

A COLLECTION OF PROSE
ABOUT LOVE, LOSS, AND
THE THINGS WE DON'T SAY

IF THESE PAGES FIND YOU

WORDS REMAIN.

CORNU VALDEZ

If These Pages Find You

A COLLECTION OF PROSE ABOUT LOVE,
LOSS, AND THE THINGS WE DON'T SAY

CORNU VALDEZ



If These Pages Find You

Author's Edition

Copyright © 2026 Cornu Valdez

All rights reserved.

No part of this book may be reproduced without
permission, except in brief quotations in reviews.

First edition, 2026



*for the ones who stayed,
and the ones who didn't.*



Contents

I. While You're Falling In Love

The Candle in My Room	2
We Kiss	5
Facetious	7
Aphrodisia	9
The Spot	10
Saturation	11
Cities, Countries and Whole Civilizations	13
Don't Me!	14
Metronome	16
These Lips	17
The Limit Does Not Exist	18
Decipherable	20
Home	22
Always Been You	23
Just That One	24
Like Magic	25
The Unwritten	26
You Remember	27
She Said Yes	29

II. While You're Holding On

The Whole of You	34
------------------------	----



All You Need to Know	35
The Peace Within Your Chaos	36
Never Been	37
Checking In	38
Indivisible	40
These Tortured Hands	41
32 Hours	42
The Road Less Travelled	43
Quiet Desperation	44
Say It	46
The Wars That Dealt an Awful Blow	47
My Own Name	49
Absolution	50
Not In This Lifetime	52
Invisible Ink	53
Signing Off	54
You Will Miss Me	55
Phantom Limbs	56
Things that Crawl	57

III. After Goodbye

Say Goodbye	60
Spare Key	61
Mid-Sentence	63
Handover Notes	65
The Sand the Wave Has Swept Away	68
Knots That Won't Unbind	70



What I Never Said	71
The Winter of Your Discontent	72
The Space Reserved for You	74
Missing Out	75
The Thing That Won't Let Go	77
The Truth I Leave Behind	79
Not Even Close	81
Broken Certainty	83

IV. In The Dark

Nothing	85
Before Dawn	87
Ink and Air	89
Asphyxiated	90
No One but You	91
The Air You Breathe	92
Kerosene	93
The Pain You Never Knew	95
Establishing Shot	98
Desiderium	99

V. After Everything Changed

A Cosmic Principle	102
A Way to Live	104
Everything Else	107
The Place That I Call Hell	110
You. Do. Not. Exist.	112



In the Quiet Between Us	114
You	116
The Hamster of Despair	118
Quiet Reinvention	120
My Heart Heals Twice As Fast	121
The Shadow of This Wall	123
The End of Our Goodbyes	125
Steady State	128
Good Morning, Trouble	130
Compound Interest	132
Going, Going	134
House Rules	135
The Long Way Around	137



I

while you're falling in love



The Candle in My Room

How could you forget the smell of baked cinnamon vanilla
sugar donuts?

I'd like to ask her.

But not today.

Maybe soon.

Maybe never.

With our faces almost touching. Our lips barely brushed.
Our eyes locked in a stare. Her brilliant calculated eyes, a
doting liquid gaze.

Let me tell you then.

That hit of sweet woody fragrance to your nose feels like
flowering trees on the first day of a sun-kissed
long-awaited spring. The aroma intensified by caramelized
sugar and warm vanilla bread fresh from the oven will make



*found this tucked in an old
coat pocket.*



you kinder to strangers.

Take it in from all the corners of my room, close your eyes,
and be taken back to a time when everything in this world
was a place full of excitement and embrace.

Watch closely as its three wicks flicker a reminiscent glow
that weaves an intricate love story of you and me.

Set a tone of enchantment to how this candle turned a
simple act of friendship into an affair that you most
certainly have not forgotten.

The candle in my room not only invigorates the senses, it
also meddles with affairs of the heart. All the pain, all the
happiness. It brings back memories.

Think of all the times we broke things and made things
whole.

Over and over.



*found this tucked in an old
coat pocket.*



Only to leave all the splintered pieces that both of us
shattered back to their intended broken state.

For good.

For good this time.

This candle, its flame, inflicts a wound that will never ever
heal. This flame brought us together. This flame will set us
apart. But this candle is forgiving. This candle understands.

So just sit back, breathe us, inhale the moments that we
shared. And let this wicked wax bring forth the redolence
of the very first and last time that we touched...



*found this tucked in an old
coat pocket.*



We Kiss

Are you ready?
Close your eyes.
Feel your heartbeat next to mine.
Feel the tiny bones of your fingers dissolve into
nothingness against my sketchy untrained hands.
And as our lips land on each other know that you are loved.
Did you feel that? It felt like two people kissing after years
of contemplating it.
I know there are a million important things you need to do.
But I hope none of them is as important as being in this
moment— in this lifetime.
Your lips are smiling, our saliva— a beautiful gooey mess of
liquid aphrodisiac.
What are you waiting for?
Give it one more go.
Pull yourself closer. Closer to me this time.

*wrote this before I understood
it.*



I'll give you something to think about.
Something that will make you very happy.
Something you will never understand.
Because today and from now on—
We kiss...



*wrote this before I understood
it.*



Facetious

facetious [fuh-see-shus], adj. — not meant to be taken seriously. as in, a facetious remark.

we were on our usual beers when I asked you the kind of question you only ask when you're trying hard not to look like you mean it:

“what if, five years from now, long after we've broken up — nagkita uli tayo. single ako, tapos annulled ka na?”

for a second I braced to leave, in case you said the wrong thing.

you didn't even blink.

“Alam na this...”

and there it was — I fell for you all over again.
because no one else could land that answer,



the coffee went cold again.



and because I'd have given you the exact same one.



the coffee went cold again.



Aphrodisia

I'm sorry. Sometimes I just want parts of you that you choose to hide with your clothes pressed between my lips. Like when you're walking and I zoom in at the back end of your knees. Every time you part your hair to the side and you reveal a neck that's just waiting for me to dive into. Every single moment you remove your shoes and the soles of your feet are just begging to be licked. Every time you raise your arms to tie your hair and I just want to bury my face in your smoothly shaven armpits. And every time you cross your legs I feel like I have every right to stick my hand between them swiftly and let my fingers navigate the inside of your unsuspecting panties. Call it lust. Call it passion. Call it anything you like. But never say I couldn't equalize my loving you with my longing for you.

tender hunger, n.

wanting someone as completely as you love them, with no line between.



left the light on out of habit.



The Spot

There's this spot.

Lucky is the man who finds that part of you that makes
your soul disintegrate a little everywhere.

A little gesture that can last a lifetime.

A peewee firecracker that can detonate roads and tiny
continents.

An innocent tease that feels like actual penetration.

That's what this spot can do.

Make a mountain out of a molehill,
the inaudible audible.

A man out of a child.

That spot is you.

pressure point, n.

(martial arts) the small, exact place where the lightest touch undoes the whole body
— one spot, and everything gives.



it rained the whole week after.



Saturation

I wish there was something more than this little square space of vicinity we're in. These little bridges of buildings and streets lined up with jeepneys that spew intoxicated smoke that fill our lungs with toxic matter. No. There has to be somewhere we can go. Somewhere we can run away to where people who pass us by won't care if we held hands or kissed in broad daylight for hours. A place where there's more sky and clouds to see than mounds of infrastructure that we normally don't care about. Some place where we won't miss the bay and its collapsing reclaimed expanse of circadian monotony we're both engaged in everyday. Somewhere we can talk and laugh for hours as we order another beer and yet another and another until we're both perfectly drunk but not so much as not be able to tear each other's clothes apart as we retreat to our tiny cottage and fuck in mid slumber. In the



*kept the receipt for some
reason.*



morning we'll drink tea and wish we never have to leave.
Pack your things. We're leaving.

Let's be anywhere but here....

circadian monotony, n.

the same grey day lived on a loop, until leaving feels like the only color left.



*kept the receipt for some
reason.*



Cities, Countries and Whole Civilizations

Stay. We can bring cities to the ground with the love and endless passion we've made each other feel. Heck, we'll take down countries, continents, and entire nations while we're making love. And while we're at it — how about a whole civilization as we kiss?

extinction event, n.

(paleontology) the sudden ending of whole species, whole worlds — your kiss as the meteor.



*still can't hear that song the
same way.*



Don't Me!

I'll never be able to resist you. Throw me a bone and I'll come running into your arms. There's no way I can tell myself to hold you back. Tell me you love me and I'll believe you. Yes. I'm weak like that. I cannot let you go. I mean, how could I, when we're naked and your legs are wrapped around my back? Ask me anything you think I cannot do. Don't me! I won't say no. Not to anything you say or tell me. Because I'd still say yes to you again. And again. And yet again. You're my master; I'm your servant. I can't even convince myself not to care for you anymore. Nope. Can't do it. There's just no way. I'm way too hypnotized by your embrace. You have me wrapped around your fingers. I'm the rope you pegged into your charms. Push me away, say mean things to me, and watch me bounce back like I just don't care. Your smart mouth offers no challenge to my heart's capability to love you like a fool. So use me like a

*read this back and barely
recognized him.*



tool. I don't give a damn. Just stay with me and swear —
that even though we're fighting, you still care...

willing captivity, n.

being wrapped around a finger and choosing to stay there.



*read this back and barely
recognized him.*



Metronome

Our love was probably one of the greatest experiences anyone can ever have. From start to finish, it felt like a silent, inaudible scream cast from a steady metronome that dictated the ups and downs of our togetherness. A consistent rhythm of love and hate within a rhythm of passion and sadness. If that makes any sense. Like a trusted metronome, everything about us was a result of perfect timing. And yet somehow we knew our time would never come. Our destruction seamless. Separation, mind-blowing. In the end, we gave in to the criticism. Not of other people, but the melancholic tone of music playing in our heads, telling us that we can never be together. Even though our hearts are still beating as one...

destructive interference, n.

(physics) two waves aligned so perfectly that they cancel each other into silence.



*the chair by the window is
still empty.*



These Lips

My lips will never smile again. If you leave me, it will purse itself into oblivion. People will forever wonder why these lips are in a constant state of frown. I guess it doesn't matter. If, at the end of the day, these lips don't end up with yours. Because these lips will rot and wither. If you won't kiss me soon, it will be forever sealed. Because these lips want your lips. Because these lips need your lips. These lips don't want your lips to be on someone else's. These lips...

They belong to you...

usufruct, n.

(law) the right to use and enjoy a thing that belongs to another – these lips, held for you, to no one else's keeping.



meant to send this. never did.



The Limit Does Not Exist

I wish I had an answer. for how much I love you.

Then I looked somewhere no one ever thinks to look.
Mathematics.

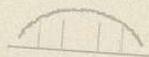
Suppose

$X = \text{Me}$

$Y = \text{You}$

Then, $X + Y = \infty$

Which means, if my love for you is an equation based on limits and loving you is the considered limit value approaching an index of continuity towards a value that people call "forever" then I conclude that—



*someone underlined this part,
not me.*



THE LIMIT DOES NOT EXIST.

asymptotic love, n.

*a love that keeps approaching forever while forever keeps moving – until
mathematics sets down its pen and surrenders.*



*someone underlined this part,
not me.*



Decipherable

This love is an immovable force. It breathes life into nothing, finds the lonely, and does not let go.

Until you — the essence of you — become part of me. Two pieces of a puzzle, making sense only when the picture is whole.

You were just a dream.

But dreams, if you pay attention, come true.

It wasn't always this way. I had to meet so many others just to know you existed. You always say our timing was wrong. I say nothing was ever more right.

I knew I needed you long before I met you — the way I need air. Then there you were. Unassuming. Timeless.

You are my soulmate, if there is such a thing.



*the ink smudged where a
thumb had been.*



Ours is a quiet, almost invisible togetherness. An inseparable estrangement. It is what it is. It is all that we have.

And still we chose each other — against the world, against all odds. Because when you are in my arms, it feels right.

It. Feels. Right.



*the ink smudged where a
thumb had been.*



Home

I've never been a traveler. But I'm sure no place on this earth has ever quite been home. I believed the other half of my soul was out there, somewhere. so when I met you, I didn't have to wonder. I am home.

found coordinate, n.

the one location that turned out to be someone, not somewhere.



i think it was a tuesday.



Always Been You

death is the walk into the unknown that no one chooses. it
doesn't give life meaning. it ends every kind of hope.

but it isn't death that frightens me.

it's losing you. it's all the love I'd have nowhere left to put.
it's you leaving and never coming back. it's the memories I
can't return to without resenting how much I still want
them.

so this is where I draw the line. life and death.

load-bearing love, n.

the love the rest of your life rests on. remove it, and every other room comes down.



*the window fogged and i drew
nothing.*



Just That One

When you suggested I keep things simple, that's what I thought I did. you find the person. you take them whole - the flaws, the fear, the parts they'd rather hide. you let that one person be enough for the rest of your life. just that one. the others stop mattering. the old names get shelved somewhere you never reach for again. choosing the one you love, and only them - tell me.. where's the confusion in all of this?

imperative necessity, n.

choosing one person to love, and closing the door on everyone else — not a want, a requirement.



he always took the long way home.



Like Magic

I have created a sensation of me loving you forever out of nothing. Like magic. I rubbed my hands, closed my eyes, and breathed you into life with my own lungs. And it happened. I rolled my sleeves and you appeared out of thin air. You are my greatest performance. Making you fall in love with me is the greatest trick I ever pulled. You are my most notable deception. My most fantastic sleight of hand. A mystical charm is wrapped around you. No incantations were used, no elaborate effects employed. I just loved you...

placebo effect, n.

(medicine) a real, measurable change produced by nothing but belief — no incantations, no effects, just love.



*there's sand in the spine of this
page.*



The Unwritten

"you don't write for me anymore."

don't be silly, I thought.
I write for you constantly.
just not on paper.

in my head
you're the only subject
I've ever had —
your absence, your presence,
printed somewhere
ink can't reach.

private draft, n.

the version of someone you keep writing only in your mind, never on the page.



*i stopped checking the phone
eventually.*



You Remember

You and I. Making love. You remember. It's when I go to parts and places that require your legs to spread apart. It's for every time my beard lands and dives in from the nether regions of your back. It's your perfectly mounded breasts pressed against my busy, awkward tongue. It's the satisfying thrill I feel when your determined mouth is occupied in places other than my mouth. It's when you pull my head between your legs, as if to say: treat your home as if it were my own. It's when your legs spread out of habit as I explore portions of your body that no other man has ever reached. It's when I arch your body like a mountain as I take you from behind. It's that Starting Over Again — our bedplay theme song — playing in the background. It's the breathless moments where we scream inside for more. It's when we climax to a simultaneous beat, and our moans unite, our sweat combines, and our souls detach to run



*the candle burned to the
saucer.*



into each other's arms. It's how we always hug each other so tightly, long after the song has died. You're still on my lap, your tired, worked-up legs wrapped around my hips. Our noses touch, our lips collide, our bodies become one... You remember. You'll always remember. Making love. You and I...

shared tempo, n.

two bodies keeping the same time, down to the last beat.



the candle burned to the saucer.



She Said Yes

Forget the countless times we fought.
I only remember one afternoon.
I asked if you wanted to go to the beach.
Right then.
No plans.
No bags.
No reservations.
You simply smiled...
and said yes.
That surprised me more than anything.



*i forgave her in the margins
first.*



You always liked plans.
I always liked detours.
But somehow,
on that day,
we belonged to the same moment.
We drove for hours,
stopping whenever we realized we'd forgotten something.
I bought a pair of psychedelic pink board shorts from a
Puregold outlet for a hundred pesos.
I wore your size 6 Havaianas,
even though my feet were three sizes too big.
I walked like an idiot.



*i forgave her in the margins
first.*



You laughed anyway.

I tried to lift you out of the water like Patrick Swayze in
Dirty Dancing.

You wouldn't let me.

You insisted you were too heavy.

I insisted you weren't.

We never found out who was right.

We kissed with saltwater still on our lips.

Then I pointed to the waves.

"That's how I'll love you."

Always returning.

No matter how many times the shore lets go.



*i forgave her in the margins
first.*



For years after,
I kept wearing those ridiculous pink board shorts.
Not because I liked them.
Because they still remembered you.

mutual detour, n.

*the one afternoon a planner and a wanderer chose the same road — and spent
every year after trying to find it again.*

*i forgave her in the margins
first.*



II

while you're holding on



The Whole of You

I love all of what you are, and all of what you're not. I love you even now, in the hard, bitter shape you've taken.

I don't flinch at your flaws, or the edge you've wrapped around yourself to keep the world out. I accept the love you can't give. I expect the hurt that comes with staying.

because even shattered, your heart is worth something.

and I think there'll come a day when all the noise inside you goes quiet — replaced by one certainty: that there was someone who took the whole of you.

radical acceptance, n.

taking a person exactly as they are — edge, bitterness, damage and all — with nothing held back.



the tide took the rest.



All You Need to Know

So listen. I'll whisper it once. This is the only thing about me that really matters. And you can carry this the rest of your life.

here it is.

I love you.

I love you when we're fighting. I love you when you've given me every reason not to. I love you like I was never given a choice.

that's all you need to know.

kept secret, n.

the one true thing you hold onto — small enough to whisper, large enough to carry a lifetime.



kept meaning to throw this out.



The Peace Within Your Chaos

I keep looking for calm in the middle of you. you are who you are — quick to need, quicker to doubt.

but under all that weather is the gentler one I fell for, the one who always comes back to make it right. I used to call that staying.

it took me this long to see: the calm was never yours to give.

it isn't you. it's me. I'm the peace within your chaos.

imported calm, n.

the peace someone only had because you carried it in with you.



*the branch outside finally
bloomed.*



Never Been

I've never been so worried about something that I lose sleep over it. I've never been so sad that I forget myself at any given moment. I've never been so hung up on something that the world stops spinning right beneath my skin. I've never been so bothered that I fear I'll lose control. I've never been so distracted that I confuse what's right and wrong. I've never felt so damaged that a little crying couldn't fix it. I've never been so worried, never so sad. I've never been so bothered, so damaged, so afraid.

Except for you.

I've never been more afraid of losing you.

And I hope I die before that happens...

sole exception, n.

the one thing that undoes every "I have never," all at once.



no return address on this one.



Checking In

I will always remember that small room. The calm and controlled steps we made as we strolled up those common stairs. The disimpassioned way we opened the doorknob as we slowly walked inside that sweat filled empty space.

A pitcher of water on the table. Newly made up sheets, overused and prepared with a cold alacrity for the next ones who will use it. The smell of neglectful poetry left behind by people who we've shared that battered bed.

And I remember every cordial kiss that went to places on your body that I know so well. I remember hugging you and never wanting to let go.

but the saddest part? the telephone. that familiar ring that always knew when to interrupt us — telling us to get dressed, telling us to go home.

i was younger than i felt.



and I remember standing there, buttoning my shirt, already
grieving the hour, because I knew where I was going next —
and it wasn't home to you.

borrowed permanence, n.

forever, conducted entirely in rooms that belonged to someone else by morning.



i was younger than i felt.



Indivisible

we didn't plan this. we weren't careful. we happened the
way weather happens.

and on the ordinary nights, when I think of us, I don't find
myself wishing for more time.

I've stopped believing time is the thing that decides how
we end.

indivisible weather, n.

the part of a life you can't remove without the rest of it coming loose.



*the clock in the kitchen runs
slow.*



These Tortured Hands

Sometimes it seems your hatred has taken you to places where your deepest insecurity resides. Like dimly lit hallways and unilluminated halls that only require the simple flip of a switch to brighten up these cornered walls. But you prefer darkened alleys and dingy cubbyholes that you know offer no immediate sense of comfort. And in your quest to find that ever elusive happiness you seek inside, you forgot that I was always there beside you. Holding a slowly dying candle, its pouring wax slowly melting on my hands, burning through my blistered skin, like God's tortured merchant of devotion.

votive offering, n.

(religion) a flame lit in devotion and left to consume itself — the giving that costs the giver.



*found a feather on the sill
that morning.*



32 Hours

It took you 32 hours to say you're sorry. Thirty-two excruciating hours of waiting for you.

If you know me at all, you'd know I would've accepted your apology in 32 minutes.

Every hour that passes feels like waiting for a verdict you already know will break you.

Because dying is when you ignore me. Death is when you choose never to come back.

I'd rather fight with you than not be with you at all.

Because I can't do another 32 hours.

preemptive pardon, n.

the apology I had already accepted in the hours it took you to believe I might.



*she'd have hated how quiet it
got.*



The Road Less Travelled

there is nothing quite as tiring as being the fault in every room you enter. you find it in the way I speak, the way I love, the way I stay.

and I am left turning it over, asking why you keep throwing dust in my eyes on ordinary days, for no reason at all.

so let me say it once more, slowly, so it stays:

you can choose the easy road. the paved one. the one everyone takes.

but I'm sorry to say it —

I am the road less travelled.

deferred regret, n.

the regret that hasn't arrived yet — the years you'll spend seeking a rarer road you mistook for the wrong one.



the good mug, for once.



Quiet Desperation

There's a quiet desperation that needs to be understood.
most of us live inside it. I just stopped pretending I didn't.

And that is why I could never force you to love me in the
same way that I have.
wanting can't be assigned. I know. I tried.

Do this and my hips will break, my feet will blister and my
voice will be as harsh and course as sand.

You love me because you need me.
I need you because I love you.
two different gravities. only one of them holds.

I should probably just be glad that you're still here.
you are the most convincing absence I've ever lived beside.

Although most of the time and even if we are together...



i let the rain in on purpose.



You're not.

present absence, n.

being beside someone who is here in body and gone in every way that counts.



i let the rain in on purpose.



Say It

so when you come back — and you might —
don't explain.

just look at me. take my hand. hold on like you mean it.

tell me you missed the shape of me against you.

and then, before anything else, say it:

I'm back. I love you so I'm back...

pending return, n.

the hope you hold open for an arrival that may or may not come.



some doors you just leave ajar.



The Wars That Dealt an Awful Blow

we cry a little every day now.
so much said.
so much done.

your feelings went somewhere
past language —
a vast thing
I can't read anymore.

the old wars,
the ones that landed hard,
didn't leave when they ended.
they sank under the skin
and stayed.

now it shows



*found this tucked in an old
coat pocket.*



in the strangest place:
not in a raised voice,
but in a touch.

a nudge.
a hand on the back.
a hug held
a second too long —

and you come apart
at the one thing
that was meant to help.

tender detonation, n.

the way gentleness, not conflict, sets off the damage buried under the skin.



*found this tucked in an old
coat pocket.*



My Own Name

somehow you made your ruin my fault — as if the wreckage
of you began the day you met me.

I would rather lose you now, while the love is still mine to
lose, than keep it by becoming no one.

dignified retreat, n.

the choice to walk away while something of you is still intact — and worth keeping.



*wrote this before I understood
it.*



Absolution

I forgive you
for falling short
of everything I expected.

I forgive you
for not loving me
the way you used to.

I forgive you
for going cold
without ever noticing
you'd once been warm.

I forgive you
for never fighting for me —
and for not having
the courage to say

the coffee went cold again.



you wouldn't.

I forgive you
for withholding
the love
I know I deserved.

but most of all —
and this is the one
that still takes something out of me —

I forgive you
for keeping us
a secret.

classified affection, n.
the love filed under secret — real, complete, and shown to no one.



the coffee went cold again.



Not In This Lifetime

the beer has gone bitter, warm where my hand has held it too long. I haven't taken a sip in an hour.

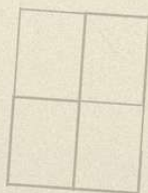
across the table, your chair is still pulled out — the way you left it when the last fight ended and the door did the talking.

this bitterness tastes like a premonition. like the first cold morning that tells you summer already left without saying so.

this is how kindness goes, then. quietly...

rehearsed grief, n.

the mourning that begins while the chair is still warm — grieving a leaving that hasn't finished happening.



left the light on out of habit.



Invisible Ink

and still — these are not the words of someone bitter. they
are the quiet proof that I was here. that I loved you well.
out loud in a room where you were never listening.

I was the hero of a story you never knew you were in.

and the saddest part was never that you left.

it was that you never noticed I had stayed.

unseen residency, n.

the long staying of someone never once acknowledged to have been there.



it rained the whole week after.



Signing Off

Not too long now, I'll be gone. Poof. Just like that. Completely off the grid. A tiny blip on the radar. A memory of lovers past. One day, much to everyone's surprise, I will sign off — without so much as a goodbye. I will disappear into the night and leave a gaping hole in that safety net you've always known. My arms won't curl into your waiting embrace. You'll live with the answer that I had chosen you, and you'll die with the question of whether you'd made a mistake by not choosing me. And this will break you in so many ways.

Because you will forever wonder why the ones that followed me could never understand you the way I did.

chosen absence, n.

the leaving you do on purpose, to become the thing they can never replace.



kept the receipt for some reason.



You Will Miss Me

You will miss me. Not convincingly at first. Never too loud. But always in the quiet. In the stillness of your hollowed empty space. And in the darkness of your solitude. In the absence of regret. You will see that I have moved on, that the warmth of my embrace has coated someone else. And you will miss me. Although not sooner than you thought you would...

sleeper effect, n.

(psychology) an impact that lies dormant and only grows stronger with time — the missing that arrives long after you've gone.



*still can't hear that song the
same way.*



Phantom Limbs

And you will forever be the phantom limb that I have lost. The lingering sensation left hanging by your unannounced goodbye. There's a hole inside my heart that waits for your return. I am so lost without you. But in the meantime, let me feel the goosebumps on my forearm as it brushes underneath your skin. My head still shouts your name. If you stay and take away this pain, I'll let you be the glare in the corner of my eyes. But if you go, you'll be the tiny bits of marrow splattered on my bones...

referred pain, n.

(medicine) pain felt somewhere other than its actual source – a goodbye in the chest, surfacing in the forearm, the bones.



*read this back and barely
recognized him.*



Things that Crawl

I can still feel the grip of your hand
even as I fell into this well,
this deep empty hole,
with centipedes and spiders
and all the things that crawl.

the bones of those who died before you,
they're scattered all around me.
they form a ray of black light —
dark and soggy, twisted, muddied, round.

why did you let go?

I scream at the top of my lungs.
I do this every night,



*the chair by the window is
still empty.*



with all these things that crawl.

oubliette, n.

(medieval architecture) a dungeon with a single opening overhead — built to drop a person in and forget them there.



the chair by the window is
still empty.



III

after goodbye



Say Goodbye

You can scare me all you want with your goodbye.

In fact, say it as you stand up from your couch, say it when we're talking on the phone, say it as you get off from your car, say it as you walk away from me.

It doesn't really matter where or when.

But before you go, please take the truth with you.

I want that to be the first thing that remains with you, and the last thing you take away from me...

false departure, n.

the leaving history reassigns — from the one who stood still to the one who actually walked away.



meant to send this. never did.



Spare Key

there will come a time
when you cross my mind
and I let you pass
without saying your name.

there will come a time
when I still care,
and I'll keep it
the way you keep a key
to a house
you no longer live in.

there will come a time
when I want you
and choose the silence —
because I finally learned
the difference



*someone underlined this part,
not me.*



between loving someone
and chasing them.

I mean —
I'll still know you.

just never
in the same way again.

object permanence, n.

the thing infants learn first: that you go on existing even when I'm not looking. it
took me longer — to know you were out there and not reach to be sure.



*someone underlined this part,
not me.*



Mid-Sentence

I never understood why people leave each other. It doesn't matter where it started, or how, or when — the pain runs the same either way. You live through it if you can.

You didn't even leave, not really. After our last fight, you just went quiet. No goodbye. No reason. You stopped answering and let the silence do what you wouldn't.

I've replayed that fight more times than I ever said I love you, looking for the line that ended us. I never found it. That's what stays — not a final word, just your voice gone mid-sentence, the argument still open somewhere, waiting on a reply that isn't coming.

I'm still here in the quiet you left me in, talking to a silence



*the ink smudged where a
thumb had been.*



shaped like you.

suspended argument, n.

a fight with no last line, left hanging for good.



*the ink smudged where a
thumb had been.*



Handover Notes

tell her everything.
all the time.
especially the hurt
you'd rather hide.

she doesn't always say what she means,
and she can be sharp.
love her right and it won't matter —
I loved her so much
that I forgot the difference.

kiss her like it's the first time.
peek while you do:
eyes closed, she's yours.

sing to her.
make every song



i think it was a tuesday.



start to sound like her.

write her poetry.
if you're lucky,
you'll replace mine
on the little table by her kitchen.

don't take her for granted.
it's a mortal sin.
you won't meet another like her.
(and I'm a tough act to follow.)

so tell her everything —
everything I never managed to.

and hey, by the way,
if it isn't too much to ask,



i think it was a tuesday.



tell her I still love her.

succession plan, n.

training the one who comes after you to love her better than you could – because her happiness matters more than being the one who stays.



i think it was a tuesday.



The Sand the Wave Has Swept Away

I can feel it coming: the slow drift to the far edge of your
mind, the quiet corner where things gather dust.

if I'm lucky, I'll be a name you almost place. a face the tide
left behind.

and you'll think of me about as often as you think of the
things you never think of at all.

and that's alright.

the sea takes the shore a grain at a time — it never asks if
the sand is ready.



*the window fogged and i drew
nothing.*



I used to fight the water. now I let it come.

littoral drift, n.

the way the shore loses its sand to the waves, grain by grain, without ever feeling it go.



*the window fogged and i drew
nothing.*



Knots That Won't Unbind

What if you found out everything that really mattered all boils down to one person? not the work. not the plans. one person.

And all you're left with is the painful regret of staying and the awful choice of letting go.

two doors, and a cost behind each one.

consoling lie, n.

the "I'm better off" you repeat until you almost believe it.



he always took the long way home.



What I Never Said

you will miss me.

in the corners of your unapologetic mind
you'll miss the highlights,
the small details of us,
and hate that someone new
gets the unapologetic warmth
you walked away from.

saving omission, n.

the one thing I left out – the sentence that might have made you stay, had I ever
said it.

*there's sand in the spine of this
page.*



The Winter of Your Discontent

there will come a time when you will look for me. Maybe not in spring that follows your mistakenly contented heart. But in the fall of your anticipated isolation.

It will creep in, slowly. It will reach out for you and your clenched fists and it will be remembered as the winter of your discontent.

The holiday wind will bring about a chill that will empty your lungs and send you an assault of desolation caused by the unbearable remoteness to the kind of love I gave.

And when you realize that I have done my best to keep these flames burning as I await for your return, bitter and crazy for the moments that you're most familiar with — you'll be happy once again. knowing well that summer has



*i stopped checking the phone
eventually.*



returned....

anticipated isolation, n.

the loneliness you can see coming toward you, and walk into anyway.



*i stopped checking the phone
eventually.*



The Space Reserved for You

there's a chair in me no one is allowed to sit in.
I won't say whose. you'd recognize the shape of your own
absence.

I kept it warm longer than I should have.
this morning, I stopped.

someone new will fill it — and she'll learn my name
the way you never did: out loud, in daylight.

I'm not signing this.
you'll know it was you by how much of it still fits.

vacant reservation, n.
a place kept warm for someone who never comes to fill it.



*the candle burned to the
saucer.*



Missing Out

congratulations. truly.

you looked at the best thing that ever stood in front of you
and said, "no thanks, I'm good."

us. what we started. the quiet magic of being us at all —
returned to sender. unopened. wrong size, apparently.

somewhere there's a version of your life with me still in it.
it's doing great. it sends its regards.

the soulmates we'll never get to be? tragic.
for you, mostly.

you'll call it the right decision,
and you'll tell that story so well.
you just won't know you were wrong.



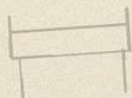
*i forgave her in the margins
first.*



which, honestly, is the funniest part.

forfeited loss, n.

the thing you give up without ever learning what it was worth.



*i forgave her in the margins
first.*



The Thing That Won't Let Go

one day you'll realize I was the one worth keeping —
probably at the worst possible moment. a wedding, maybe.
yours.

whoever comes after will taste faintly of my handwriting:
a decent cover version. good, even. not the original.

you'll catch my eyes in his and have to look away —
which is a lot of work to do at brunch.

turns out "new" and "safe" were never synonyms.
you'll look it up eventually. I'll wait.

and somewhere in you, the one who never let go
is still holding on. rent-free. excellent tenant.

our story doesn't end. it just goes unspoken,
the way the best ones do —



the tide took the rest.



the greatest love, the one we never told,
and the one you'll never quite finish reading.

soft haunting, n.

the gentle, unshakeable way you stay inside someone who left.



the tide took the rest.



The Truth I Leave Behind

let's agree never to confirm we weren't meant for each other.

some hypotheses are better left untested. this is one of them.

but if we ever get the data, it'll feel like the night you left:
quiet, final, the sound of a light switching off
in a room I have, inexplicably, kept paying rent on.

I'll settle eventually. everyone does.
not because someone finally "measures up" —
what a phrase, as if love came with a tape measure —
but because anyone who isn't you is simply easier to survive.

lower stakes. fewer casualties. adequate.

you'll probably never know how it was for me,



*kept meaning to throw this
out.*



which is fine. I've made peace with being a footnote
in the definitive edition of your life.

so I'm leaving it here, in writing, where you'll find it later —
assuming you read past the first page, which, historically,
you did not.

not a confession. confessions want absolution.
this just wants to be on the record.

the truest thing I never said out loud,
now conveniently available in print.

unspoken record, n.

the truest thing, written down precisely because it was never said aloud.



*kept meaning to throw this
out.*



Not Even Close

for a while I wanted you to feel it —
the ache after every fight.

I rehearsed the speech and everything. strong material, no
audience.

then I found a better use of my time:
becoming the best version of myself.
he'd been in stock the whole time —
back shelf, no signage. you walked right past him. twice.

my entire revenge plan, in full:
thriving. well-rested. emotionally available, just to other
people.

I only intend to be the one you go looking for
in every room after this —
and can't quite find,



*the branch outside finally
bloomed.*



squinting, in increasingly flattering lighting.

absurd benchmark, n.

the impossibly high standard you turn yourself into – the one no one after you will ever quite meet.



*the branch outside finally
bloomed.*



Broken Certainty

you had me at my brightest, and spent most of it looking
the other way.

you thought getting what you wanted would finally quiet
the wanting. it doesn't. it never has.

so you settled. I kept reaching. and the version of us that
could have been quietly decided not to.

I won't wish you regret. I won't wish you well, either. I'll
just leave this where you'll find it...

false abundance, n.

*believing there is always more where that came from, and learning, too late, there
wasn't.*



no return address on this one.



IV

in the dark



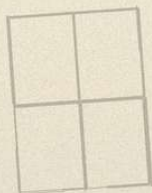
Nothing

ask me anything.
ask how I've felt,
any hour since you left.

I'll answer before you finish —
sadness is still sadness.
broken is still broken.
nothing is still nothing.

and since you're wondering,
here is everything I've done
with my life
while you were gone.

the bed stayed made on your side.
the coffee went cold
deciding if it still mattered.



i was younger than i felt.



the days walked in,
looked around for you,
and left the way you did.

so here it is.
all of it.

...

yes.
that's right.

now you know.

furnished absence, n.

*an emptiness that fills a whole house: the made bed, the cold cup, the long
unremarkable days spent doing none of it.*



i was younger than i felt.



Before Dawn

I remember waking before dawn
to a confusing kind of empty.
the first thought, every time:
how do I do this without her.

it still doesn't feel real.
like surfacing from a dream
straight into a nightmare
I already know by heart.

I've been here before.
which should make it easier.
it doesn't.

the pain hasn't dulled.
it just got familiar —
like walking into the same wall



*the clock in the kitchen runs
slow.*



and being surprised, each time,
that it's still there.

I remember walking into a sunrise
and wishing it would hurry
and turn into a sunset.

and in between,
the same quiet war.

familiar grief, n.

pain that never lightens, only turns routine.



*the clock in the kitchen runs
slow.*



Ink and Air

So I wrote sad stories about you. And little did you know, I made you immortal through my words. Those words dripped with everything — every hour we spent together, every ache I felt once you were gone. Writing kept me breathing. Writing gave me air. Writing kept me sane. But it still wasn't enough. So I avoided you. Seeing you felt like the slow walk to the guillotine — every step of it.

pressed flowers, n.

a love kept between the pages, flattened and beautiful, because it could not be kept any other way.



*found a feather on the sill
that morning.*



Asphyxiated

I'll take it. I'll take whatever you can give me. I'll take it rather than know the truth. That I was never loved. That I now have hands that don't know which pockets they belong in. That I now have legs that don't care where they walk. That I have these lips, and the next ones they touch will end the world. That I have asphyxiated lungs that still breathe air but, in its place, slowly take in despair. That I have this heart, the heart you broke into a million tiny little pieces. That I have this soul that doesn't know how it ever existed before you. Worst of all, that I have these memories of you and I can't take them out of my mind. And every bit of memory that includes you is everything and anything that's slowly killing me and tearing me apart...

carbon monoxide, n.

(chemistry) the odorless gas that fills the lungs in place of air — taking you slowly, without your ever noticing you'd stopped breathing.



*she'd have hated how quiet it
got.*



No One but You

I may just be a moment for you. But you were a lifetime for me. You've changed me in so many ways — for better and for worse. Everything I felt about you was absolute, irrefutable. You were the best part of every song I dedicated to you. The highlight of my day, at any given point in time. Nothing makes me happy like you do. You were even the pain I longed for, even when it hurt me in the most congenital of ways. But now look at you — all comfortable, without the feel of my embrace. And look at me: going quiet with the light. You'll never be here when I need you, and I'm feeling like the tattoo on your thigh. Something you know is always there, but never take the time to look at anymore.

ambient love, n.

devotion that fades into the background until it's just part of the furniture — always there, never looked at.



the good mug, for once.



The Air You Breathe

The most frustrating thing you'll ever do is give up the one thing you can't live without. That single thing keeping you alive. It's the air you breathe. The water you drink. The only happiness you ever knew. And by doing it, you do yourself a disservice. You become the anti-hero. The aberration. The rare move. You can tell yourself you made the right choice all you want, but life will never be the same. Or fair. Or meaningful... Time will stop. The only moments that matter will be the then and the now. The before and after. The here and the in-between. You'll never be as good as you once were. You'll never be the man you used to be. People won't let you. You can try. But you can't. Because nothing will ever make sense from now on... I mean, not anymore.

diminished self, n.

the lesser version you're left as once the thing that ran you is gone.



i let the rain in on purpose.



Kerosene

soon you'll understand
what I am.

a kerosene lamp.
a small, borrowed light
meant to burn
only for a while,
and only on what it's given.

you were right about me.
you always were.

and I don't blame you
for moving on,
for needing a steadier light
than the one I could be.

but if I'm honest —



some doors you just leave ajar.



I wanted to stay wrong.
I wanted to keep believing
in the version of us
that was never going to last.

because being wrong
was the only thing
that ever made me happy.

because the wrong —
foolish, doomed,
burning through its hours —

was the thing
that kept me alive.

vital error, n.

*the wrong you keep on purpose, because being mistaken was the only thing that
ever kept you lit.*



some doors you just leave ajar.



The Pain You Never Knew

We used to love each other.
Now we sit across from one another,
pretending this is just dinner.
The conversation is easy.
The silence isn't.
Every now and then,
our hands forget
that they're no longer allowed
to look for each other.
They still do.



*found this tucked in an old
coat pocket.*



I watch your eyes
search for the life
we almost had.
Please realize
you will never find me in another person.
Some connections happen only once.
So before you go,
I figured you should know...
I kissed you
to remind you
of this pain



*found this tucked in an old
coat pocket.*



you never knew.

forbidden reflex, n.

the reach a body makes across a table for what it is no longer allowed to hold.



*found this tucked in an old
coat pocket.*



Establishing Shot

We live and love and love to be loved. We think life is fair, yet we're quick to judge a thing unfair. Suddenly, our little versions of ourselves — and the values we held on to — wave a sorryless goodbye. And while time flies by, a harmless drone hovers above you. There are people all around. Some you know, and most you wish would go. The mechanical experience zooms in. You see a vision of yourself, only to be surprised you're all alone. You've always been alone. And I think you must have known that too.

aerial view, n.

the vantage that pulls back far enough to show you were always alone in the frame.



*wrote this before I understood
it.*



Desiderium

Everything seems broken. It was broken before I ever dared touch it. The worst part is that people don't care if it shatters into a million little pieces — though they always have a million suggestions on how to fix it. They always do. They move in and out of our lives just to make sure these little fragments stay exactly the way they are. Then they go, "I'm so glad that didn't happen to me." They're on-the-go spectators; they talk about what happens in between. They converge in small groups of three, wait for summer in June, talk about it for hours on end, laugh in hysterical naked madness, and feel good about themselves because they think they know how it feels. Everyone, I suppose, fancies the beautiful. And what's more beautiful than a well-designed mid-life tragedy they're certain they'll never be part of? Very quietly, very patiently, they watch. See how the poison takes effect. Wait for the credits to roll



the coffee went cold again.



until the screen goes black. Notice how it seeps into the wet and damaged soil while the rain pours hard. Celebrate the stare that lingered longer than it should have. Stand outside and watch him squeeze through those big, lonely revolving doors. Now smile against every insignificant matter flowing through your guilty, masticated veins, and breathe a sigh of temporary hope. There's a reason we were taught not to play with fire as children. Because it hurts. We know how much it hurts. And we know how long it takes to heal. It doesn't matter. Everyone fancies the beautiful.

And this fire is slowly dying...

tragedy tourism, n.

the way people visit someone else's ruin for the view, glad it isn't theirs.



the coffee went cold again.



V

after everything changed



A Cosmic Principle

Every choice echoes.

Nothing simply disappears.

The universe has a way of remembering what we forget.

Every kindness returns.

Every cruelty lingers.

Every truth waits.

You may never see the moment the scales begin to move.

But they always do.

The stars don't keep score.

They simply keep everything in motion.



left the light on out of habit.



Call it fate.

Call it karma.

Call it God.

I only know this:

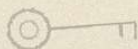
The universe has a way of balancing every equation.

That's not magic.

It's a cosmic principle.

moral gravity, n.

the unseen force that returns every kindness, holds every cruelty, and balances the books we were sure no one was keeping.



left the light on out of habit.



A Way to Live

last night a wave of happiness moved through me,
and underneath it,
quiet as a tide pulling back,
the thing I'd been trying not to name.

sadness.

I stayed up with Life until morning.
we talked the way old friends do —
no need to explain,
no need to pretend.
somehow it already knew
what was written in my soul.
it even answered
a question I never asked out loud.
“the trouble with hiding what you feel,”

it rained the whole week after.



it said,
“is that one day you reach the bottom of it
and find nothing there at all.

people will always believe
they know your heart.
they’ll tell you how you feel
and never think to ask.
let them.
you were never going to control that anyway.”

and then, softer —

“choose to be happy.”

I used to think that was a single decision.
a door you walk through once.

I know better now.



it rained the whole week after.



you choose it in the morning.
you choose it again at night.
you choose it on the days
that give you no reason to.

it was never just a choice.

it's a way to live.

renewable happiness, n.

*the kind that expires by morning and must be chosen again – especially on the
days that offer no reason.*



it rained the whole week after.



Everything Else

people suffer from knowing too much.
the mind fills past fairness,
past clear judgment,
until there are too many words
for what we feel —
and the words become a whirlpool.

but strip it down
and life only ever offers
two doors.
choose your poison.
sink or swim.
fight or cry.
move forward, or don't.
suffer, or live.

and none of it holds.



*kept the receipt for some
reason.*



the past won't keep you.

they'll forget your name.
your face.

the way you did things,
the stories you told,
the hours you gave,
the kindness you spent.

the streets will get new signs.
the stores will close.
governments will fall.
in the end, everyone
is forgotten —

no one left to remember you
except the few
who actually loved you.

the ones you kept



*kept the receipt for some
reason.*



taking for granted,
too busy caring
about everything else.

misallocated care, n.

pouring your attention everywhere except the people actually holding you.



*kept the receipt for some
reason.*



The Place That I Call Hell

My refuge from the pain is a four-walled place that I call hell. In here you can forget the things that can't be fixed. In here the people that society deems normal don't exist. In here there's a quest for truth and a passion for what's considerably real. In here no words can hurt you and your broken heart can heal. In here the heaven that you know is not that happy of a place. In here revenge is best served cold — so cold it turns into a case. In here the only flames that matter are the ones that burn your soul. In here no loving is ignored, and reciprocated to a fault. In here there are no notions of a life filled with regret. In here nobody leaves you in exchange for someone else. In here the thing that hurt you is the same thing that can fix you. In here there's freedom from discomfort, so you can go back to

*still can't hear that song the
same way.*



yourself...

hermetic seal, n.

(engineering) a closure so complete no air, no outside, gets in — a room sealed against the world.



*still can't hear that song the
same way.*



You. Do. Not. Exist.

To my lovely, indefatigable detractor, who continually sends hate messages that I constantly ignore.

Know this — I don't have to stoop to your level. No. That would bring you too much happiness. All I have to do is exist. Yes, exist — for you — until you ultimately recognize that life has more meaning than you could possibly fathom. You could camp out on my doorstep with your verbal weapons of mass destruction, and I would be so nice as to offer you this stuffed chicken wing that I deboned myself, just to let you know we're civil — while secretly wishing that you choke on a remnant wishbone that becomes a symbol of your vile and vulgar pride.

Yes, I am smart, well-read, and have a wicked sense of humor. In fact, I'd date myself if I could. And as you've noticed from that statement, I am also teeming with self-confidence. I have a power over you that you wouldn't



*read this back and barely
recognized him.*



recognize if it were staring you in the face. I may appear calm and collected, but know for a fact that the only reason I subordinate myself is so I can deconstruct you, and tear you apart limb from limb, when the opportunity to destroy presents itself.

God, that sounds so morbid...

rope-a-dope, n.

(boxing) feigning weakness, letting your opponent wear themselves out – then, only then, taking them apart.



*read this back and barely
recognized him.*



In the Quiet Between Us

let's skip the part where I die tragically of a broken heart.
too much. bad for the upholstery.

here's all I ever actually wanted:
one witness. someone willing to go on record
that a love like that happened, that it was mine, and it was
good.

I'm not asking for a monument.
a footnote would do. a strongly worded testimonial.

so — someday, when it comes up —
will you finally tell them?
or will you keep doing that thing
where you take the truth and quietly file it under



*the chair by the window is
still empty.*



"nothing"?

posthumous witness, n.

the truth of how much you were loved, arriving only once there's no one left to hear it returned.



*the chair by the window is
still empty.*



You

Someday, you might find me in a gutter somewhere, where the rain and sun combine to make my skin appear like mud. But that's only because I refused to move until the day you come back. I knew that if you returned, my love would always be the same. And it doesn't matter who you're kissing then, because I still know who you're thinking of, if and when you do. And though we didn't end up together, please tell them you always knew that we were so made for each other. So listen. I need you to do something for me. Something that will make me very happy. Okay? Okay. I need you to tell the world that the only other person who really knew me was you. I need you to tell them stories about how much I lived, how much I breathed, and how much I loved.

But more than this, I need you to tell them that the person I loved, lived, and breathed for was

meant to send this. never did.



YOU.

designated keeper, n.

the one person you appoint to hold the truth of how you loved, and to tell it to everyone else.



meant to send this. never did.



The Hamster of Despair

the hamster of despair is dead,
but the wheel is still turning.

I don't have to keep running
just to stay alive.
I can sit still now,
and feel
absolutely nothing.

and nothing
ever felt this good.
nothing
ever felt this right.

your name has gone unfamiliar —
a word left over from a dream.
you know it happened.



*someone underlined this part,
not me.*



then you're not so sure.

like recalling something clearly
and barely at all,
at once.

flywheel effect, n.

*the way a wheel keeps spinning long after the power is cut — the machinery gone,
the motion not yet caught up.*



*someone underlined this part,
not me.*



Quiet Reinvention

One day you will regret walking away from me. And you will look for me in places where you think I might be. But I will no longer be there. These arms will be unreachable from then on. This heart you once called home will become an empty space, gathering the dust of memories of you. Every corner you walk into will be filled with the songs we used to sing. And anyone who makes love to you after me will wonder why his body and yours don't seem to agree. Someday, in the end, you will regret losing me.

And me? I'll be long gone by then — not just moved on, but changed past your recognition. Still learning. Still building. Giving to someone else the parts of me you kept forgetting to hold.

somatic memory, *n.*

the body's own recollection of a former lover — why the next one never quite fits.



*the ink smudged where a
thumb had been.*



My Heart Heals Twice As Fast

I finally exhaled the last of you —
the part I'd been keeping alive in my chest
like an overwatered plant.

letting go is the hard part.
admitting it's over. admitting, worse,
that you were never quite mine to begin with.

there's still some damage on file.
a few dents. a cracked thing or two.
words that landed like splinters and stayed.

fine. noted.
but here's the part you underestimated:
you can keep doing this all you like.

my heart heals twice as fast.



i think it was a tuesday.



warranty's excellent. ask around.

rapid remission, n.

the wound that lifts faster than it should – ready to love again before it has finished healing.



i think it was a tuesday.



The Shadow of This Wall

I am the emancipation of the truth. In happiness, I will reside. I made this choice just now. Yes. Really. Like a few seconds ago. Life had been an encumbrance — but what used to feel like a rock falling to the ground has now become a balloon soaring through the skies. The moments I had, the shapes I left behind, and that ripple of water have all dissipated. You will no longer find me in that place I once was. I am no longer there.

This world is a haven for the desperate and the confused, and I am at its center, spinning with renewed focus and determination. Because even if I try to decipher everything happening around me, words will fail, efforts won't impress, and life goes on. I walk the same path, but slowly now, and the song playing in the space between my ears drives away the ghosts that used to fill my lungs. If I'm lucky, one day I'll get the chance to leave a legacy of love



*the window fogged and i drew
nothing.*



and hope, and the concrete where I once stood will
remember my name.

sublimation, n.

(chemistry) a solid passing straight into vapor, skipping the liquid altogether — a
fallen weight becoming a thing that rises.



*the window fogged and i drew
nothing.*



The End of Our Goodbyes

in time, the smoke will clear.

for now, time is the thing that holds us.

time is the insult.

time is the distance

between this and the day it stops hurting.

but that day will come.

the dust of everything we lost

will settle at our feet,

and we will still be here.

we'll gather what's left of us —

the parts worth keeping —

and carry them quietly

into whatever we build next.

no audience.



*he always took the long way
home.*



no proof to offer anyone.
just us,
older,
still here.

acceptance is the only thing
that ever really saves us.
not forgetting.
not winning.
just the slow agreement
to stop fighting what already happened.
so breathe.

because soon —
sooner than it feels —



*he always took the long way
home.*



it will be the end of our goodbyes.

slow clearing, n.

the gradual lifting of smoke after the fire – not forgetting, not winning, only the quiet agreement to stop fighting what already happened.



*he always took the long way
home.*



Steady State

they'll tell you love is the fireworks.
it isn't.
it's a Tuesday.
it's you, humming off-key in the kitchen,
me pretending not to watch.
it's running out of things to say
and staying anyway —
comfortable in the quiet
the way you're only ever comfortable
in a house you've lived in for years.
anyone can be dazzling for a weekend.
I want the one
I'd choose again



*there's sand in the spine of this
page.*



on the most ordinary day we'll ever have.

steady state, n.

(chemistry) the condition a system reaches once it stops fluctuating and simply holds.



*there's sand in the spine of this
page.*



Good Morning, Trouble

you wake up
with your hair staging a small rebellion
and yesterday's laugh still on your face,
and I think: there she is,
the whole reason
mornings were invented.
you mumble something
that isn't quite a word.
I agree with it completely.
this is the trick no one warns you about —
that the person you love
is most beautiful
in the exact state



*i stopped checking the phone
eventually.*



they'd never let a camera see.

golden hour, n.

(photography) the brief light after sunrise that flatters everything – though you'd look like this to me at noon.



*i stopped checking the phone
eventually.*



Compound Interest

I stopped auditioning
for rooms that were never going to cast me.
I stopped shrinking
to fit doorways
built for smaller lives.
here's what I know now,
at the halfway mark:
you don't lose by being too much.
you lose by handing the scissors
to people who only ever
wanted less of you.
so I'm keeping all of it.
the volume. the appetite. the laugh



*the candle burned to the
saucer.*



that shows up before the joke is finished.

compound interest, n.

(finance) the quiet math by which small, steady faith in yourself becomes, given time, a fortune.



*the candle burned to the
saucer.*



Going, Going

they say there's someone for everyone,
like it's a comfort.
as if the point weren't finding
the one specific someone
in a world doing its best
to lose you in the crowd.
but there you were.
back of the room.
unimpressed by all the right things.
and something in me
that had been going, going,
for years —
finally went.
gone.

hammer price, n.

(auctions) the sum at which the gavel falls and a thing becomes, irrevocably, yours.



*i forgave her in the margins
first.*



House Rules

in this house
we dance badly and on purpose.
we keep the good mugs
for ordinary Tuesdays,
because who exactly
were we saving them for.
we say the sappy thing out loud
even when it's embarrassing —
especially then.
the world can keep its grand romance.
I'll take the small, unglamorous forever
of someone who knows
how I take my coffee
and makes it anyway, every time,
like it's the least they can do



the tide took the rest.



and the most.

common law, n.

(law) a bond the world comes to recognize not by ceremony but by the plain fact of your living it, day after day.



the tide took the rest.



The Long Way Around

thank the wrong ones. truly.
thank the ones who left
right on schedule,
who taught you the exact shape
of what you didn't want
so you'd know the rest
the instant you found it.
nothing was wasted.
not the detours,
not the dead ends,
not the years
you'd swear you lost.
you didn't fall behind.



*kept meaning to throw this
out.*



you were being routed.

dead reckoning, n.

(navigation) finding exactly where you are by honoring every mile that got you here — even the wrong ones.



*kept meaning to throw this
out.*



Glossary of Feelings

absurd benchmark

the impossibly high standard you turn yourself into — the one no one after you will ever quite meet.

aerial view

the vantage that pulls back far enough to show you were always alone in the frame.

ambient love

devotion that fades into the background until it's just part of the furniture — always there, never looked at.

anticipated isolation

the loneliness you can see coming toward you, and walk into anyway.

asymptotic love

a love that keeps approaching forever while forever keeps moving — until mathematics sets down its pen and surrenders.

borrowed permanence

forever, conducted entirely in rooms that belonged to someone else by morning.

carbon monoxide

(chemistry) the odorless gas that fills the lungs in place of air — taking you slowly, without your ever noticing you'd stopped breathing.

chosen absence

the leaving you do on purpose, to become the thing they can never replace.



circadian monotony

the same grey day lived on a loop, until leaving feels like the only color left.

classified affection

the love filed under secret — real, complete, and shown to no one.

common law

(law) a bond the world comes to recognize not by ceremony but by the plain fact of your living it, day after day.

compound interest

(finance) the quiet math by which small, steady faith in yourself becomes, given time, a fortune.

consoling lie

the “I’m better off” you repeat until you almost believe it.

dead reckoning

(navigation) finding exactly where you are by honoring every mile that got you here — even the wrong ones.

deferred regret

the regret that hasn’t arrived yet — the years you’ll spend seeking a rarer road you mistook for the wrong one.

designated keeper

the one person you appoint to hold the truth of how you loved, and to tell it to everyone else.

destructive interference

(physics) two waves aligned so perfectly that they cancel each other into silence.

dignified retreat

the choice to walk away while something of you is still intact — and worth keeping.



diminished self

the lesser version you're left as once the thing that ran you is gone.

extinction event

(paleontology) the sudden ending of whole species, whole worlds — your kiss as the meteor.

false abundance

believing there is always more where that came from, and learning, too late, there wasn't.

false departure

the leaving history reassigns — from the one who stood still to the one who actually walked away.

familiar grief

pain that never lightens, only turns routine.

flywheel effect

the way a wheel keeps spinning long after the power is cut — the machinery gone, the motion not yet caught up.

forbidden reflex

the reach a body makes across a table for what it is no longer allowed to hold.

forfeited loss

the thing you give up without ever learning what it was worth.

found coordinate

the one location that turned out to be someone, not somewhere.

furnished absence

an emptiness that fills a whole house: the made bed, the cold cup, the long unremarkable days spent doing none of it.



golden hour

(photography) the brief light after sunrise that flatters everything — though you'd look like this to me at noon.

hammer price

(auctions) the sum at which the gavel falls and a thing becomes, irrevocably, yours.

hermetic seal

(engineering) a closure so complete no air, no outside, gets in — a room sealed against the world.

imperative necessity

choosing one person to love, and closing the door on everyone else — not a want, a requirement.

imported calm

the peace someone only had because you carried it in with you.

indivisible weather

the part of a life you can't remove without the rest of it coming loose.

kept secret

the one true thing you hold onto — small enough to whisper, large enough to carry a lifetime.

littoral drift

the way the shore loses its sand to the waves, grain by grain, without ever feeling it go.

load-bearing love

the love the rest of your life rests on. remove it, and every other room comes down.



misallocated care

pouring your attention everywhere except the people actually holding you.

moral gravity

the unseen force that returns every kindness, holds every cruelty, and balances the books we were sure no one was keeping.

mutual detour

the one afternoon a planner and a wanderer chose the same road — and spent every year after trying to find it again.

object permanence

the thing infants learn first: that you go on existing even when I'm not looking. it took me longer — to know you were out there and not reach to be sure.

oubliette

(medieval architecture) a dungeon with a single opening overhead — built to drop a person in and forget them there.

pending return

the hope you hold open for an arrival that may or may not come.

placebo effect

(medicine) a real, measurable change produced by nothing but belief — no incantations, no effects, just love.

posthumous witness

the truth of how much you were loved, arriving only once there's no one left to hear it returned.

preemptive pardon

the apology I had already accepted in the hours it took you to believe I might.

present absence

being beside someone who is here in body and gone in every way that counts.



pressed flowers

a love kept between the pages, flattened and beautiful, because it could not be kept any other way.

pressure point

(martial arts) the small, exact place where the lightest touch undoes the whole body — one spot, and everything gives.

private draft

the version of someone you keep writing only in your mind, never on the page.

radical acceptance

taking a person exactly as they are — edge, bitterness, damage and all — with nothing held back.

rapid remission

the wound that lifts faster than it should — ready to love again before it has finished healing.

referred pain

(medicine) pain felt somewhere other than its actual source — a goodbye in the chest, surfacing in the forearm, the bones.

rehearsed grief

the mourning that begins while the chair is still warm — grieving a leaving that hasn't finished happening.

renewable happiness

the kind that expires by morning and must be chosen again — especially on the days that offer no reason.

rope-a-dope

(boxing) feigning weakness, letting your opponent wear themselves out — then, only then, taking them apart.



saving omission

the one thing I left out — the sentence that might have made you stay, had I ever said it.

shared tempo

two bodies keeping the same time, down to the last beat.

sleeper effect

(psychology) an impact that lies dormant and only grows stronger with time — the missing that arrives long after you've gone.

slow clearing

the gradual lifting of smoke after the fire — not forgetting, not winning, only the quiet agreement to stop fighting what already happened.

soft haunting

the gentle, unshakeable way you stay inside someone who left.

sole exception

the one thing that undoes every "I have never," all at once.

somatic memory

the body's own recollection of a former lover — why the next one never quite fits.

steady state

(chemistry) the condition a system reaches once it stops fluctuating and simply holds.

sublimation

(chemistry) a solid passing straight into vapor, skipping the liquid altogether — a fallen weight becoming a thing that rises.

succession plan

training the one who comes after you to love her better than you could — because her happiness matters more than being the one who stays.



suspended argument

a fight with no last line, left hanging for good.

tender detonation

the way gentleness, not conflict, sets off the damage buried under the skin.

tender hunger

wanting someone as completely as you love them, with no line between.

tragedy tourism

the way people visit someone else's ruin for the view, glad it isn't theirs.

unseen residency

the long staying of someone never once acknowledged to have been there.

unspoken record

the truest thing, written down precisely because it was never said aloud.

usufruct

(law) the right to use and enjoy a thing that belongs to another — these lips, held for you, to no one else's keeping.

vacant reservation

a place kept warm for someone who never comes to fill it.

vital error

the wrong you keep on purpose, because being mistaken was the only thing that ever kept you lit.

votive offering

(religion) a flame lit in devotion and left to consume itself — the giving that costs the giver.



willing captivity

being wrapped around a finger and choosing to stay there.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

CORNU VALDEZ

Cornu Valdez writes about the quiet moments that stay with us the longest.

His words live somewhere between prose, poetry, and letters never meant to be sent—exploring love, loss, memory, and the things we don't always have the courage to say out loud.

When he's not writing, he helps brands and people tell their stories with clarity and purpose. Over the years, he has worked in marketing, media, and digital strategy—always drawn to the art of connection and the power of a well-told story.

If These Pages Find You is his first collection.

He hopes these pages find you exactly when you need them.

