

# 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

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### 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.

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## 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

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### 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

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### No. 3 Memory Aids

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### No. 4 This is What We Fear

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### 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.

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### No.12 Why Am I In this Place?

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### No.13 Remembering

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### No.14 Hold Hands

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### No.16 Love Bears All Things

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