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Elegies for Careless Love

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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.