

A songwriter loses his will to make music, and finds an unlikely muse in the ghost who haunts the home he just purchased.

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The soul of a woman is trapped in an unforgiving cage of her past, and needs help finding the keys to her freedom.

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A troubled man returns from war with a Purple Heart, a mysterious hunger and demons who find him despite the deep-cover and camouflage of love.

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A battle-scarred, one-armed guardian angel protects those in her care, refusing to be made whole, claiming her injury gives her empathy.

Songwriter, artist and author, Antsy McClain, performs this transcendent musical journey, playing every instrument and singing every note you hear, while telling a darkly sweet story of redemption and healing.

These 13 songs, presented in a three-act arc, form an exquisite labor of love that

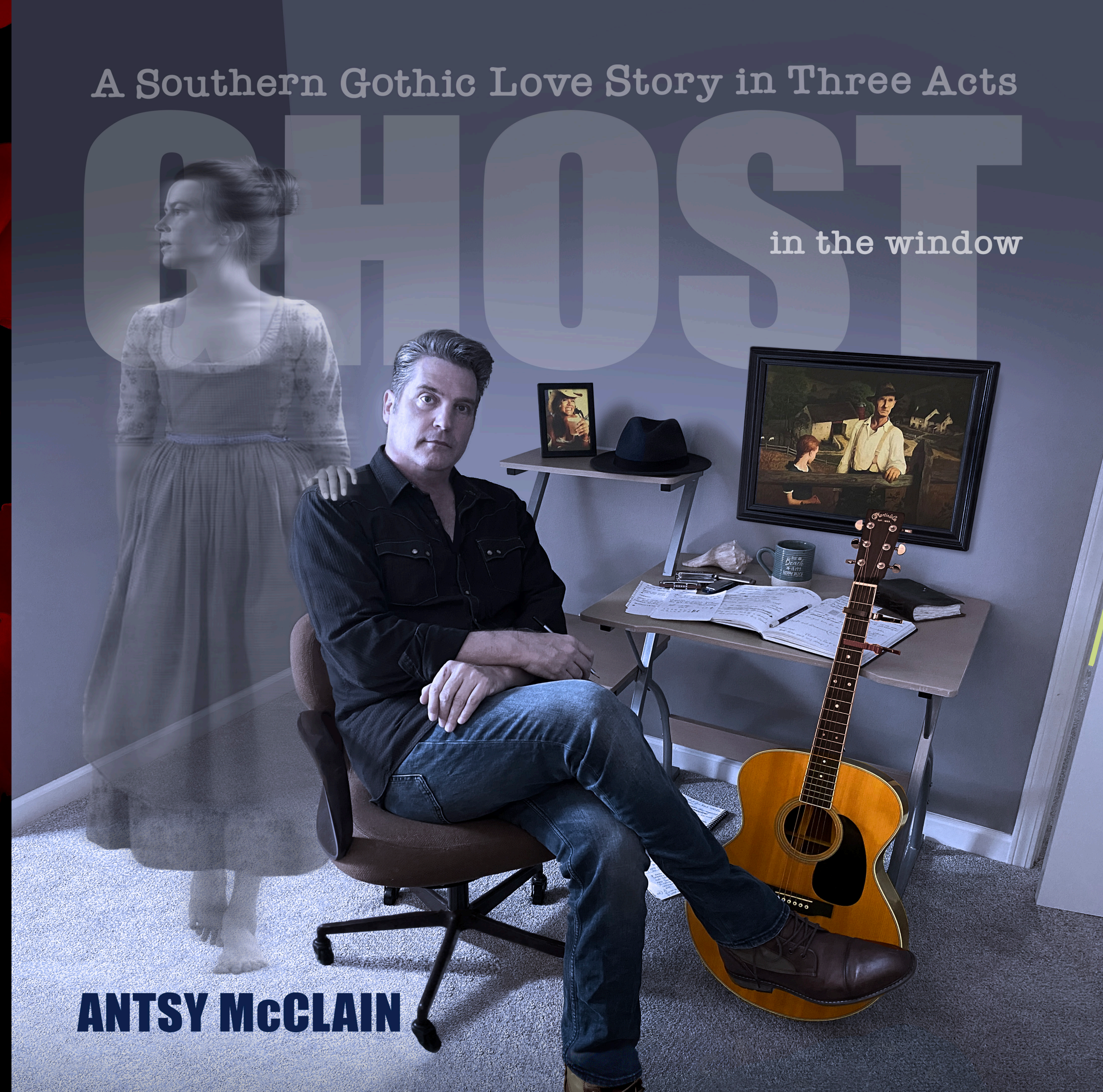
honors every delicate layer of the human condition.

Written and produced secretly in the year following his wife's death, McClain's "Ghost in The Window" is born out of pain, but remarkably, somehow, paints an unforgettable portrait of grief with strokes of hopeful light and vivid color.

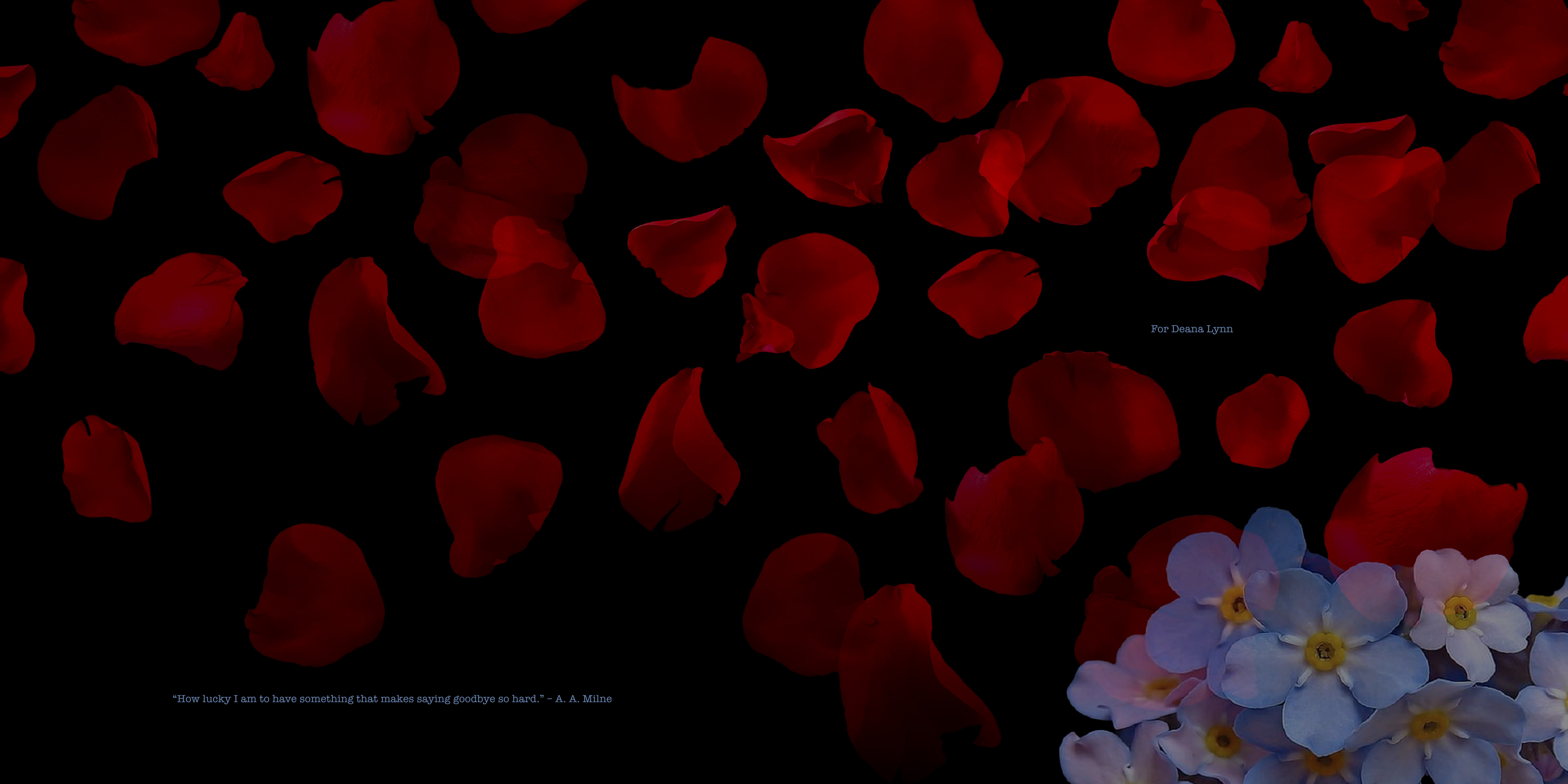
A Southern Gothic Love Story in Three Acts

GHOST

in the window



ANTSY McCLAIN



For Deana Lynn

“How lucky I am to have something that makes saying goodbye so hard.” – A. A. Milne



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GHOST

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ACT ONE

The Songwriter,
the Ghost and the Angel

1. The Songwriter
2. The Ghost in the Window
3. The Blue Satin Sash
4. I Never Lost Like This
5. The One-Armed Angel

ACT TWO

The Husband
and the Monster

1. When We Close Our Eyes
2. Bed of Roses
3. The Lion of Lower Broadway
4. He Keeps an Eye on Things

ACT THREE

The Living, the Dead
and the In-Between

1. Music from the
Motion Picture
2. Until Her
3. Where Somebody
Knows My Heart

EPILOGUE

So Beautiful It Hurts

Written, produced, performed, illustrated and designed by Antsy McClain

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Photo by Dennie Kirtley

The Songwriter

I was Born in Bender's Ferry,
a little town in Tennessee.
I moved here back in 1992.
The Nashville scene was scary,
But it soon took hold on me.
I got a place on 16th Avenue.

I came here to be a singer,
but that never quite panned out,
I met a girl, 'would go to hear her sing.
Had me wrapped around her finger,
I started writing songs about
The way she made me feel,
and that changed everything.

Other people sang my songs,
the wheels began to roll
I had some hits and made that girl my wife.
Fate had other plans along
the way, and took control,
I held her hand as she let go of life.

My music stopped the day she passed.
Dried up and blew away.
At least that's what I used for an excuse.
I told myself I've wrote my last,
I took my saved-up pay,
I bought this house
and found an unlikely muse...

Ghost in the Window

I saw a ghost in the window
on the night I moved into this place.
Looking out at the road
with a pained look on her face.
In a plain gray dress and cold dark eyes,
Her mouth hung open in muted cries,
A pale blue sash was tied around her waist.

She turned her gaze from the road
and her eyes caught me.
I couldn't tell if I was being summoned
or cautioned to flee.

I was frozen still but I looked on,
She backed away and then she was gone,
Swallowed by the dark of a room I had yet to see.

I moved into the first floor,
and that's where I stayed.
The upstairs door was closed
and I kept it that way.

When nightfall came I could feel her there,
Staring out the window at the cold night air,
Waiting for something or someone a lifetime away

One cold bitter morning I noticed
the door was ajar.
I climbed the stairs slowly
and felt every beat of my heart.

The room was empty with a pale blue glow,
Smelled of perfume from a century ago,
I brought in a table and chair and this old guitar.

And I know you must think I'm talking crazy,
But I feel like everything's gonna be all right.

I would write in that room every day
as soon as I arose.
I'd pull the door shut when I left,
but it never stayed closed.

I heard my guitar on a dark, rainy night,
One string at a time, awkward and light,
An old melody from a lifetime ago, I suppose.

Now, I'm writing these stories
I never could tell on my own.
Songs about people and places
that I've never known.
Sadness, like mist, hangs in the air,
A pale blue sash draped over my chair,
A voice in my head whispers I'll never be alone...



The Blue Satin Sash

He was a front line soldier
Coming back from the war.
He made a big target,
Barely fit through the door
Still he made it home
With a limp and his arm in a sling.
She felt her heart flutter
Like a nest egg bird taking wing.

Shadows in his eyes
Like a far away storm.
Did he have a place to go?
Is he loved? Is he warm?
Their love caught fast,
Like wind twisting out of control,
A runaway prairie fire
Burning hot in their souls.

He saved up his earnings
And he bought her that dress.
With the blue satin sash
The day she said yes.

No need for a preacher,
There wasn't a church house for miles.
The beat of their hearts
Was enough to get through their trials.

Well, the years went fast,
There were seven in all.
Harvest to harvest,
Spring, Summer, Fall.
They'd walk to the tree on the hill
And make love in the shade.
Their winters were quiet and still
By the fire they made.

Was he ever really here?
Was it all just a dream?
Was he just a ghost?
Was it not like it seemed.
Between two worlds,
Neither of 'em she'll ever know.
One made of fire and
One where the living can't go.





I've Never Lost Like This

I've got a long list of friends
I'll never hear again
On the other end of my phone.
My shrinking family tree
Will fade to memory
And pretty soon I'll be on my own.

I've lost my mind a million times,
I've lost my way to bliss.
I lost my will on a windy hill
For a blue-eyed farm girl's kiss.
But I've never lost like this.

I've lost a lot of games,
Hung my head in shame,
Even lost my name a couple times.
Now I'm an orphaned son,
A gypsy on the run,
Haunted by the one I'll never find.

I've lost my cool, I've been a fool
Who never knew the risks.
Been up against a barbed wire fence
With bruised and bloodied fists.
But I've never lost like this.

I said goodbye to smoke,
Alcohol and coke,
Did my best to choke it all away.
That deep and holy pain
So dark you can't explain
Without seeming insane or blasé.

I've said goodbye to places I
Can say I'll never miss.
I got my fill and better still
Paved over the abyss.
But I've never lost like this.

Well, grief's the price you pay
When you love someone this way,
It hurts so much you'll say you want to die.
Each time we give our heart,
We all know that's the start
Of the world coming apart before your eyes.

But here we are, the Northeast star
Is glowing through the mist.
And the reason why the winter sky
Is roiling like it is.
Cuz I never loved like this.

And even now, I'm grateful how
There's someone that I miss.
And that I got to love like this.

The One-Armed Angel

There's a one armed angel high above the world we rarely see.
She feels the pain in loss of love, looks on with empathy.

She tries to lift a millstone's weight from the shoulders of the hurtin'.
She flies off to the edge of fate and pulls back the tattered curtain,

Where fitful souls who barely slept can catch a glimpse of light,
Just clear enough for one more step through another endless night.

When the offer came to heal her, and make her whole again,
She declined and said she'd rather keep the stunted limb,

So those she comforts clearly see she knows the pain of loss,
When "Just a Closer Walk with Thee" is too long a bridge to cross.

"Selah. Selah," the one armed angel cries.





When We Close Our Eyes

The willows are sweeping the front yard.
The wind is reshaping the clouds.
The red clay so thick you can taste it.
The snap bean fields are all plowed.

She's in her apron by the henhouse.
A little, 15-acre farm
His overalls cover a dress shirt.
A basket of eggs on her arm.

These pictures tell our story,
And keep us all alive.
Inside a dusty, burlap heart where
Nothing ever dies,
When we close our eyes.

When we close, when we close our eyes.

Watching the sky after planting.
Rain coming in from the West.
Never enough to make harvest,
The crows and the banks do the rest.

The weather, the war and the worry
Hang in the hot, summer air.
A season of storms and erosion,
More than a couple can bear.

These pictures tell our story,
And keep us all alive.
Inside a dusty, burlapped heart where
Nothing ever dies,
When we close our eyes.

When we close, when we close our eyes.

Bed of Roses

I can't help it if I love ya.
You can't love me if you don't.
I know I should move along,
But my heart tells me that it won't.

So soft. All I do is touch ya.
There's my fever on the rise.
I hate to walk away and leave ya.
Sweet pain. See it in my eyes.

You say it's only infatuation.
I say it's something you'll never know.
You cut me like a bed of roses.
Like a bed of roses.

So sharp. All I do is touch ya.
Blood red petals everywhere.
So sweet. Drops of dew and honey.
Your scent hanging in the air.

I can't help it if I love ya.
You can't love me if you don't.
I know I should move along,
But my heart tells me that it won't.

My heart tells me that it won't.
My heart tells me that it won't.
My heart tells me that it won't.

You say it's just my imagination.
You know it's over but you can't let go.
You cut me like a bed of roses.
Like a bed of roses.



The Lion of Lower Broadway

I was killing' it in '49'
'T'was the eve of rock n' roll.
Back in Nashville with a Purple Heart
And a demon in my soul.

A cold night in Printers Alley,
In a no-name basement bar.
She came in from the darkness
And I laid down my guitar.

The combo I was playing with,
They cautioned me that night.
Said careful, Hoss, there's something
In her eyes that ain't quite right.

She led me to the river's edge,
That's the last thing I recall.
I woke up three days later
With a shadow 9 feet tall.

My neck was throbbing wildly,
Felt the wound with trembling hand.
A thirst so bad, I coulda swore
My throat was made of sand.

Had a hunger, dark and sticky,
Like I'd never known before.
Say night night to the boogey man,
He'll soon be at your door.

I'm the Lion of Lower Broadway,
'Long the Cumberland I crawl.
I'm the monster in your nightmares,
I'm the blood stain on your wall.

I'm the record deal that owns you,
And binds you in your shame.
The contract that you signed in blood
Just underneath my name.

So I haunt these streets and alleys
Between the sun lit hours.
This city comes to life at night
At the height of all my powers.

I steal dreams from the youthful,
Nothing tastes so sweet.
I love the worried eyes of strangers
As I pass them on the street.

There's new blood every weekend.
'Come from all across the land.
Who's gonna miss another tourist?
Or another four piece band?

I feed on drunken bridesmaids.
I just need one a night.
It won't be til the wedding 'fore they
Discover they're one girl light.

For decades I've been prowling,
For years I've dodged the sun.
And no one's any wiser
To all the bad things I have done.

If not for blood, then money,
Either way, it's gonna be.
This shallow grave called Nashville
Is just the place for a thing like me.





He Keeps an Eye on Things

Could that be his dark silhouette outside,
Against the line of evergreen trees?
They both know he's much too big to hide.
She hears his cries in the sticky Tennessee breeze.

Just before the world is up and wakin,'
His silhouette turns around and disappears
She wonders, did he leave, or was he taken
By a city built on broken dreams and tears?

She never understood why he went gone.
Truth be known, she always thought he might.
He keeps an eye on things but don't come home.
She only sees a glimpse of him at night.

She knows he's someone else now, she can feel it.
But it don't stop the aching at her core.
His visits, more like hauntings, that don't heal it.
Leaves an envelope of money by the door.

Could that be his dark silhouette outside?

Like Music from the Motion Picture

She saw the movie when she was twenty years old.
Fire in her belly, no ash in her soul.
A hole was opened and it got inside,
And stayed like a flower there, pressed and dried.

Soundtracks change, time carves the face,
Bends our bones and slows our pace.
But the song never ages. Each time it plays,
She's right back there in those halcyon days.

Last night she was driving, heard the opening line,
And it got her like the flicker of a neon sign,
Woke up that girl she once knew well,
With a flower in her heart and stories to tell.

She picks up a gust of warm summer wind,
Like a snapshot taken of a long-gone friend.
Stabs at her chest like a sugar cane knife,
This bitter-sweet song book of her life.

Like music from the motion picture.

Reacquainting yourself with your pushed-down past,
It's airborne trouble and it can rise up fast.
Sleeping giants once stirred awake,
Don't know what they'll bring ya,
Or what they might take.

But it was something her heart was guiding her to do,
And when that occurs, you just follow through,
Come what may, wave off what's gone,
Clutch that dried up flower and you carry on.

There were times in her life when she followed worse.
A red haired boy in a Snow White curse.
A fairy tale romance, or so she thought,
She left him in a valley of forget me nots.

There'll always be sadness deep in her bones.
But sometimes a song will rise from the stones.
Give her a smile, give her soul rest,
Like a dried blue flower tucked away in her chest.

Like music from the motion picture.





Until Her

I've always been a stranger,
Just a guest in my own home.
Walked around like an imposter,
Out of place and on my own.
Rest never came easy,
Even when my name was on the loan.
Until here. Until now. Until her.

My heart has lost some pieces
Along the highways where I rolled.
I scattered them like breadcrumbs
In the hopes I'd find my soul.
Is it any wonder I never felt whole?
Until here. Until now. Until her.

Until here, I never really hung my hat up.
Until now, all I ever did was watch the time.
Until her, I only thought I knew what love was.
And then the here and now and her combined.

These summer days are peaceful.
You know, I don't feel her stir,
When grief was nagging at me
Like the clinging of a cocklebur.
I've tried to tell her story,
But I was never really sure,
Until here. Until now. Until her.

Well, the bourbon bottle's empty
And the night shades have all been drawn.
I caught a glimpse of her reflection,
I turned but she was gone.
I never imagined
That I could ever move on.
Until here. Until now. Until her.

Until here. Until now. Until her.

Until her.

Until now. Until her.

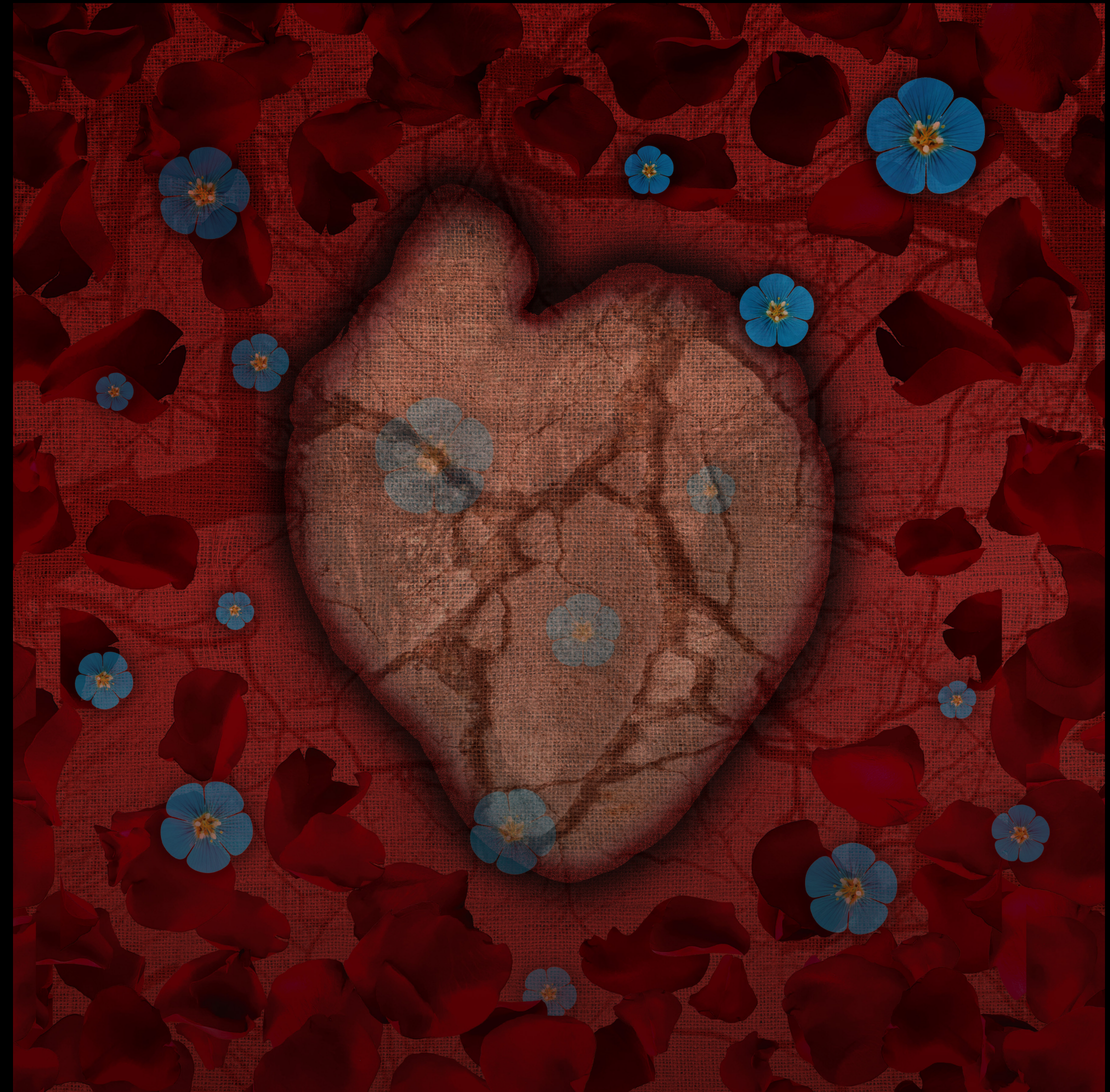
Where Somebody Knows My Heart

I drained a bottle of Basil Hayden and it came back out in tears.
I wanna be where somebody knows my heart.
I've been too long co habitatin' in the shadow of my fears.
I wanna be where somebody knows my heart.

I wanna be, I wanna be,
In a place where somebody knows my heart.
I'm going to be, I'm going to be,
In a place where somebody knows my heart.

When I love, the well runs deep. I give it all I've got.
I wanna be where somebody knows my heart.
There's a hole beside me where I sleep, bottomless and hot.
I wanna be where somebody knows my heart.

I wanna be, I wanna be,
In a place where somebody knows my heart.
I'm going to be, I'm going to be,
In a place where somebody knows my heart.





So Beautiful It Hurts

Love will leave you breathless. So beautiful it hurts.
Sometimes it feels like prison, other times like church.
And you won't know whether to pray or plan escape.

Love can pull the tide in, the water deep and black,
Then wash you out by morning to find your own way back.
It's your shadow on the sand, but you don't recognize the shape.

So beautiful it hurts.
So lovely in it's breaking.
Exquisite in it's aching.
So beautiful it hurts.

Love has an evil sibling, the name I can't recall,
But you won't forget the feeling when that shadow's on the wall,
And everything you know has changed or taken wing.

Life only gives us glimpses one heart beat at a time.
Creates a live mosaic until one day we find
The strides we make outside of love don't mean a thing.

A Brief Glossary of Allegory

The blue Forget Me Not flower and the blood red rose has been used as metaphor in music, art and literature for centuries. I've borrowed them here to explore the idea of bright hope against deep sorrow.

The mourning dove, however, determined as he was to play a role and have a speaking part in this production, begs more explanation.

Most songbirds have a wide vocabulary of notes. Many seem to never repeat themselves. The mourning dove has only three, and they rarely vary in rhythm or pitch. The dove outside my studio window tends to stay in the key of B, which I found out completely by accident.

Deana Lynn and I enjoyed the doves that rest on our roof at dusk. We would often turn off the television, remove all noise, and listen to the birds outside our sunroom window. Even during the last, painful months of her life, the doves' song always brought smiles of comfort and peace to her as we would hold hands and gaze out at the backyard.

Mourning doves mate for life. If you see one alone for any length of time, it likely means their mate has perished.

One Spring day at around dusk, after pattering around in this big, empty house, I found myself upstairs in my studio, putting the finishing touches on these songs.

I heard the mourning dove outside. I held my phone up to the window and recorded his song. It was a male. He was alone, like me. He was limited to the few notes he knew, like me. I recorded him for several minutes.

I transferred my phone recording into the session of track one, "The Songwriter." I had no idea if it would work, if it was the right key or if the tempo would match, but it was worth a try.

I spliced a piece of the mourning dove's song into "The Songwriter," and was moved to tears as I realized it was a perfect fit. I let the dove's notes repeat until stopping it three quarters of the way through as the songwriter speaks of losing his ability to write after his wife's death. I brought the dove back 11 songs later, three quarters of the way through "Until

Her," when the songwriter reveals he might finally be able to move on. Once again, the dove's notes fit in perfectly. The mourning dove became an allegory for the songwriter's "voice."

I've named the dove Maxfield, after the painter Maxfield Parrish, who also loved deep blue skies at dusk. Maxfield sang to me again last night, his mournful notes giving me a strange but abiding comfort. Just three notes, the last one repeated three times. Every time.

It's nice to know there's something constant in a world that changes so fast, so often.



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Acknowledgments

Some days I thought this project would kill me. Other days I swear it saved my life. It kept me going, got me out of bed, gave me a purpose beyond my grief. My obsession to finish it pushed the boundaries of sanity.

The top of my writing table is warped from the spilling of saltwater tears, where I forced myself to confront all that I was feeling, set it to music and then set it free.

Whether it would kill me or save me, I knew I would have to let it all go eventually. And I'm sad to see another end of something. Endings. God, how I hate endings.

It's taken a long time, this catch and release, but it's as done as I could get it, so that now, it might do the impossible: Give commiseration and comfort to the lonely and grieving.

Grief is a cloak one never takes off completely. But we do heal, right? (Please, someone tell me we heal.) If we do, I guess knowing you're not alone is a good place to start.

This project was made in an air-tight bubble of my own making. I had the feedback of very few while writing the songs, illustrating the book and producing the album. As a producer and songwriter, I've collaborated countless times with many, but if this was a collaboration, it was done with ghosts - and one very persistent dove.

Thank you, Sue Butler, for your focused insight as I found my way through this story. You revealed meaning to me I didn't even see in my own songs, and showed me this story was even more autobiographical than I realized.

Thank you, Robbie Barbour Ihry, for your friendship, encouragement and endless commiseration through a dark time. It is what it is at the end of the day. 100%.

Thank you, Michelle Roy, for your invaluable input and encouragement from my first ideas to the finished product. It's made with bits of real panther, so you know it's good.

Thank you, Grant, for reminding me that art can be a loyal and hungry companion while going through hell. Keep the artist fed and he will never die. I think Nicholas Cage said that.

I started writing and recording this project while staying in what I called "my convalescent home" in St. Pete's Beach, Florida, a beach-front condo owned and managed by Lisa Forsyth and her partner, Brett Greiveldinger. At the end of 2022, alone and wondering what to do with myself, they handed me a key to their place. I left Tennessee with a suitcase of beachwear, my guitar, a mandolin and some recording equipment. I made an album there - The Indelible Man, with my friend George Harris - and I started this one, all thanks to the generosity of Lisa and Brett.

Thank you, Deana Lynn, for your love. It was an honor to be yours, and to be there for you through those last horrible stages of life. We made a promise to each other that if there was anything after this life, whoever died first would send a message to the other. I'm not sure if the mourning dove was that sign, or just the musings of my overactive imagination, but whatever it was, it sure was nice.

My children are forever in my heart. Thank you for being there, Lauren, Buddy, Emily, Brooklynne and Grant. Anna Jane, Henry, Emma and David: Papa loves you.

Take care of each other, and use your powers for good.

- Antsy McClain, July 18, 2023

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