

for Marthe Reed

by Megan Burns

on Thanksgiving morning in Lafayette
i start to read the book
you helped create before you died
the one your husband brought to me
in New Orleans at the Dragonfly
a place where you should be in body
& also inside the book in words (em)bodied
& i think about bliss and how your bio
has an end date and why did you end

and also how did we end up here
it's hard for me to believe your work
was anywhere near done

what damage has already
been done
how to keep a world viable
how to remain viable, a wake

or to intervene, to say
 as if by magic
 so i will into the world

your continual being

let me frame for you a catalogue
of conversations about grief
i never intended to have

that we might continue to cherish
time is slippery
*for Mike- you say- who makes everything
possible- who among us makes everything possible*

i think about love every day
 i think about what it does
 and does not make possible

i go alone into the underworld
but there is no alone
there is no underworld

there is a glossary of where i've been
& what i have survived

this land you occupied
is haunted and also
haunted you how could you not give up Louisiana
any more than language itself

i did not plan to come here
with your words in my bag
but life is rarely how we plan it
or death—or us, the living who go on
holding your death out in front of us—all of the dead
our Anthropocene of held energy

i sit and listen to the bird's call
do these birds who sing now
—certainly did not sing for you
but still that sound
like an echo, mirrors and doubles
like the way a poet will mine an area
like grief—we take it out, we keep it close
he says, it's not as if i want to be rid of my grief

my bereavement—this mantle i have earned
by laying down in love

*we require each other in unexpected collaborations
and combinations*

-Donna Haraway

someone dies

and death colludes
grief combines
the dead thread a story long

after exit

i pulled over to the side of the road
i sat down or stood up next to my desk
i laid down next to your body
i was on a phone
i remember every moment i heard

now you are dead
 and the world rearranges itself
around that fact
 every cell in the body
rearranges itself

now for a new definition

 of who we are

and what we are
 after you are gone

we check sources, and we look at our faces in the mirrors
we sleep, dream & wake up: All the while—tell me

what i am now

when someone you love dies
there is a part of you that ceases
to care if all of it dies

parts of us die, and that is despair

powerful the words of not being named
unmoored, unhinged
unfamiliar light

take it all, drown it all

what need have i for sound

what could be vital now

what could go on

what words help us make
something of the landscape of death

grief literacy

otherwise seen as “nothing”

if we do not speak of it
& that we do not speak of it

accrues our suffering
let us detail this too

a language of how we lose
and what we do in the aftermath
one that holds all hope and all despair
say precisely what we mean

perhaps we could chart a course
understand more accurately
physical places we occupy
& places not occupied by physical beings
& where we meet

where we cross one another, close
enough to touch—that “relational overlap”
between spirit & matter

“who is our” as in who is our dead
& what rights do we have to claim them as ours
where is grief leading us
and if i do not want to go there

where am i carried

we “invent ways to see what we need to see”

or rather grief teaches us a new language
perhaps we have never seen clearly
until now, perhaps it is only in breaking

that we are able to see
imaginary, or out of grief

i constructed ways to survive
as for belief, i say to your love

what causes less suffering
is all that matters

i'm not interested in a language
of static truths

i know truth is fluid to what allows us to thrive
under it, not destroying but shaped
by the light of our love, or to say
the only truth is love

or love is the only truth

to walk this path of grief

you carry your love & you allow
your hands to open

we learn to “not see”
all of our lives
so at first, the task of seeing
what grief hands you
is almost unbearable

blinding, you have no word

you reach out, disoriented
you reach out towards the dead
& you reach out towards the living

& who
& who takes your hand
& whose hand do you find in yours

when we think, we always think with
-Linda Russo

i remember walking together
the sky blue & gentle
& of what we can & cannot do
in the face of loss
we move in bodies suspended
 in a hollow
 in an echo in shatter
we of limbs & sound

i spoke a poem in your tongue
to a crowd and have no memory
of how i stood there

i knew once with a certainty like death
that we were coding into the poems stories of survival
paths deep in our ancestral DNA
held together by the word
we secreted into the poem
the spells needed to continue
a matrilineal line of program & you too, knowing
defined & created languages

against the slaughter

our bodies resisting

the erasure of s_l_nce