

## Love is A Discipline Mad for New Stories

Flimsy inside my coat pocket,  
your letter is soft  
as a bread crumb wet with rain.

Your confession of love is our chance  
to turn a corner  
and see the city our dreams are made of.

There, passion and death  
walk between buildings  
the way swans stretch their necks into fables.

But the city we live in  
is underneath that city  
dappled in starlight---

our stories, made of skin,  
are complicated by the past. . .  
For example, at my breakfast table

this morning, I answered your letter  
by writing a novel  
originally conceived

on the day of my birth---  
describing the places inside your body  
I was born lonely to touch.

## **Born Lonely to Touch**

The husband sits in therapy  
hungry and alone in his boots,  
eyes rolled up like shirt-sleeves.  
He tries to describe  
how making love to his wife  
in order to have a child  
reminds him of a landscape  
in Northern Nevada---  
back when they were both  
able to look past  
the clouds from early morning  
and see first light reflected  
in lake water along the Great Basin.

But the comparison  
doesn't make sense to me  
until he admits that was ten years  
before his affair  
was discovered---  
before his wife smashed  
each family photo from its frame  
and swept the broken pieces  
into a shoe box still blood-stained  
from her fingers,  
sitting on his lap now, here in my office,  
covered in the dust  
from underneath their bed.

## **Our Labyrinth Made of Ash**

I spread ash in the yard  
from winter fires  
my wife and I burn---  
in honor of my brother  
dying from cancer  
three-thousand miles away.

Here is our love-making  
packed into a cardboard cone  
and sprinkled carefully  
into the seven circuits of a labyrinth design,  
large enough to walk through  
at a comfortable pace.

This for the boy  
who taught me how to stay  
inside the lines  
when coloring with crayons as a child

and this for the man  
who ran a business for twenty-five years,  
sometimes directly into the ground  
of the lawns he mowed  
for other people

but still a path he made himself  
from the ash of his own fires.

My wife and I walk the labyrinth  
as we have every night for the last six months,  
and stoop to pick  
scraps of Mesquite out of the pathways  
adding to a stack,  
knee-high, at the entrance.

(stanza break)

At one time, each stick  
was a blessing for a test result,  
but we're past that now.  
And then each stick  
was a memory I spoke into the phone later,  
but we're past that, too.

Finally, the wood is ours again,  
kindling for future fires---  
and the labyrinth walk also,  
a kind introduction  
to the end of our own days.

## **The Boy Who Taught Me How to Stay Inside the Lines**

In my dream, I'm back in the family house.  
The floor plan begins to confuse me  
as I search the rooms for my old fly-rod.  
I wonder if this is where my brother lives now.

The floor plan begins to terrify me  
divided by walls made brittle with rain.  
I search the rooms for a memory of him.  
The doors are nailed shut. That couldn't be good.

The walls are stained like old teeth from the rain.  
He climbs down from the ceiling to greet me.  
His bones are showing. That couldn't be good.  
His arm is a fly-rod slapping my back.

He jumps from a window into dead leaves  
with a map of Virginia stuffed into his shoe.  
I wonder if that will be his final resting place:  
lost to the river banks, fishing all night.

## **The Wind has Places to Go**

As evening peels skin  
away from our homes,  
a homeless man dies

outside in a box.  
Never mind the touch  
of new snow falling

soft as a shoulder  
pinched under our boots.  
City workers come

and drag him free  
leaving a trail of crumbs  
from his plastic bag.

Pigeons find out  
and gather to feast  
on the path leading

from his box to the street  
as if eating bread  
from the fable

left by two children  
who had hoped against hope  
to find their way home.