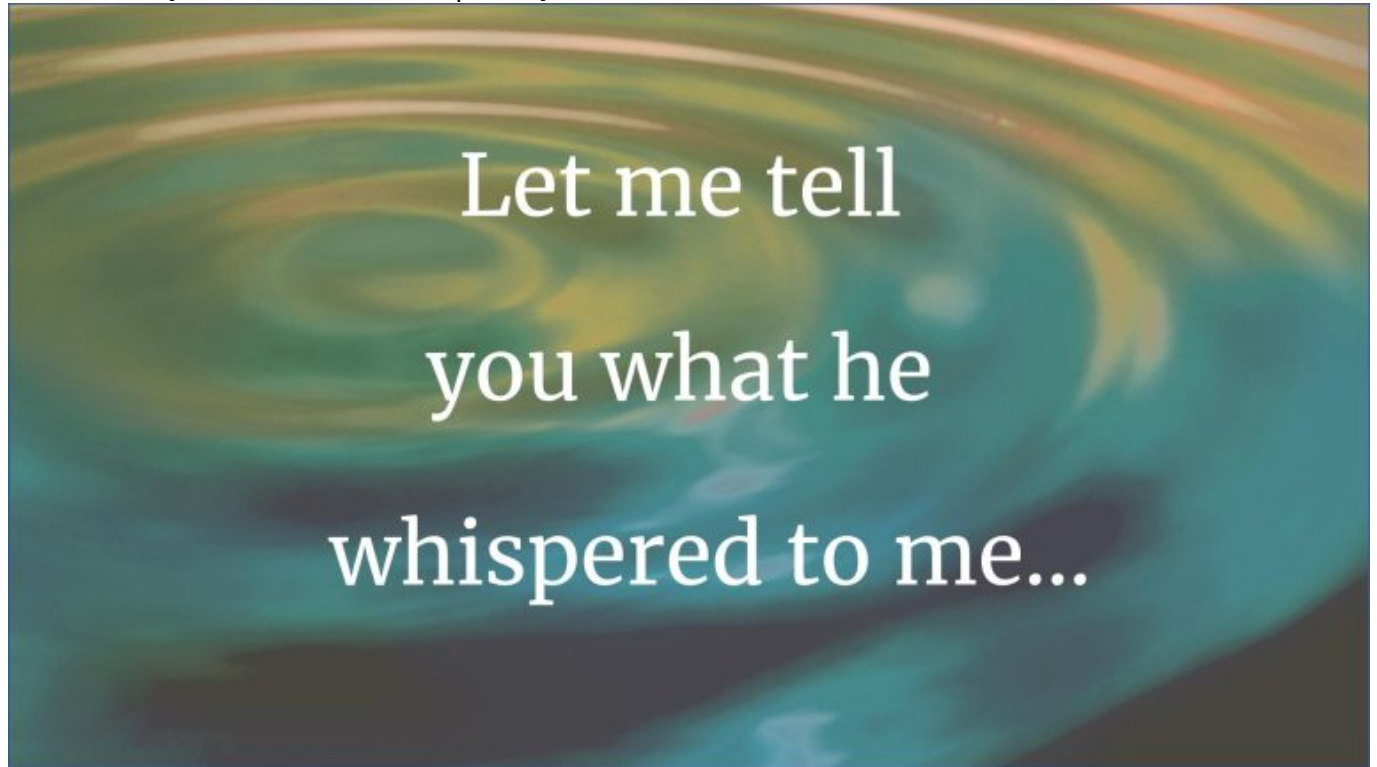


# He Was Not the First Dead Man I X-Rayed

Category: Poems

written by Steve Cushman | July 14, 2023



in the Orlando Morgue that summer,  
but he was the only one who ever turned  
to face me as I lifted his arm for a side view,  
trying to locate where the bullet had lodged.  
His eyes shut, mouth slack, the dime-sized  
hole in his ruined chest, the damp trail  
of blood disappearing behind his back.  
Shirtless, he still wore jeans and the front  
pocket bulged with something—his wallet,  
a phone, perhaps his prize for the night's work.

I'd like to see what he saw in those last  
moments, but I can't. Instead, let me tell  
you what he whispered to me in that dark room:

*The open window like an invitation.*

*The promise of a jewelry box.*

*All of it for me.*

He turned to leave through the same  
window. Stunned by starlight, stunned  
finally by what he couldn't see.

Now here we are this Friday evening  
and what's left of him is staring back at me.