

from Loss: Love in Another's Language

Rachel Tzvia Back

To he who turns away

from arms open
to embrace

consider
the heart that sounds

a sudden desire in life's
common moment

unexpected unasked
arrives

in white pink all
hues

in between
of almond blossomings

that wild-without-warning
roadside rapture

to stay
who knows how long

moments or days
the babies'

soap skin soft
fragrance

you thought
would never end

where does it
intoxicate now

while you might walk
through open doors

into an open heart
toward what is

still possible

Tearing the tether

The sadness of something lost nothing
that was mine

my heart is refused he wants
refuge

from desire not possible
I want to tell him it is

the deluge
as promised delivered that day

today tomorrow
if the gods love you but he

holds in hand the docile
dove the one

who will not fly wild
over changing terrains as first dark

and glorious storm begins
or ends and though this day too

descends
and I would tear the tether set out

to swelling sea still
he will not kiss me.

Love: fragmented

(the heart)

cleft, as in
divided

the rift between
what was spoken

and what sits
silent

in a corner
unattended

aching

(the child)

always enters
the room

just as you might
turn

toward the door
listening

for another's footsteps
she

enters the room
insistent and

demanding
you see she's been

crying

(rain)
unannounced
though awaited

ragged summer long
scorched

everything even
singed

desire
now stirs

in the rain
in the hills

where I walk
and you

at a distance
cannot say why now

you weep
waging war

with absence
you cannot name

though
your eyes

far-away islands
are greener

for the sorrow

(land)
that would be
my body

for you
alone at sea

a place
to wash up on

steady still
until

you graze
unsteady

against it
touch lips

to my breasts
soft

silkweed foreign
milkweed

the monarch lifts
off the flower

a landscape
shifts

will not settle
rifts--

the damage is done

(millstone)

because every desire
met

opens to another
because

there are forms of torture
the gods

never thought of because
a boulder

sits on your heart
a stone

in my mouth
while you pull

away wanting silence
imagining

escape

(the child, again)

fourth in the family
forgotten she is

sitting on the edge
of a balcony

she has black hair
she is blond as wheat

your dark lashes
green eyes

she is yours
she is

me
collecting words

in blank notebooks
pins them to the page

stilled butterflies because
she is ruthless

stronger than I
will ever be

I long to know her
and then

leave her far behind

(ruthless)
you pin my arms
to my sides

savaged self
you are

looking to salvage
something

you never knew
you needed

you move
inside me

fierce
in candlelight

shadows stir
something

untamed
twigs and tinder

into fire
on a dry and wild

mountainside bare
and brutal you

are pleased my need
grows hide

your own in guarded
gardens

hedges high
(the fire dies)

you turn to go

(in the garden)
she was bereft
the heart

broken
cleft leaf

when she moved
to embrace him

he pushed her away
don't cleave to me

he said
don't

pierce or penetrate
don't

tear open apart
don't

need or seek
an embrace don't

hold to

(two languages)
left to right right
to left

they might
meet

in the middle
but rarely do

letters
nothing alike yours

tender like you
austere like you

angular ancient
having traveled distances

and deserts
(when you speak

there is sand gravel
in your throat)

my letters rounded
curved cursed

with youth
surrounding

emptiness
in the gap

between the two
how often

do we fall

(into silence)
with every kiss your
tongue

touching mine
you swallow

another word
steal

what was mine
until

I am
wordless

would
there be love

in a wordless
world

in the night
by the crescent

I can see
the almond tree

blooming in perfect
wordless

white
undisturbed

by silence
but I

reach for a branch
your bare

arm
any sound or

syllable
something

unsevered
unbroken

as if your word
of love

could hold me
whole

in the world

Elemental etudes

1. *Air*

The whisper in your ear
where

I touch with wet tongue warm
breath, to

betray betroth bless
the unexpected

love will linger long and later
when

I'm far again, foreign, your fever
broken, but

the wind the whisper the warm
air deep

in your curved ear will still
sing: *small*

*miracles - the heart awoken, opened
offered*

*unabashed in the moment and you cannot
pretend*

you don't hear

2. *Fire*

There was an angel in the fire. Her
wings

were tender translucent blue, her robe
a wild rose

stem adorned with spiked yellow thorns
burning

petals fluttered all night. There was an angel
in the fire

unfettered from the sky fenestrated lover's
dark eye

held my gaze, she held her breath
when we

didn't kiss, kindling of lips almost
touching, she

hovered there in the space between separate
open

mouths where we breathed each other's
breath

barely as air fed the fire and a single flame
broke loose

from the rest, unbound from earth or ash, burst
into light

you could hear her tight-boned wings
strike

against the blackened stone, charred
wood, wondrous

unworldly beating of her wings wild
wild

in the burning hearth in our
unruly

hearts

3. *Water*

After you left it rained all day all night
all day

next. Water ran down the slick tree trunks
down

the eaves, down the leaves heavy and glistening.
Second night

in the saturated dark, I heard your voice when the loon
called out: *beware,*

*take care, practice restraint and
good measure.*

The bed was still damp. By third morning, when
all things rise,

the reckless stream had flooded its banks,
abandoned

its course, peaked white passion noisy
against

the granite rocks, its crash a refrain:
inscribe

*caution on the waves, carve care into
the currents - see*

*just see if you can
contain*

this dazzling urgency, your taut
teased skin,

your wanting all the while
me, wanting

release

4. *Earth*

To return to (you would say): certain, solid,
safe.

But when the rain lifted *earthshine*
earthlight

earthstar earthfall the land
had shifted

waterside strips had slipped
into the river

to drift away someplace else they
had never been.

What remained behind was drenched,
darkly

fragrant, lush music in the deep channeled
ear

subterranean earthplates moving,
lustrous

soil still unfolding, and subterfuge
subrosa

seed of desire - what will now never
subside

earthdin earthshake earth
born

we are - still, in the darkest part of the night
I heard

you call out, unrestrained -
then

when you spoke my difficult
name

*you told my heart - demanding
unforgiving*

*never-satisfied heart - all it
wanted, all*

*it has ever needed
to know*

Echo, After

Sealed room
returned done differently now
hollow beneath the earth become
body's empty chamber door shut tight
not even ajar

after and Love
rebuked Desire recanted
undone denied *delicate*
thread or web weave of gaze gauze word
thrust into the world print on page

chanted lettered love unworded now you would
unspeak the spoken
in a locked chamber
air escaping and certain knowledge
of my heart *hole or hollow* absorbing absence

silence
resounding every stilled chord
in your *nothing remembered*
and what I would not see:
impossibility

rampant *raging autumn reds*
of mountains every rampart
we would not cross
together loss
embedded

in every bed we borrowed
each moment as meaning
multiple and many
in another's language
Not a lie

but love and loss
 the calling
loon the loom loose
 strings of a heart
 gone astray

become one:
the only unbordered terrain
 between us
 mine *mined mind's eye*
mirroring lost time

Now
 how you turn and turn away
 again
more brutally Battle
 would be apt imagery

though I thought it
love
 we were after
And still *and still*
 what will not be stilled:

how can the heart be sealed?
 Stone at cave entrance
 trapped within I am
Echo
alone *her own*

ache
of each absent word
 she hurls
herself against the hardened walls
 chalk-white

 dust rising
her battering wings
 sing and singe
 each memory
gateways to longing Love

not blind but become
mute
too close to flame to fire
to burning
tongue

and you
and you

