

Shadow and Light

*Loss and possession, death and life are one,
There falls no shadow where there shines no sun.*

- Hillaire Belloc

Libretto Conceived and Developed by

JOAN SZYMKO

for perusal only

Part I THE CLOUD OF FORGETTING

No. 1 I Felt A Cleaving

I felt a cleaving in my mind
As if my brain had split;
I tried to match it, seam by seam,
But could not make them fit.

The thought behind I strove to join
Unto the thought before,
But sequence unravelled out of reach
Like balls upon a floor.

No. 2 Tangled Tango

"I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU NAMES OF THREE OBJECTS:

SHOE, TREE, CAR –

CAN YOU REPEAT THOSE THREE WORDS?"

"SHH shoe... TRAIN I can't remember the other one"

"Okay then, please repeat this phrase: 'No ifs ands or buts'"

"No– no ifs.... no... nothing fits..."

"Okay, Can you please spell the word, 'WORLD' backward?"

D... D R — O — W...

My world is backward, upside down and inside out
My world is backward, upside down and turned about
No ifs ands or buts about it
My words and thoughts get tangled deep inside my brain
I worry all the time about my lapses and I feel ashamed
No ifs ands or buts about it
No ifs ands or buts about it
And just the other day I lost my way on my way home
My heart beat raced as panic swept into my very bones
No ifs ands or buts about it — No ifs ands or buts about it
"YOU HAVE DEMENTIA, PROBABLY OF THE ALZHEIMERS TYPE."

No. 3 Memory Aids

This is the paper that gives the date.
This is the kettle to boil the water.
This is a china breakfast plate.
This is a note to call my daughter.

This is coffee, I drink it black.
This is toast, and I eat it plain.
These are the thoughts I keep on track
To hurry them through my daughter's brain.

These are things I need to say
To sound as usual on phone.
The longer I keep my child at bay,
The longer my life is still my own.

No. 4 This is What We Fear

"THOSE THREE WORDS I GAVE YOU EARLIER, CAN YOU RECALL THEM?"

Shame, Fear, Stigma

"I'm afraid of being dependent—of being a burden."

"I'm afraid of losing control; of being out of control."

"I'm afraid of being abandoned, a burden—pitied."

"I'm afraid of life without memories, without meaning."

"I have reached a point of where I know I don't know—

I just don't know when I don't know

This living unknown frightens me more than death"

This is what we fear
No sight, no sound
No taste or touch or smell
Nothing to think with
Nothing to love or link with.

Part II UNCONTAINABLE NIGHT

No. 5 By Night

By night on my bed I sought him whom my soul loveth:
I sought him but I found him not

*Tonight, I just want to look into your eyes and see
sixty beautiful years of my life looking back at me.*

No. 6 Sundowning

1.

This white.

That yellow. This blue.

No matter what color pill

I crush into the applesauce, this blue bowl,

to feed you and myself, one

full night of sleep, one night

without this wandering. That weeping.

Without the long rattle of doors.

2.

Each evening that same urge to slip

this lumbering form, to step from its wreckage as from a robe
dropped to the floor.

Each evening the struggle to ditch the feeble disguise
of body, this skin, this jerry-built cage
of bones that holds you, like the rescued starling, disconsolate
and thrashing against its cardboard box.

3.

Each evening that blue persistence,

that voice, telling you to keep an appointment,

to catch the bus, to report to a job

lost fifteen years ago, to keep your word,

to collect the debt, to make things square.

Each evening the struggle to take off your coat, to sit,
rest, lie back, to be still.

To sleep one night without this broken clock

that is you, still chiming

in this still-blue hour of evening,

telling you, you are late, overdue.

You are expected somewhere important hours ago.

Years. And you rise, rise

like bad clockwork. Like I have forgotten.

Like I don't understand.

Like I never understand

the living-room drapes are engulfed in flame.

Like the whole damn house of mind

is burning down around you, and the walls

are all swallowing their doors.

No. 7 A Choice

"I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU THREE MORE WORDS TO REMEMBER:
HEARTBREAK, STRESS, RESILIENCE"

There are moments when you have a choice:

fall apart, or take a deep breath and

just do what needs to be done.

Feel a new loneliness.

And a new strength.

No. 8 Lead, Kindly Light

Lead, Kindly Light, amidst the encircling gloom,

Lead Thou me on!

The night is dark, and I am far from home,

Lead Thou me on!

Keep Thou my feet; I do not ask to see

The distant scene; one step enough for me.

for perusal only

No.9 Take Me Home

*I want to go home, my friend's mother says
over and over, even though this is the house
she's lived in for fifty-some years.*

Are we going home?
Are we going home now?
Take me home.
I want to go home.
When are we going home?

No.10 In This Uncontainable Night

Quiet friend who has come so far
Feel how your breathing makes more space around you.
Let this darkness be a bell tower
And you the bell. As you ring,

what batters you becomes your strength.
Move back and forth into the change.
What is it like, such intensity of pain?
If the drink is bitter, turn your self to wine.

In this uncontainable night,
be the mystery at the crossroads of your senses,
the meaning discovered there.

And if the world has ceased to hear you,
say to the silent earth: I flow.
To the rushing water, speak: I am.

Part III: I and THOU

She refuses to get out of the Honda,
grabs the steering wheel from the passenger side
hangs on, knuckles white—

kicks at her daughter
waiting patiently by the open car door,
spits at the young aide assigned to help,
pinches the arm of the duty nurse reaching in.

On this bitterly cold morning in March
she hisses words never before out of her mouth
digs in her heels, stays put.

understands in some corner of her brain
if she gets out of the car
and walks through the large double doors
she will never leave.

No.12 Why Am I In this Place?

You come to see me every day
(Why am I in this place?)
I sometimes can't recall your name
But I do recall the face.

I know you're someone who I love –
My daughter, or maybe my mother.
*And that man with you –
Is that your husband or your brother?
Your husband? Are you old enough?
He seems very nice.
(Help me to remember –
Wasn't I married —twice?)*

Why am I here, and what did I do
To deserve this wretched end?
I'm surrounded by many strangers.
(Or maybe they're my friends?)

(no. 12 cont.)

My room is cozy and comfortable –
I must admit it's nice.
But someone's stealing my underwear!
Really! It's happened twice!

They really treat me well here,
I'm as happy as can be.
(See that man in the red sweater?
He wants to marry me.)

Did I ever have a husband?
Did I ever have a home?
Did I have a family,
Or did I live alone?

Oh, I remember my husband now,
But I can't recall his face.
Where is he? Does he come to visit?
Did HE put me in this place?

Why am I here, and what did I do...etc.

*You need to tell the attendant
This door is always locked.
I can't go out when I want to.
I've knocked and knocked and knocked.*

No.13 Remembering

Do you know lonely?
Sit strapped into a chair
No choice, keep breathing
Do you know lonely?
Words are spoke' as if I'm not there
Here inside I'm alive
Still feeling beauty-- kind eyes, warm smile
Please, please, please
I'm still here inside.
Wonder if you see inside
Lonely lonely me remembering beauty

"I'M GOING TO GIVE YOU THREE NEW WORDS:
BE – HERE – NOW"

No.14 Hold Hands

You know you love me
but you can't recall my name
so we just hold hands

No.15 I Sing to You

I sing to you
songs you taught me when I was small
(songs from when you were small)
not knowing the words would someday hold
more meaning than we could ever imagine
I sing, I sing to you— You are my sunshine,
my only sunshine, you make me happy when skies are grey.
You'll never know dear how much I love you.
Please don't take my sunshine away.

No.16 Love Bears All Things

Love bears all thing
believes all things
hopes all things
endures all things
love never fails

LIBRETTO CREDITS

for perusal only

No.1 I Felt A Cleaving

"I Felt a Cleaving in my Mind, poem by Emily Dickinson. From *The Complete Poems of Emily Dickinson* (Harvard University Press, 1983)

No. 2 Tangled Tango

Opening narrative and lyrics: ©2015 Joan Szymko

No. 3 Memory Aids

Poem "Memory Aids" by Gail White. Used by permission of Gail White

No. 4 This is What We Fear

Opening narrative: © 2015 Joan Szymko; Richard Taylor ("I have reached a point...")
From *Alzheimer's from the Inside Out*, by R. Taylor. © 2007 Health Professions Press, Inc. Reprinted by permission. www.healthpropress.com.

Choral text: "This is what we fear..." is an excerpt of 5 lines from the poem 'Aubade' from the *Complete Poems* by Phillip Larkin. Used by Permission of the Estate of Phillip Larkin by way of Faber and Faber Limited of Bloomsbury House.

No. 5 By Night

Song of Solomon 3:1 In the Public Domain
Spoken line, excerpt from "House of Memories"
© Karen Kaplan Perlmutter

No. 6 Sundowning

The poem "Sundowning" from *Oblivio Gate*, by Sean Nevin, Southern Illinois University Press, ©2008 by Sean Nevin. Used by permission of Sean Nevin

No. 7 A Choice

A prose excerpt from *Tangles* by Sarah Leavitt. ©2012 by Sarah Leavitt; Used by permission of Skyhorse Publishing, Inc.

No. 8 Lead, Kindly Light

An excerpted verse from the hymn text, "The Pillar of the Cloud" from *Modern Hymns* (1833) by John Henry Newman (1801-1890); In the Public Domain.

No. 9 Take Me Home

Opening narrative excerpted from the poem "House Behind Trees, 1906-7" by Barbara Crooker from the anthology, *Forgetting Home, Poems About Alzheimer's*, ed. Anna M. Evans
Choral text: "Take Me Home", © Joan Szymko

No.10 In This Uncontainable Night

A translation of "Sonnets to Orpheus / Part Two, XXIX" by Rainier Maria Rilke; from *IN PRAISE OF MORTALITY, Selections from Rainier Maria Rilke's Duino Elegies and Sonnets to Orpheus*. ©2005 by Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy; published by Riverhead Books. Used by permission of Anita Barrows and Joanna Macy.

No.11 Regret

The poem "Regret" by Sharon Lask Munson, from the anthology, *Forgetting Home, Poems About Alzheimer's*, ed. Anna M. Evans. Used by permission of Sharon Munson.

No.12 Why Am I In this Place?

Verses from "My Mother's Alzheimer's" by Holle Abee. Verses selected and re-configured by Joan Szymko. Used by permission of Holle Abee.

No.13 Remembering

lyric ©2015 by Joan Szymko

No.14 Hold Hands

"Holding Hands", poem by Forrest Hainline; from the anthology, *Forgetting Home, Poems About Alzheimer's*, ed. Anna M. Evans. Used by permission of Forrest Hainline.

No.15 I Sing to You

Untitled poem by Linda Austin from *Poems that come to Mind*, by Linda E. Austin. © 2012 by Linda E. Austin. Moonbridge Publications. Used by permission of Linda E. Austin.

No.16 Love Bears All Things

1 Corinthians 13:7-8. In the Public Domain