

Elegies for Careless Love · *Daniel Halpern*

I. Late October, Lake Champlain

I've been trying to write you of that night
although you have no need
to be reminded of it—you haven't forgotten
the moon held on a stick of light
over the lake, its sudden appearance in our bed
on my shoulder, on your shoulder.
We can let it pass but nothing is over
and the imprint of your feet and hands
remains in my hands. I remember now
the moon, the lake and the room
of Vermont pine—the space
of those days when all it could do
outside was rain. Forget those nights,
that place, when we were at ease
with our predilection for the removed
nagging us back
to sleep and your dream of a blue bottle
filled with an unknown scented fluid.
Now I give you a blue container—
scent-filled—with slices of paper notes,
those phrases that can't be said.

II. Woodsmoke, Vermont

The woodsmoke drifted into the car
everytime we passed a house
on that road down the center of Vermont,
and each time you told me how you loved
woodsmoke. The weather was rain
and that week was like living
in the already past—everything part
of some other time:
the odor of the room in that town,
the wooden bed and checkered wallpaper,
the women on geritol who sat
all day in the lobby.

And all night the scent
of woodsmoke drifted to us
in our wooden bed, all night the rain
fingered the wooden shingles
above our room. What could we have said?
Below us the old women were held
in woolen blankets
and soft white inn sheets.
And there we were, holding on
to each other
already in the process of letting go.

III. Sleeper

I held you in the front room.
When we woke the fire was nearly out
and the wine had almost
worn off.

You said you couldn't sleep
being held,
yet you slept.

I asked if we should go
into the other room,
but you said no, that you
could never go there,
that it would be the end of everything.
We went into the other room
and it was the end of nothing,
or not of anything that had started.

I think about what you said that night.
Nothing had started that wasn't always there.

You never slept before the fire,
you never went half in dream
to the other room,

and you only dreamed
that as I held you there
you slept.

IV. Your Hands

You've probably put on
your white sweater

and plaid skirt,
your boots and now

shake down your hair
as you enter some dining room

vague and vain and a little
lonesome for our dark

late night dinners in the city
when you were happy with

the candlelight, the single rose,
the hand closing on yours.

Isn't it always like that for awhile?
Everything stopped, held there

with only the hands in movement.
Yours must be so cold—

do they deflect snow?—
I took them in mine,

your hands that had given up
their warmth for so long.

V. An End

Occasionally, it was only night. I mean
you didn't come back again

and in the morning there was nothing
left unless you had carelessly left

your scent in the room.
I remember nothing more than the idea of scent.

The only thing to do in the morning
was to begin again without you,

which I have begun to do.
The nights are shorter and spring

has come, and another who takes more care
with what she cares about

than you. I will miss you.
Do not expect applause.