

LYNN CROSBIE

Love Letters

I would give my husband drawings for grocery lists, with smiling faces on the eggs, and spider feet dangling everywhere. I could draw letters too. fat senseless alphabets, lexical landscapes of pointed trees and bloated clouds. that is how I wished words were, with changing colours and feathers in their spines. on road signs in my dreams, they shimmied, their Rockette heels a variegated sunburst. unlike the stiff black knots and stakes that glared at me from envelopes and books. an unchanging and cruel exotica, like smelling Cuban cigars wherever you go or the same screaming opera. he said that I did not need to learn with him there, reading slowly aloud, but sometimes in silence. that drove me insane, he would laugh or frown at something on the page, and look as if he were a creeping vine on a tombstone, a coffee stain on a piece of clean manilla. I practice learning on a stack of mail he kept in his sock drawer, and I finally learned dear. Dear Hank, it felt like having a perfume sample fall from a magazine in a sweet sudden breath. it make me think of velvet antlers, of his rumpled cardigan sweater and my love for him, a word which slayed me, with its clean lines and quick exhalation, the swelling heart in its middle. I began to scream things all day long, and I felt the first affection for poetry through the ringing sounds of advertisements, soapbox labels and advice to the lovelorn columns. words were heroic, huge killing things, and they beat in my head and bled from my eyes and fingers. I would be ironing, and a giant phrase or comma would barrel into the room, its veins bulging, its arms around my waist. Dear Hank, I miss you especially your sexy hands, mine clenched when I got that far and then some. then I know for sure that reading was magic, it conjured up these long eyelashes and white Harlow hair, and the guilty bald spot and shaking dewlap of my faithless husband, adrift on the libretto of his private life. he would still read to me in his annoying way while I squirmed on my novels and texts, that lay under the couch cushions like misplaced scissors. I drew him an elaborate list one day, of pink champagne bottles and support girdles, and wrote my first words. I left them with his letters, on the back of our marriage certificate, I think that they were my finest, I said, Dear Hank, the end. and right away began working on a longer book.

KATHRYN DANIELS

The Survivor

Because the teacher
beat her in school
for being a Jew
Because the Poles
broke down the door
with heavy boots
Because the camps
taught cruelty
not books
she never learned
to read

Because her hand
is deformed
from some torture
performed upon her
Because she fears
errors can be fatal
Because her thoughts
are dark animals
who bite
she never learned
to write

This life has left
bitterness in her mouth
the way orange rind does
when a small piece
stubbornly clings
to the sweet fruit flesh
and you eat it
not meaning to

Finally, at sixty,
she's learning to read
the words proceed
across the page
like a parade
she wants to follow
In her twisted hand
she holds a pen
and in small, shaky scrawl
writes her own name.

ERRATA

On pp. 104 and 105 of our "Nordic Women" issue (Vol. 9, No. 2), we published two poems written by Tove Ditlevsen, and translated by Cynthia Norris Graaë, entitled "Divorce 3" and "Divorce 4." We apologize for having mistakenly attributed the authorship of these poems and for having incorrectly spelled Ms. Graaë's name.