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## Elegies for Careless Love

Daniel Halpern

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## 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.