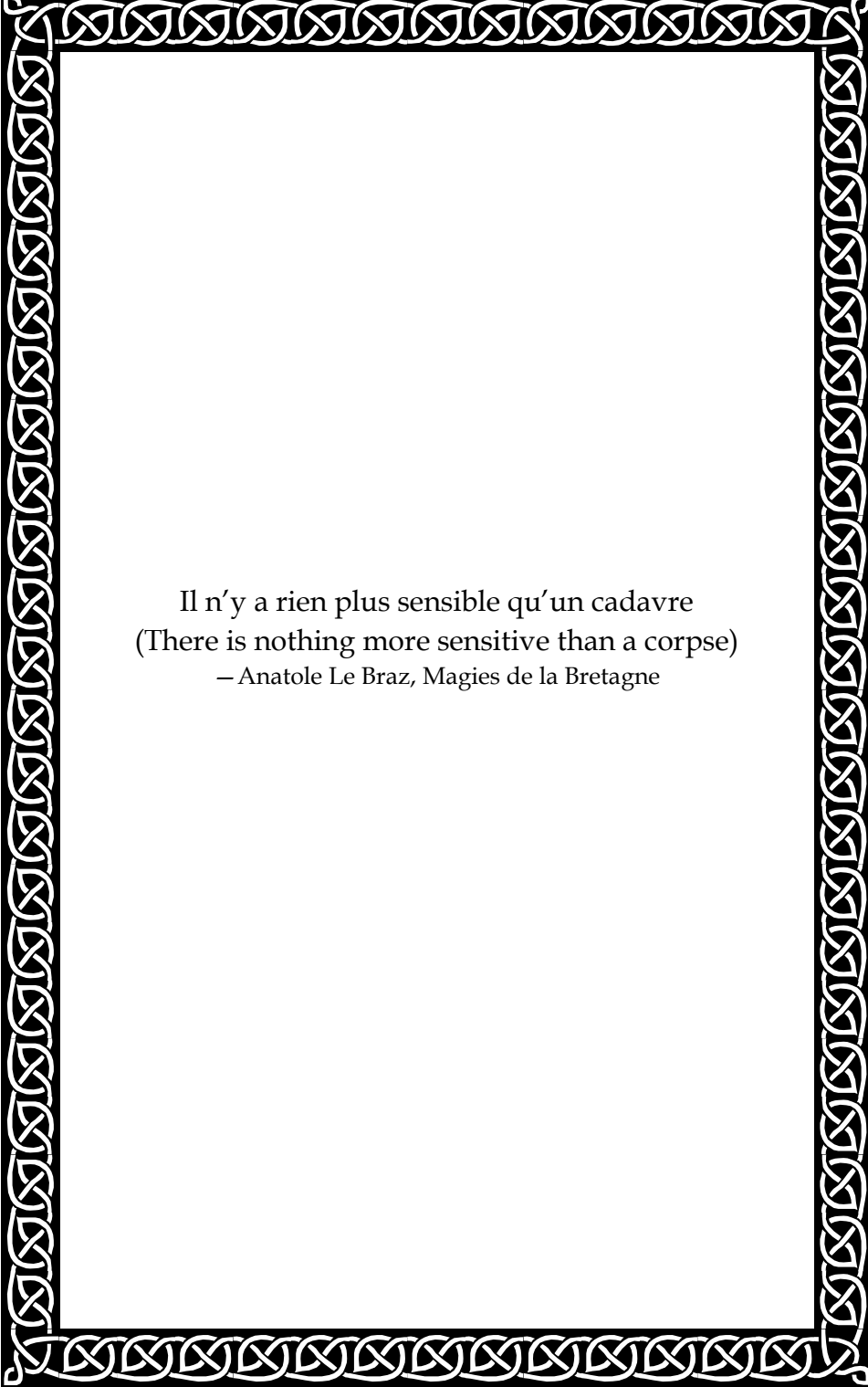




NOTHING GAINED

Dedicated to the memory of
Alain Bonkela Isekatuli
May 23, 1970 - June 10, 2021



Il n'y a rien plus sensible qu'un cadavre
(There is nothing more sensitive than a corpse)
– Anatole Le Braz, *Magies de la Bretagne*

We like to imagine
The bright lilacs leaving
Return again next spring
That's nothing but a lie

Aided and abetted
By weak minds – wilful eyes
That cannot distinguish
Each blossom's delicate

Differences dying
Uniquely fragrant deaths

AGG20210610

sometime in the night
the pitiless knife was honed
for the fatal slice
in the morning I awoke
to "Time will heal this wound too"

but time is the thug
who lacerates all our hearts
standing still – stone-faced
blade in one hand – the other
outstretched – demanding payment

AGG20210617

We did not know it
At the time – we only knew
The touch and the taste
Of each other – the rising
And the falling of our breath

As we fell asleep
After the heat we added
To the June twilight
Faded to final darkness
I did not know it – not then

AGG20210618

The lining of my jacket was frayed
And my pants had a small stain
As you know – I don't have an iron
So – the Christian Dior shirt
You bought for me was wrinkled
Sorry for showing up looking like a hobo
But – you see – you weren't here
To help dress me for your funeral

AGG20210625

Now you have become
Someone mainly spoken of
Using the past tense
But the white lilies wilting
Drag me into the future

Forcing me to speak
The awkward language of hope
About a spacetime
I'm sorry you cannot know
Though I wish you were present

AGG20210701

The dead are easy to love
There's not a word of a lie
Comes out of their mouths
That we ourselves do not first
Place on their cold lips

AGG20210704

It would seem pointless –
Sticking dandelion seeds
Back on their bare stalks
Once they've scattered on the breeze
– but your memories I'll keep

For nine years I cared
Cared about you – cared for you
The winds of one night
Have left me here wondering
This – what lies beyond caring?

AGG20210715

On the shores of Epekwitk
Such is the beauty
That you are no longer part of
Waves and sun and wind
All these once enticed our skin
Together – now mine alone
You swam in these waters – once
You lay on these white sands – once
Your beauty was – once
The gentleness of these waves
Caressing hot sands
No returning – now
Wind will seeming endless sculpt
Ever-shifting dunes
Strangely different waves – now
Suffering changes
Leave my broken heart
On the shores of Epekwitk
And offer it raw
To biting wind-driven sands
Astringent tears of the sea
AGG20210819

These dying days of summer
Oddly alien
Bigleaf magnolia pods
Prepare next year's blooms
Their odyssey all their own
Oblivious to you – me
Nine years to the day
I texted "Salut ça va?"
And you would reply
Until this summer – that is
An ending without a word
Cicadas singing
Here – now – will know only one
You knew fifty-one
Will never know fifty-two –
These dying days of summer

AGG20210901

On the ninth anniversary of our meeting through Scruff

Tongo malamum bolingo na nga!

Tongo malamum motema na nga!

(Good morning my love!

Good morning my heart!)

This was the ritual text exchange between Alain and me in his mother tongue, Lingala, almost every morning for almost nine years.

Then it stopped on June 10, 2021.

Now you are voiceless
Music played solely
On windless October nights
By soft falling rain
Concussing the dying leaves--
Cantata to sonata

Unpredictable
The music of memory--
A burst of laughter
Becomes a spasm of tears--
And I am no musician

AGG20211001

Born out of our touch—
A caress a kiss a fuck
Now — all out of reach
I'd press my ear to your grave
But fear hearing — Join me, please!

AGG20211010

In the year you died
The leaves do not want to leave
Don't they know? Let go!
Your reds russets yellows golds
Will never be seen again

AGG20211101

Elsewhere
Now you are – elsewhere
My Albi, my alibi
What is my excuse
To continue being – here
Sunshine on stubborn oak leaves

AGG20211106

Albi was Al(ain) B(onkela)'s nickname. Alibi in English comes from the Latin word Alibi, meaning elsewhere.

The moon used to cast
Two shadows – now – only one
Plate on the table
AGG20211110

An empty green chair
Extra space on the sidewalk
You are absences
Vacant spaces – this without
Even mentioning the bed

AGG20211113

You who hated cold
the purple flowers
and golden leaves all fallen
to November frost
I think of you and wonder —
How far down will the ground freeze?

AGG20211119

the soft cooing of the crows
this morning I heard
the soft cooing of the crows
you've never heard it?
small surprise — as it's whispered
just to the beloved's ears

AGG20211120

The Names Of The Dead

Do not be afraid

To say the names of the dead

You will not raise them

From their cold and empty graves

All their ghosts are in your head

AGG20211122

A Response to Meng Jiao's "Apricots Die Young"

The Moon was nowhere

To be seen the night you died

The Moon shone brightly

Two weeks later – on the dark

Freshly turned clay of your grave

While you and the Moon

Both disappeared together

Only one returned

Fickle silent reminder

Of the before and after

AGG20211207

Deceased: June 10, 2021, New Moon: No illumination

*Interment: June 26, 2021, Waning Gibbous Moon: illumination 96 per-
cent*

Dead lovers are easiest
Easier even to draw
Than gods – other ghosts
Never again to be touched
Precarious icons

Ghosts do not haunt us
We are the ones haunting them
With dead-end desires

I have decided
Your ghost is a happy one
Forever dancing
Amid those purple flowers
On that sunlit summer day

AGG20211222

Ghosts are easiest to draw. People are familiar with dogs and horses, which they see everyday, so dogs and horses are the most difficult to draw. As to ghosts, no one has ever seen them, so one can draw them any way one likes. Therefore, ghosts are the easiest to draw. Han Fei (approximately 280-233 BCE)

画鬼最容易。因为狗，马，人人都知道，天天都看见，所以最难画。至于鬼呢，谁也没有见过，想怎么画就怎么画，所以最容易画。韩非（约公元前280--前233年）

Death cannot be poetry

The days that remain
Be they happy sad long short
They'll be without you
This clarity of death means
That this is not poetry

A poem requires
Something – not nothing
Some purple flowers
A dancing ghost – some such thing
To pin itself to – not death

AGG20211227

Ghosts are luxuries
Fireside and cinema
For storytellers
Who can talk about Horrors
That they are not living with
When Death is closest
Ghosts are nowhere to be seen
Nowhere to be heard
Amid the daily numbers
Of the sick and newly dead
I luxuriate
In quiet conversations
Barely audible
Amidst alarm and ennui
Cozy with my Ghost Lover
AGG20211229

Deadheading the Widow's Thrill
First-time deadheading
The Widow's Thrill's gray withered
Buds— like Google said
Sure enough— new yellow blooms
This is why I distrust plants
Life in general
Mindlessly going on and...
Delta— this one's dead
Omicron— Race y'all— woo-hoo!
Last one there's a rotten egg!
Last day of the year
The last year you were alive
It's quaint that y'all feel
Like y'all have a future
That's all behind me
Collapsing into
The present— above is sky
Below is the ground
The ground that's surrounding you
A seed that won't grow— unlike
Those new yellow blooms
I can pretend were aided
By my selfish acts
But in the end— beginning
And ending— all on their own
AGG20211231

Madamn'd Grimm Griffy's Service Ora[c]le

"Being on the alert, howling

Late at night

There are men with arms

Fear not,"

The Book Of Changes

All our cellphones howling the curfew threnody, we bid farewell to 2021 and welcome 2022. But Madamn'd Grimm Griffy is here, wielding her impressive psychic powers to tell you not to worry.

Having encountered a period of sorrow, we use our intellects to free ourselves from fear and pain. The world reveals itself anew, as irises blooming in May, as Iris the rainbow messenger of the gods, as the embraces of men in the night. Energized, our art flourishes.

Make an exhaustive list of things you might not do, and then do the first thing on the list. As for the rest of the list, do or not-do as you see fit.

The Cards as they were dealt on Dec 31, 2021.

Tarot Major Arcana: The Sun

Tarot Minor Arcana: The Queen of Swords

Hanafuda: Shatsukii: rice shoot playing month (May): 菖蒲: あ

やめ: ayame: Iris: the Greek Goddess, personification of the Rainbow, messenger of the Gods

Brian Eno's Oblique Strategies: Make an exhaustive list of everything you might do and do the last thing on the list

The Book of Changes/I Ching/ 易經: Trigram 43: 夬 - Guai - Eliminating Evil, Moving from Inaction to Action.

My winter garden

White with the barest sketches

Of darkened branches

Imperfect pages tracing

Imaginary blossoms

Free and riotous

Yellow azaleas – real

Rhododendrons – pink

Worm-gnawed magnolias – proud

Presences in absences

AGG20220104

Time in the Lazaretto
Days in the Lazaretto
Meme streaming echo chambers
Nights in the Lazaretto
Dreams offering no refuge
Some of the ghosts are little
More than neon memory
Others have flesh on their bones
Potential death on their breath
Nights in the Lazaretto
Necrophorus meat beetle
Days in the Lazaretto
A Jack-in-the-Box Jesus
AGG20220108

If you had drowned – perhaps
The sea one day would have
Remembered – suddenly – your name
I whisper it to purple jellyfish
– pulsating with hope –
That the rumour of your demise
May reach Poseidon’s ear – pillowed
On pink corals and mother-of-pearl – lost
In a dream of mutual love – lost
AGG20220121

A Head Full of Stories

The dead do not nourish the living

Famished

They're eager to eat

Our memories of them

Leave us with fuck all

But a head full of stories

Ceann Lán na Scéalta

Ní chothaíonn na mairbh na beo

Cailte leis an ocras

Ba mhaith leo

Ár gcuimhní cinn orthu a ithe

Ní fhágann siad faic na fríde againn

Ach ceann lán na scéalta

AGG20220123

Nothing Gained

After your birthday party

I kissed you into a cab

Waved you into the night

Not knowing five days later

You would be dead

I have not seen you since

Which might not seem odd

But that I have seen others

One day in a food court at a mall

I saw a friend eating chow mein

And stifled a wave remembering

He died a year previous

If you do not want to encounter

The ghost of the departed

You should gently kiss their forehead

Before the coffin lid is closed

For the final time

Something I had seen done

Something I did

Over and over again

As a child attending funerals

Crying women surrounded

Your coffin I had no chance

To make that final gesture

To seal our worlds apart

What is stopping you

From appearing now?

Except twice – and only twice – in dreams
Once – wearing a white shirt
Wide-eyed and bewildered – you said
“Andy, where is this coming from?”
And you pointed
To the centre of your chest
Where spots of bright red blood
Seeped through shimmering silk
Then I knew it is not good
That you are buried
In a Catholic graveyard
Filled with statues of Jesus Christ pointing
To his fucking Sacred Bleeding Heart
Now at the end of our adventure
You have gained nothingness
And while I have not lost everything
I have lost a lot
And fading memory will take the rest
You will become
An empty space bracketed
By my outstretched arms
A sudden wilderness
Of ever-elongating waves
AGG20220516

To mark the anniversary of Alain's death, I have collected the poems I have written over the past year about him, our relationship and its end.

Most have already been published on tankawanka.wordpress.com, but a few have been added, and several revised.