'm a man
whose insensitivity didn't lead to
compromise. Those inconsistent
betrayals paved the way to
weaken my resolve have now
dissolved in the tragedy of loss
with no second chance of
ever fulfilling that last refrain.

Nightmare

I awoke in a room unfamiliar to me where
I glide through the drugged shadows
as you stand in floating silence without words.
I bolt upward from my pillow as if jolted by a
spring from inside a child's toy. The glare of
the optic clock reads 4:20 a.m. I shake my head
to clear the din of the high pitch sound that
penetrates my ears to a crescendo of pain.
Fear overtakes me and I imagine the
room is inundated with invisible fumes
killing me with carbon monoxide poisoning,
silent and tasteless in its toxic spell.
Now fully awake, I collapse back on my pillow,
coughing and assuring myself I am alive.
I think of the apparition and wonder if you
placed it in my dreams from beyond the grave.
Still shaken, I get up for a drink of water, and
once outside the bedroom door, I observe the
monitor's cord unplugged from the socket's maw,
and do not wonder anymore.

Left Behind

Looking at the wilted
roses left a few days
before, I feel the sense
of decay. They seem to be separated
from the cloak of shadows
that caress the names in the
wall, their brass boldness,
a stark finality.

I run my fingers across the
letters of your name
and smell the scent
of dying leaves, earthy
in the sudden breeze.

I retrieve the roses,
a tribute to your absence
from my altered world.

The drooping petals, shriveled
black, having lost their fleshy
fullness now revealing the
hidden thorns.

But not for you whose silent
heart will never race to passion's
thrill. I crush the withered petals
between my fingers and know
no ritual will ever assuage the
torment for those of us
left behind.

What You Have Missed

There is never a day your
absence goes unnoticed.

For me you gave the world its sun,
you loved the rain and Christmas,
spoiled children on Halloween, but
I no longer have you near; it is pain
I feel in the extreme.

The things you have missed now
form the rites of passage,
two weddings, our son's graduation
from the college of music, the promotions
and exits from careers, the painted rooms
to stave off grief and the dark dreams
that took refuge there. In March, your
grandson will arrive with a cry that
will awaken the world, and your high school
will induct you into its Hall of Fame.

My father died as well as yours. You missed our
trip to London, a promise I kept. I bought a
wedding band in Bath where we planned to renew

our vows, and walked out into the plaza, and there I
quietly wept. I am faithful to your love the way
I deem it best, and by this alone is how I
pass the test.

Sweaters

On the way to the funeral home I decided
what you would wear in your casket.

Your skin once had a pink cast and although
it was July I had your cashmere sweater
in mind. Now your skin had lost its splendor,
replaced by the mask of delusive stillness.

Yesterday I was still undecided between the blue
and pink sweaters. I found the blue in the bottom
of your last drawer as if you had recently folded
it in its perfect neatness. A fleeting thought made
me question whether I had made the right choice.

Those were the hot days of mid summer, and the
numbness I felt in the greeting lines, along with sobs
providing a music of their own, placed the relevance
of the sweaters in a perspective of guarded choice.

Now, late fall has come quickly and I think winter
will be here soon. I look out the window at the array
of naked trees that remind me of black lace in fragile

rows with a background of clouds in their odd stillness,
like mauve bruises on the face of the evening sky. I
notice the dance of a single leaf as it makes its way
in erratic leaps down the street. I close my eyes and
see you in the distance wearing your pink sweater.

Escapement

Because memories have it so that I can
no longer sleep in the bed we shared,
I now take refuge on the couch with my
small dogs. They stay close by me staring
with fixed eyes from the leather ledge
poised like miniature lions in repose. They
sense my loneliness that stalks me through
those hours that seem to freeze the face of
clocks as if they were arbitrarily fixed. It is
a superstition and a symbol of death to have
three clocks in the same room. I have four
that tick in perfect unison, keeping cadence
through my dreams where I am in control
of the vital piece, the escapement, essential
to the function of the other parts as a whole.
A metallic symphony soothes me until I
surrender to the touch of sleep and the
comfort that is the beating of my heart.

Ghost Girl

I dream of you in celestial fields,
strolling through blankets of heather
accompanied by angels with slender
hands, and blue eyes that gaze upon
you with perfect smiles of grace.

There are those times when sleep
has been stolen when I imagine that
I hear you breathing from the room
that remains unchanged, when last
you slept near me and I could smell
your hair where once sunlight lived.

You will always be my ghost girl.
The golden wren that streaked past
my face when I walk your little dog,
the trees that bend as if to weep in
the suddenness of storms, the fog
that follows me in tranquility, the
wind that lifts the branches just to
say “hello”, the hummingbirds that

sip the nectar from the flowers that
were yours, the sudden sounds from
vacant rooms where furniture can be
heard to move and pictures fall
from walls, your scent that lingers
from an open drawer, the ceiling
shadows of a woman watching as I
try to sleep, a sudden song on the
radio that has me sing along. I try
to gauge the distance to the galaxy
of stars where I believe you wait
for me with a final request and I
am not afraid.

Mouths

I twist the knob of your door,
its brass touch corpse cool.

I enter in slow steps as if you
may be held in slumber's caress.

Pale bars of light penetrate the
curtains you bought more than
a decade ago. Your photograph
peers back at me as if to say "hello,"
but your lips don't move, parted
in the fixed stillness of camera click.

The days have turned into years that
my grief has perfectly defined.

No other mouth could ever replace
the flush of pleasure's warmth that
was mine. Your smile beckoned with
its slightest trace, always my reward.

I divert my stare from your picture and
notice in the corner of a shelf a vase that
piques my curiosity. I remove the lid and

gasp to see the dentist's mold of your
perfect teeth. Now discovered where
vanished words will never speak from
a silent mouth no longer of this world.

Absence

I am able to register the veiled desperation
that your absence has given me to confront,
this hell's hollowness, killer of dreams, that
has deformed all meaning of what I cherished.

I miss the touch of your hands on those days
when the coldness of the rain drew us closer.

I imagine the contours of your face that I could
trace at night like a blind man's quest to find
your lips to kiss. I want to fill my lungs with the
scent of your skin and pull you close just after
you have bathed. I want to marvel at the way
your hair bounces in the motion of your step,
and wait in anticipation for the scratch of the
key that unlocks the door, bringing you

home to me, or when I view you from the kitchen
window cupping the roses you caress tenderly.

I want to feel the shock on that winter's night
when you place your feet against my leg in an
attempt to get them warm. I want to share our
love of new place and our children's babies

being born, I want to hear my name when you
talk on the phone, but, most of all, your memory
has shown that love is hell when you die alone.

Rain

I was enjoying the rain,
walking slowly and not caring
about getting drenched.

I was merely drifting and thinking
about being misunderstood by my
children, my friends, by most people
who think they know me,

I think about all
the mistakes I have made, you
were never one of them.

I only recollect your tenderness
most of all, and how you loved
the rain.

Winter Beach

We loved the beaches at Hilton Head Island
and would go there in late July. The sun, a saffron disk,
awaited us, a beacon in the expanse of a cloudless sky.
The beaches were blanched and isolated, a paradise where
our children played out their fantasies at the ocean's edge
along khaki ribbons of sea soaked sand.

At night we walked and listened to the lulling hush of waves
when the sand had cooled and the pelicans had flown home.
The gull's shrieks were no longer, the taste of salt permeated
the wind. The silhouettes of lovers strolled.

I have not returned there since the death of my wife. Now I
walk a different beach in winter imprisoned by fading thoughts
that vanish like the hours of a day and force me to navigate the
night without the company of her warmth.

I gaze at the Atlantic's slate colored waves. Winter has brought
an end to the work of the trawling ships, but a single boat is casting
its final nets before the white shrimp are left alone to release their

eggs anew. My emotions battle grief's stubbornness and they won't release me from its grasp. The sinking sun has acquired the hue of bone and will soon be swallowed as it sets into the sea. Its image reminds me of Rainer Rilke's words.

Your gaze, which I now warmly welcome on my cheek if that were a pillow, will come searching ceaselessly for me until it falls, while the sun itself is setting into the womb of foreign stones.

-The Book of Hours

Your love of the ocean among the fragments of the shells accompany my footfalls upon the crusted sand. I wince against the sting of the grains propelled by the wind. I take a final glance at the lights from the distant boat and hope the shrimp will be spared the nets under the audience of the silent stars.

I Long for the Wisdom of Your Words

I pray to hear the voice of Rene Rilke because
I have turned inward to confront the grief that
is my everyday companion who never lets
me heal. My heart is shrouded in darkness and
I would love to discover the light so I could kill
my fears. Where is that God to which I may belong?
Stretch my spirit until I arrive with passionate
inwardness and the strength it takes to recognize
the things that drive happiness to its knees. I must
teach myself to see all things anew so I can be the
recipient of that everlasting joy and may destroy
the vines of grief entangling me.

Help me cease this pacing and free me from this cage.

Let me no longer look through these bars that
contain me, give me wisdom to set me loose upon the world.

Rene Rilke! Are you listening? Make me whole again!

A Woman's Strength

Twenty-nine years ago my daughter came
into the world weighing eight pounds.

Her blue eyes were the same color as mine.

Her smile was inherited from you as well.

This March, her son will be born at the same
hospital where all our children arrived in the
morning hours when love had come again.

Even though I watched both my children arrive
through push and pain they came with the miracle
cry. I would give anything for you to share our first
child born to our daughter, but you won't be there.

You won't be able to hold her hand or speak to her
in your mother's voice the way it calmed her fever
on the night train through East Berlin, where the
passing landscape menaced in silent sin and our
daughter's fever spiked.

In the delivery room you will not be present. In my

pocket next to my skin I will have a photo of the day
our daughter arrived, and I hope you can hear the
pounding of my heart so that you may be witnessing
this day still, with the strength of your woman's will.

Winter Flowers

I stand confused, staring at a cluster of crocuses
in the pristine snow.

Their petals remain closed
as if they are the purple tips of spears
of spring that have thrust
through the blanket of crystal sheen
in a formidable winter's surprise.

They are brighter than summer gardens,
Redolent in the miracle of their presence, a harbinger
of warmth, like the memory of your smile.

Cured Unexpectedly

Sitting in Starbuck's, I am watching the rain's assault
in circular splashes in the puddles of the parking lot.
People hurry from their cars to reach the shelter of
the shops. *The New York Times* is spread out on my lap as
I peruse the bylines for an interesting read. I spot
the words "Cured Unexpectedly." I read on.

No one expected the four women to live much longer.
They had a rare, aggressive and fatal form of ovarian
cancer. There was no standard treatment. Drugs were
out of the question; it was thought they would not work
against this type of cancer. The doctors were wrong, and
immunotherapy was the key. The tumors shrank and
life turned to normalcy for these women from different
parts of the world who had once been considered terminal.

Hyper Calcemic Small Cell Ovarian Cancer is different from
the type that killed my wife. It is rare, so much so that most
oncologists never see it. In retrospect, I wondered if my wife
could have been saved. Better techniques have been brought

into light in the last seven years, but her fourth stage diagnosis sealed her fate. I wondered if they knew then that cancer was driven by a single gene mutation and these cells fool other cells into responding in radical ways depending on mutations.

They had sliced my wife, put in ports, removed her organs, subjected her to chemotherapy so staunch she could barely move. The doctors observed, probed, took her blood and spoke in sterile sentences from mouths with mannequin faces. They never uttered the words “save” or “live,” but played their parts in the drama of tubes and charts and computer scans that left no doubts. She wasn’t cured unexpectedly. I wondered if enough had been done to hurry all those miracles along.

The article ended with a quote of hope, and I returned to the sight of one last girl trying to outrun the rain. The picture of one girl who had survived stared from the paper’s picture. I could see the pain seeping from her eyes, and closed mine to the image of my wife lost in my trance of the photograph. I rose to face the rain.

A Different Ending

Spring thawed
passion
lost in drawers
decades since
we searched each other's
photos
and plumbed the years'
emotion
when others' flaws
sharpened our pain.
I stare through tinted glass
at mauve clouds in stillness,
of purple floating bruises in
swirls of changing stains.
I see your eyes,
your parted lips, whispers
that never lied,
those softly spoken promises.
We feared life's fragility,
of season's casting their spell,

of hope's transparency of truth

so rare to tell.

Tomorrow I board a plane

to Portland,

forty years I've felt the same,

No regrets.

The truth is

that love transforms

like autumn skies at

sunset's request.

There will be nothing to atone;

we will cast off any shrouds.

Then I will wait for dawn,

I'll board that jet.

There will be no resistance,

but yet?

L'Heure Blue (The Blue Hour)

You have been gone seven years.
Rarely do I enter this still room;
it was the sanctuary where we slept,
made love, and spoke to one another
in tones that made us. Now, only a
space to contemplate a sense of loss,
shrouded in the deep blues of stained
glass of the west window. I find myself
thinking of those earlier times when I
gave way to the “Blue Beast,” Edwardian
slang for sexual passion unleashed in the
confines of a heather painted room that
is now the hue of teal. It is now a chamber
of secrets told only to myself, the stage of
the blue hour, whose indigo nights where
death surely stalks its dominion. I sit on
the edge of the bed aware of the emptiness.
I raise my legs and swing them onto the bed,
slipping off my shoes and listening to them clatter
to the floor. I stare into the depths of the closet,

coffin like, with a door that is unable to remain
closed. Your clothes are gone now except for your
Victorian wedding dress hanging limply in its
defeated pain. I slip off to tranquil sleep, dreaming
for more light to illuminate the downward spiral
of the blue hour that always remains the same.

Cloud Sculptures After Midnight

The quarter moon emitting rays of light
is a beacon in its amber slice of splendor.
I stand silently blending with the shadows
concealed in a copse of trees whose limbs
stretch skyward in verdant praise of night.
My upturned face focuses on distant clouds
scudding slowly across the dark plains in
satin smoothness of an effortless drift.

Three clouds collide in transformation and
form what appears to be a woman's image
covering her face with a hooked forearm as
if she has drowned in heaven's endless sea of
serenity, floating forever in the eternal tide.
Her hair flows down her slender back in
swirling mists of gossamer curls providing
her a silver cape to her moon-kissed gown.

I marveled at her comely silence through

the parted branches from far below and
wondered why she concealed her face as
if to blot out the radiance of the scattered
stars that seem to weep for her cislunar
passing when suddenly she came too near.

Memories

All memories eventually disappear;
the smile on your mother's face,
the childhood tree of sanctuary.
Must all memories turn to mist?
No, they resonate in the heart and mind.
They reappear as the garden shed where
we first kissed in the shade of summer trees
until autumn made them naked and unaware.
But our kisses never slept, so we never forgot
their feel. Not all memories fade, the lemon light
above the door that signaled for you to come home,
the night birds that startled us as we laughed behind
the tree, your father's interest under the car's hood
with his banter about the good ones gone to rust.
But new designs have rearranged our lives. There is
talk of times as if they were blood relatives who would
soon appear even though buried long ago in the
garden of stone, where there are only night faces
appearing in dreams of yesterdays when futures could be
fulfilled. The lasting memories are the lingering thoughts

that never can be owned.

What the Therapist Said

The therapist looked at me coldly, parting her lips the color of earthworms, and began to speak without a trace of compassion. “You know, you don’t want to be known merely as the guy with the dogs.” I looked at her as if her words had come from the mouth of a hyena, how all of our conversations of the last month now had been for naught. “Why not?” as I felt the sting of her cursory comment. “Because you need to try to get back into the game; you can’t dwell on her forever!” “Well,” I said, as my focus remained on her curish mouth, “maybe I want to be known as the guy with the dogs, for they have always been loyal, and there is no doubt they love me unconditionally, and that is a fact I have questioned to the last!” “I am not here just to blow smoke up your ass; you must think about moving forward.” But, all I could do was think about taking my dogs for a walk and ending a conversation I knew would be our last as I glanced at the stagnant clock.

Anniversary 8/1/2018

August first has come again. It ends
what I refer to as the “death days”
that stalk me every summer in an
unending plague of thoughts that
linger like a hex of witchery come
again to remind me of being my own
prisoner. This start of August is not
the same, as I am convinced, more than
ever, that life is for the living, and to be
dead inside while still alive will never be
a new beginning. I believe she would
give me her blessing to leave the solemn
days behind and look to the horizon until
we may be united again, and simply do away
with the painful process of constantly
obsessing about an angel lost to this world.

In the Company of Night Irises

The summer heat has been punishment enough.
Temperatures have turned me into a sweating
statue, stultifying any movement possessing me
to stare at the heat's writhing coils above the
asphalt sea in snake dances of translucency.
I beg for the coolness of the emerald evening
that intercedes with the infusion of night,
soothing my plight of parched dreams of
climes and times when breezes were like
the kisses of summer girls who never thought
of ageing into the silence when their tongues
refused to explore the meaning of love's lament,
frayed and faded into coy seconds of surrender.
Those moments to be destined to the amber of a
vault's stillness without the warmth of lasting
touch, now vanished to the realms of memory's
grasp in the locked box of a heart with a golden
clasp.

I languish on my porch to escape the brick

house baking of the crowded rooms within where
people look into their phones for artificial wisdom
by the reading of technological bones. Solace comes
slowly with the enveloped kiss of darkness. The light
above the door is like a pearl-moon beacon that has
the power to illuminate the slender necks of irises
in the grace of their bending bloom. I caress their
fleshy lips as they kiss my finger tips; I am struck by
the epiphany of hope where I can visualize your
face, an image smoldering in my mind that refuses
to become that Rilkean speck of a vanishing point as if
its existence has been snuffed out, leaving what was
once our world to explode into fragments in the arena
years which quell the significance of those fears, fading
in their resistance to prohibit the occasional tears,
longing for the legacy of your sacred persistence still.

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