

# THINGS I CAN NOT SAY

*Floriography and the Pandemic*



by Amy Theiss Giese

on the cover: *Pear and peony*, 2025

*Please use the following curated “dictionary” to decipher and interpret the still life arrangements in the photographs. Each botanical in an image is listed as the title of that image.*

<b>Aloe vera</b>	Bitterness, Grief, Sorrow
<b>Anemone</b>	Estrangement, Fading hope, Forsaken, Health
<b>Aster</b>	Afterthought, Farewell, I will think of it, Jealousy
<b>Basil</b>	Best wishes, Good luck, Hate, Hatred of the other
<b>Bay leaf</b>	Immortality, Love, Protection from illness, Renown, Strength, Success, "I change but in death"
<b>Bellflower</b>	Constancy, Gratitude, Indiscretion, Without pretension
<b>Blue Iris</b>	Courage, Faith, Wisdom, Resilience
<b>Calla lily</b>	Ardor, Chastity, Early Death, Mystery, Rebirth



*Turnip, peony, and yellow carnation, 2025*

Carnation  
*[mauve]*

Dreams of fantasy

Carnation  
*[purple]*

Antipathy, Changeable, Unreliability

Carnation  
*[striped]*

Refusal

Carnation  
*[white]*

Sorrow, Sympathy, Deep sadness

Carnation  
*[yellow]*

Disappointment, Disdain, Rejection,  
“You have disappointed me.”

Chamomile	Patience in adversity
Chrysanthemum	Abundance, Fidelity, Optimism, "A heart left to desolution"
Chrysanthemum <i>[white]</i>	Truth
Chrysanthemum <i>[yellow]</i>	Death, Grief, Lamentation, Slighted love
Dahlia	Grief, Instability, Loss, Mourning
Dead leaves/ autumn leaves	Melancholy, My love has ended, Sadness
Fennel	Courage, Deceit, Endurance, Grief, Healing, Protection
Ferns	Confusion
Fig	Argument, Longevity, Prolific
Hyacinth <i>[purple]</i>	Impulsiveness, Jealousy, Sorrow

Hydrangea	A boaster, Carelessness, Frigidity, Heartlessness, Ruthlessness
Ivy	Dependence, Endurance, Fidelity, Friendship
Lavender	Constancy, Devotion, Distrust, Mistrust
Lettuce	Cold heartedness
Lichen	Dejection, Solitude
Lily <i>[orange]</i>	Hatred
Marigold	Cruelty, Despair, Grief, Health, Jealousy, Pain
Moss	Weakness, Ennui, "Your obstinacy drives me to despair"
Onion	"You are repugnant to me"
Pear	Affection, Health, Hope

Peony	Anger, Shame, "Your pride is unbearable"
Persimmon	Healing, Luck, Lust, Protection,
Pomegranate	Suffering, Conceit, Foolishness
Ranunculus	Childishness, Fascination, Ingratitude, Perfidy, Social matters
Raspberry	Remorse
Rhododendron	Danger, Beware



*Persimmon and marigold. 2025*

Rhubarb	Advice, Health, Protection
Rose [general]	Beauty, Carrier of secrets, Healing, Hope and passion, Love, Protection, Strength through silence
Rose [white]	Exorcism, Humility, Innocence, Purity, Secrecy, Silence, Wistfulness
Rose [yellow]	Apology, Caring, Decrease of love, Dying love, Friendship, Infidelity, Jealousy
Rosemary	Remembrance, "Your presence revives me."
Saint John's Wort	Animosity, Superstition
Snapdragon	Creativity, Deception, Force of will, Indiscretion, Never, Presumption, "Your wanton mischief will be avenged upon you bitterly"

Sunflower	Ambition, False riches, Hautiness, Homage, Lofty thoughts, Opportunity, Pride
Tarragon	Horror, Permanence, Shocking occurrence, Terror
Thistle	Surliness, Austerity, Misanthropy, Harshness, Retaliation
Thyme	Activity, Courage, Death, Energy, Healing/Health, Purification, Strength
Trachelium	Protection, Healing
Turnip	Charity, Indifference
Weeping willow	Forsaken, Melancholy
Zinnia	Absent friends, I miss you, I mourn your absence





*Dahlia and lavender, 2025*

I got sick in March of 2020, when we still didn't comprehend the scope of the virus that continues to sweep the globe and alter our lives irrevocably. It was a few days of staying in bed – no fever or symptom concerning enough to send me to the hospital, or to warrant one of the scarce Covid-19 tests. I got better. I thought I'd be back to normal. Starting in April, I'd have weird episodes of feeling not right: coughing after a run and feeling like I couldn't catch my breath; having a hard time finding a word in the middle of conversation; favorite foods tasting "off;" headaches; tremors running down my arms.

By the fall, I knew something was wrong. These episodes became more frequent, and symptoms became more intense. All the tests I did at that time showed up normal. The specialists couldn't find anything specifically wrong.

But the body knows, if you listen.

Five years later, I now have some diagnoses to go with my wild constellation of daily symptoms. Most of them acronyms for syndromes that are understudied, as historically they are more common in women of a certain age. POTS. EGJOO. IBS-D. ME/CFS. MCAS.

And I'm starting to see signs of more familiar ailments manifesting, like liver issues, pre-diabetes, asthma and weight gain. Some days I feel like I'm waiting for the other shoe to drop, diagnostically speaking.

It is exceptionally rare for me to go 24 hours without having to navigate some problem with this new body of mine. I have to measure and weigh each activity against my abilities and energy. I am figuring out how to accommodate myself in a world that has decided that there is no need to mitigate the ongoing spread of a novel virus. I hold most of my thoughts and feelings about the collective abandonment of public health inside.

Until now. Using the symbolic language of flowers to give voice to all the things that I can not say has been cathartic. And sad. Holding both the anger and the sorrow together as the images splinter and fray. The visual vocabulary that LiDAR scanning apps gives me is immense. Making concrete the distortions, absences, gaps, and misunderstandings that swirl continuously. Both around my body and my feelings.

*Amy Giese  
June 2025*



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