

Romance

or

The End.

Elaine

Kahn

PRAISE FOR *ROMANCE OR THE END*

“This book is crazy and wonderful like a basket full of snakes.”

—EILEEN MYLES, author of *Evolution* and *Cool For You*

“History tells us there is Love, and there is War. Not much is said about the tension between, where the narrative of Romance pulls itself razor thin in our struggle to reconcile the two. With the brusque candor of the intimate present, dripping the acid of fresh feeling, Elaine Kahn sets, in her poems, a blank, a space, a scene, in which to enshroud and unshroud herself with the mixed fantasy, trauma, and assumption produced when we yield, unwittingly, to Love. Like all nursery rhymes, her tale is truest when its simplicity disarms, its conclusion remains dark. We find Romance, pinned down, with its skin peeled back—and Kahn is its God, whose weapon is levity, sharp between her teeth.”

—TRISHA LOW, author of *Socialist Realism* and *The Compleat Purge*

“With laser precision and an almost seventeenth-century ear for melody, *Romance or The End* is a frank, strange, and often hilarious autopsy of eros. The art of Elaine Kahn is not cool at all. It is very, very hot.”

—ARIANA REINES, author of *A Sand Book* and *Mercury*

“Elaine Kahn’s *Romance or The End* is a river of hot concrete: you flow with it erotically because it flows. Her words follow you around like windshield wipers or dried flowers in a jar and hold you captive by letting you go. She turns you into a sweetheart in the middle of the day and a credit card for romantic transactions at night. Her delivery is quick, but not hurried. Time is on her side because she has turned poetry into a road that can’t be bifurcated with prolixity. If she is swift, it’s because it’s impossible to get rich after a

car accident. If she is inside your psychic cunt, it's because she knows the difference between therapy and poetics.”

—VI KHI NAO, author of *Sheep Machine* and *Fish in Exile*

“Situated close enough to the ‘American Religion of Loneliness’ to despise it, Elaine Kahn’s *Romance or The End* is a journey into the specific hells of love, separation, truth, and story. With heretical pleasure, Kahn attends to the erotic and the wretched, and when she finds herself in places that have been gutted by trauma, she endures, using language to test her surroundings like someone dropping a stone down a well. Ruthlessly observed, and rendered into lines of equally exquisite musicality and physicality, each poem acts as ‘a merciful blade / into the center of pain / the delta of what feels dull.’ Reading *Romance or The End* is a clarifying experience, one that eschews both endings and romance for something more vital and more rare—it ‘makes you feel afraid and love to be alive.’”

—BRIDGET TALONE, author of *The Soft Life*

“Not since Satan has anybody’s ‘little tongue’ given head this good in language. Not just head and godhead, *Romance or The End* gives us tragically more than we deserve. It is even, like vengeance, and just, like nothing. Belief is hard, but there is no way not to believe Elaine Kahn, who is surely the solid origin of everything worth wanting or keeping, including what’s ‘nourished / by its own disgrace.’ Dare get risked and hunted unendingly by this work, and it’ll make your ‘heart wet’ too, I swear.”

—JANE GREGORY, author of *Yeah No* and *My Enemies*

PRAISE FOR ELAINE KAHN

“Elaine Kahn’s poems touch me somewhere deep. I don’t know how or why, but I’m willing to go wherever she wants to take me.”

—KIM GORDON

“Elaine Kahn shoots from the groin, championing a ferociousness that rages against asperity while playfully seducing the reader to misbehave. Hers is a realm where oceans beat against genitals, and Hannah Wilke warms the earth.”

—DODIE BELLAMY

“Elaine Kahn’s poetry blends colloquial tongue-action and rigorous academic formalism better than anyone I’ve ever read. There may be some similarities to Clark Coolidge at times, but she is definitely her own . . . uh . . . ‘man.’ She resolves contradictions inside her work with a clarity that feels far more effortless than it must actually be. And it provides a sort of Dionysian pleasure that should be negated by its clearly Apollonian form roots.”

—BYRON COLEY

“Kahn’s poems are strategic attacks against mythic fictions like selfhood, gender, even the universal acceptance of scientific knowledge. But to characterize Kahn’s poetics as invested in ‘truth’ would fail to highlight its multivalent relation to language as something that both delimits perception and serves as a vehicle of power.”

—JEFFREY GRUNTHANER, *Hyperallergic*

“Like one of God’s tiny miracles.”

—BEN MIROV and AMY LAWLESS,
The Best American Poetry

PRAISE FOR *WOMEN IN PUBLIC*

“Kahn’s precise and attentive debut full-length collection probes at notions of femininity with a sharp dagger, her terse but assertive stanzas carrying an understated conviction. ‘Listen, I’m not political, I am distracted,’ she proclaims, though her focused language will convince readers of her intelligence and savvy.”

—*Publishers Weekly*

“You can read this amazing book of poetry over the course of just one substantial subway ride. It has squishy imagery and also really good metaphors to make you feel things. ‘A Voluptuous Dream During an Eclipse’ is probably our favorite, but we love every single one of these poems.”

—*The FADER*

“With Elaine Kahn’s *Women in Public* in my back pocket, I am wondering how is it that anyone could ever identify with anything other than the abject, and how did the image of the poet ever become synonymous with that of a dandy? ‘Do you think that you are greater than a mom?’ Elaine Kahn writes later in the same poem, and then, later still: ‘Life has its good points / And the fat, white thigh-bones / of a tourist.’”

—*Bookslut*

“‘Do you think that you are greater than a mom?’ This is an intensely honest, honestly intense poetry. Humorous, carnal, accusatory, celebratory—*Women in Public* tells me to get lost, so I do. When I find myself later, I’m rereading *Women in Public*.”

—ROD SMITH

“Kahn’s poems don’t end on the page. The ideas bleed from poem to poem, constructing a venous universe surging with the complexity of meaning making and the numerous contradictions so often forced upon the gendered human form . . . Kahn packs her poems with a density as complex as the systems regulating the human body itself. However, where there could be claustrophobia, Kahn creates an opening, a portal for new meanings and

definitions.”

—*Entropy*

“A Celine Dion song comes on the radio at the salon. It reaches the chorus and every woman mouths the words together. ‘Another one and another one.’ Elaine is DJ Khaled. It is all of us in capitalism repeating everything over and over because our only commitment is to repeat until Elaine breaks it, ‘If I could break/ the hymen of his ear with/ I can’t stand you.’”

—LAURA WARMAN, *Cosmonauts Avenue*

“Elaine Kahn’s debut full-length poetry collection, *Women in Public*, explores the odd continuity between motherhood, blow-up dolls, lack, and love, asking the question: ‘What does the world hate more / than women / in public.’ The poems read as attempts to capture the contradictory nature of the feminine—to live on the edge of being, both subject and object, consumer and consumed. In this attempt, Kahn navigates the distance between the McRib and the abject with a dark eroticism. She wields metaphors, or more so, absences, in ways that leave you feeling as if you’re falling into them. These are poems about to unravel.”

—Small Press Distribution

“[*Women in Public*] as a whole functions as a grotesque carnival of embodiment, and our speaker’s performance a type of poignantly raunchy clowning, an intentionally obnoxious and uncomfortable striptease aimed at the gaze itself . . . Kahn’s collection is more than simply a retaliation to society’s ogling of the female in public. It is also an inquiry into the self situated within a Plathean lineage of women’s identity poetry, and it is this inquiry that peers at turns through our speaker’s sardonic tomfoolery, reminding us just how not-simple the issue is. Inasmuch as our speaker’s vulgar clowning seems a sarcastic play off the confessional, her bites are shot through with a real vulnerability.”

—*OmniVerse*

“Kahn’s poems . . . bend and contort between seduction and repulsion . . . *Women in Public* is composed ‘in the gentlest font of sick,’ and from the compost heap of her poems of burnt hair, jerking off at night, car impound lots, and fuzzy green Jesus pictures grows a self in all its rich capacity.”

—CARLEEN TIBBETTS, *American Microreviews & Interviews*

“Beyond merely subverting traditional gender roles, Kahn’s mostly female speakers confront our assumptions of what female agency and desire look like, asserting a breezy confidence. Many of the poems coalesce around Kahn’s alternately witty and pull-no-punches voice, as well as her precise imagery . . . Kahn’s ability to capture the raw materiality of a mood is, at its best, captivating.”

—Scout

PRAISE FOR A VOLUPTUOUS DREAM DURING AN ECLIPSE

“This is not the listless atemporality of the worldly and mundane—‘like doing laundry all day long / he is being nowhere’ she says in the titular poem—but a conscious, creative, and present force, where ‘yesterday is gone’ and Kahn’s poetry is free to ‘break / the hymen of his ear.’”

—DAN HOY

PRAISE FOR CUSTOMER

“*Customer* has an eye for truth when truth is the moment after you spit gum in someone’s hair and realization that you did it because you want to be their friend; how an ocean ‘spanks up’ to your chest in the otherwise still of a

perfect beach. The Customer sees the irrevocably fucked truths, and she candies them out like a clarity factory . . . *Customer* is arachnid and buttery, and her verbs make even the most ordinary scenarios grim and unsettling.”

—ALLY HARRIS, *DIAGRAM*

Romance or The End

ALSO BY ELAINE KAHN

Women in Public

ROMANCE
or
THE END

Poems

ELAINE KAHN

Soft Skull  New York

Romance or The End

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for Coco

Stay with me, I am sick; my love is more Than many diamonds

—ALFRED LORD TENNYSON

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Acknowledgments

Romance or The End

INTRODUCTION

ROMEO & JULIET & ELAINE

I.

We are gathered here to worship
the American religion of loneliness

It isn't easy
being this disturbed

but, suffering brings women to god
and I am not too small to understand

My mother is a pool

II.

Love's Commercial:

Pale blue buildings in the sun

Maria says hello to Paul
hello

Paul puts something in his mouth

(it is the tone of an answer
a pure response, an answer tone)

Maria turns on
like a wide band

Paul wants to fuck
the god inside her

Something pencils in—music?
a skinny fish of sound

Maria serves Paul's emotional and sexual needs
in exchange for pizza

III.

I look up your nose
as you tell me all your secrets

My laundry is allegedly done
yet, I am unwilling to return to the machine

Obviously, this
is not a love poem

IV.

You big dumbbell!
Bring me to life!

The warmth of my heart is hard
and unending

chapter one

THE PULL

LINEN

Every time I think of you
my hands work like a woman

Pulling another woman's hair into a ponytail
a state of grace, a doodle

Crotch, seclusion, yawning,
owning, ail

God has called on me
to wear this breastplate

I don't pay attention
I come open like a blood

Orange red of evening red of
clouds as tall as palm trees

Whorled apart
like hair around a drain

The sea has worn me out
the sea has opened up

A thousand different holes
in me and I have spat myself in each

The sex inside a fist of grass

I walk around
I look at pictures of myself

At night, I lay my outfits
into shapes of people on the ground

Tomorrow I will be as tired as a god
and after that

FRIDAY, APRIL 17th

The fantasy of being murdered has returned

it lives inside me like a crab

(I want it so the words come flat and all at once
a pier you walk out and look off of)

I'll send you there, with my little tongue

ROMANCE

I have heard it said
that love
turns people
soft
but I have
never been
more
brutal

ATTACHMENT THEORY

One baby says to the other baby
Look, the nurses are smoking
Look, the nurses are beating each other up

It is Saturday
and the babies
are holding me

Arms outstretched
The bods of godlets

Expecting
puts a seal
onto the world

So I am not

What is an O?
What is the circle of a guttural emission?
What is O-O-O-O-O-O-O-O
Ahh

I rattle like a baby
with a bottle
and a rattle

Do you think the reason babies love rattles
is that somewhere
in their softest infant brains
they know
that's what a Xanax bottle sounds like?

Do you think I'm a baby?

There are some ways
I am not

ROMANCE

let's make art out of pennies
let's make cats out of yarn
hard cats, narrow cats
the hard word of art
the impossible art of touch
this, this is your cheek
here, here is your neck

YOU DREAM OF CANDY BECAUSE YOU WANT YOURSELF TO

in another window
in a video
a dog is wheezing
and I am thinking
about candy
about what I want
to touch
I click on
swoony
like you like
every hour
a unique, careening bell
that breaks apart the quiet
like a picture
I look over
and over
everything I do
is to stay
longer

chapter two

THE LONG MONTH

AUGUST

for Kit

We woke up at 10

I brushed my teeth

I made breakfast

You put the dishes in the sink

We read on the porch

You sat in the rocking chair

I lay on the hammock

You kissed my nose

We walked to the beach

You kicked a ball

I climbed the rocks

You found a crab

We heard thunder

I skipped a stone

You stuck the ball under your shirt and said *look, you got me pregnant*

I kissed you hard

The sky was getting dark

I walked into the sea

UNTITLED

I never wanted
to belong
to anyone
but myself

here I am

I hate it and it makes my heart wet

ROMANCE

It breaks the muscle
and voids the temple
and the stomach
and is diurnal

CONJECTURING WHEN AND WHERE: THIS CUT IS FRESH

the pattern in full
is infantile

oh god

my personal bank
is blank

but why?

if you were
my final error

(I lay my head / onto the staircase / turn into / a slug / a rope / it
comes / to life and curls / around / my body / that is how)

I like it

CHILD ACTORS

wear bows
in their hair

me too

just like a child
and—an actor

DISHONOR

in the middle of the day
I love to be indulged

we are trying to be honest
but everybody knows that isn't possible

my eyes
in the red hangover of your eyes

sweetheart there is nothing
you can want without

ROMANCE

People say
I love you

I don't care
and I am never tired

chapter three

LOVE'S COMMERCIAL

ALARM

(an alarm in a yellow room)

(a drink in a yellow room)

(driving from a yellow room to a brown room in a blue car)

(the windshield wipers wipe and wipe)

(the music clicks—like a tongue)

I was beginning to worry

I was stretched

like a tongue

(there are flowers in a vase and flowers in a jar and dried flowers)

I waited for you
and now you're here

it's a kind of motion

when I look at you

it happens fast

nothing
and then

I am fine

(nothing happens)

(working)

fine fine

in the beginning

I walk their dog

(these individuals)

who are they?

Aristotle and Saint Thomas

things I do not know a lot about

moralists! stepmoms!

(there is nothing)

like

I want more information

I do not have it

(limiting invokes invincibility)

I find that I myself
am inessential

(held captive and away from each other)

(social risk)

(the temptation to flee)

(to freedom)

what do you think of my body?

chapter four

MY WILD MIND

YOU DID NOT ASSIMILATE, WHICH IS THE PRIVILEGE OF
A KING

or

I REGRET HAVING TO ABANDON YOU BUT I MAY NEVER
ABANDON MYSELF

or

IS IT EVEN POSSIBLE TO HAVE A CONVERSATION?

Your objections
are less passionate
than my desires

What drives me
is baseless
and therefore
indisputable

WHEN A SUDDEN MADNESS SEIZED THE INCAUTIOUS LOVERS

a slice of blue
a layer
like a cake
it vanishes red
pillows I have
got to cum
each evening
we have dinner
and you disappear into a wall

YET SPLIT MY HEART ABOUT YOU MAN LOVE DROPS
LIKE A DOZEN PENS

What's important?

You say nothing

Notice well and we point out
the words like oh
of course and is that right
my beauty / call me / something / else

No bliss is not enough

Ass whipped / eucalyptus

I would like
to ruin this
with valor

Don't forgive
the rareness of a perfect kiss

*Although I don't believe finality
I'd love it darling if you'd FaceTime me*

Thou couldst have loved this / what the fuck

(The moral inconsistency is, of course, maddening. Yet, it raises questions such as: within states of regulation is there peace?)

MY WILD MIND

my wild mind
will not let me cum!

THERE IS NOTHING MORE TO LIFE THAN THIS

Sickness
is a kind of clarity

It makes you feel afraid
and love to be alive

It interests me
to be afraid

My claim is on the absolute

I never wanted
to be free

Only to be
nothing

And to love
to be alive

Just like the French
my beauty's nourished
by its own disgrace
I love

when it's disgusting

Jealously
I wash myself

The sacrament of being
held without affection

My only purity
is in my failure
to be satisfied

We will never comprehend this
nor what hinders you

The horror I confess

I cannot have you
without being
and you know what I'd prefer

EVERYBODY THINKS THAT THEY ARE DIFFERENT BUT
NOBODY IS DIFFERENT

the poor thing
I hope they say
she was born
with so much
venom in her heart

A WISH TO BE POISONED / WHAT I WANT TO TOUCH I
CLICK ON

I listen to a song you sent
and think about your body

Loud
and all at once

A cam gif
winds and winds

I examine
my orgasm

Now and then
there is a need
to become
something

Life is like that

You don't know
and then it happens

Like a red heart

Your fat blood
and its actual eye

Anything
is adequate

As bruises
blur my knee

The air it glows
around my head

Try to grow up in one piece

Wind the clock
watch quiet
television, god
your mind is boring

Take a walk

What knowing makes you

I decided

I decide

You can do pretty much anything to me

chapter five

THE STONE CHAPTER

ALL I HAVE EVER WANTED IS TO BE SWEET

I watch his arms his
face is not thinking of
his face his body is
what is the fear can
you believe in fuck I
let him watch his arms
his face is not thinking
of his face his body is
what is the fear you
can believe in fuck I
let him watch his arms
his face is not thinking
of my face his body is
what is the fear I can
believe in fuck I let
him watch my arms
my face his body is the
fear I fuck what you
believe you watch my
arms my face not
thinking of my face
my body is what is I
fear and fuck you can't
believe me fuck you
can you watch my
arms my face not
thinking is your face
your fear is what I fuck
his body can you face

what I is fuck I let him

then worsen all, believing what I let
that I is this and this is what I get

unfastened by my fail so low to speak
in wasted keeps, removing me from me

to you who say my fall was justly wrought
know this: I paid for more than what I bought

my body split to hell so quick was stuck
not you, you arm your body safe you fuck

you lie beneath a sky I cannot reach
and rinse my kiss from yours with sun like bleach

it's true, it's he who pulled me from above
and you that left me there

OUT OF YOUR LOVE

I
don't
know
what
would
have
happened
if
what
happened
hadn't
happened

It happened

So many times

THERE IS NOTHING / I WISH / TO CONTAIN

I write and it's a theatre

I stone(y)(eye)d

recount:

I don't know how I used to write
or used to live

The sky is white and I am nowhere / underneath it

ROMANCE

Love has turned on me
and now I am its liar

chapter six

I TOLD YOU I WAS SICK

I WOULD LIKE TO HAVE

you

hell

the problem of loving a person

I TOLD YOU I WAS SICK

Only the visceral
Shit spreading from the crease
the gemstone cold
I fondled them
Value based and oiling
like witches and as earthly
God
too sick from
I remember
later like a badge
and even I had an erection
What to make of that

PARADISE IS A MIND BLOWING YOU

Fate is immoral
it dumps on you
and you do not explore
it's bad
as I wish you were
a ceiling
or a geode
dump me when I look at you
from every care
I cannot wait
until I die
I should have said
but would not let you
touch it

IRISH SPRING

Men cry on my stomach

All my life
I've only wanted
someone

Tell me a story
that I can believe

EDICT

for Jane Gregory

the rain
does not
make me wet
 but it's what
 I told you
 not to touch
my hell

the hell

oh hell
 oh operator please give me number nine and if you disconnect me
 I'll chop off your behind

I BRAIDED PEARLS INTO MY HAIR BUT I DID NOT HAVE
A WEDDING

(whispered)

marriage is two people
who love each other
so they say a vow
to devour one another
head to toe
in the cruelest manner possible

ROMANCE

a silent
expiration

in the small
hours like a man

whose pleasure
disenchants

love ends fast
and never

reinvents like light
describes a cone

a nothingness that longs
to become regular

splendor or whatever
good things turn to

every day

UNFUCKED IN THE BED WE FUCKED ON

When you loved me
life was real

When you forget me

chapter seven

I LOSE HOPE

WOMEN WEAR CLOTHES TO DEMONSTRATE THEIR GRIEF

Today my therapist suggested
I try lying down on top of graves

She had a leaf stuck to her cheek
But I didn't tell her

I'm depressed
because my orgasms alone are uninspiring

And the most money I have ever made
was when I got hit by a car

NATURE

To live is to disorganize

To become waste
in little waves, in echoes

Hear my mother
call my name
a door creaks shut
a windy day
it devastates me
and I blur away

My condition won't allow me to remain

Although
I can't exempt myself
from wanting

Alive
and in this shit-pile

A woman must
be very poor
to love

Pull a branch
out of the water
stick the water
in my eye
I shiver out
a fowl
with muscly shivers
pinking out
the water's gray
narcotic web
malaise in service of desire
fucking nature

You delight
in getting rid of me

I STAND HERE IN MY POODLE SKIRT AND ASK FOR
EVERYTHING I CAN THINK OF

was my sex my only magic?
I took a picture of the moon

THE REASON IT NEVER RAINS IS GOD NO LONGER CARES FOR US

be careful what you read
and who you love

everybody says that
I look better with my eyes shut

any effort: minimum
it's total, less than me

I can't transcend a thing
if I'm unable to desire it

stay there
allow me my emergency

I remember being in love
but not really

INSERT

hair brush

candle

dirt

a pen

rope

a balloon

beer bottle

the end of a cane

eyeliner

lipstick

paper napkin

t-shirt

carrots

banana

hand mirror

the arm of a doll

pencil

lollipop

lint roller

clove of garlic

a high heel

a makeup brush

travel-sized contact solution

travel-sized hair spray

a string of pearls

a box cutter

a tooth brush

a length of chain

handle of a steak knife

handle of a sauce pan

neti pot

carnation

leather whip

a bottle of oil free eye makeup remover

a ruler

twizzlers

tube of sunscreen

sunglass case

I DON'T CARE IF IT LASTS

eros betrays

hate beguiles

love goes out

I THOUGHT LOVE WAS A PLACE BUT LOVE IS A PULL

the dishes do themselves
and I am within me
the same and from myself
without you and it doesn't matter

She answered
in their own tinct and added of her wit

it isn't loneliness
it's solitude
and it is mine

so
*she lived
in fantasy*

when I think of you
I do not think
of you
I think
of anything
but you

TEXTING A BUNCH OF GUYS NAMED JOHN

There are lots of ways
to show affection
and he fucked me
with a tube of sunscreen
in the backseat of my car

Maybe I don't want a witness

Maybe I just want to be alone
and research plastic surgery
or eat lasagna

There's a lot of shit
that can get a person through the next hour

I keep the house clean-ish
Know for sure that I am not anemic

But, the feel good stories
leave me feeling bad

Liberty could not exist with you

There is a lump inside my throat

There is a lump inside my breast

ELEGY WHAT NEVER WAS

When I choked
on his ex-girlfriend's hair
while sucking his cock
in the bed they used to share
it had the feel of rightness

How it takes
a plastic bag
one thousand years
to go away

It wasn't love/I suffered

I DIDN'T LOOK AT ANYTHING SO THERE WAS NOTHING
TO WRITE DOWN

a thin clot

casual as rape

it comes from everywhere

ROMANCE

The feeling of leaving
your body instead of the room

THE PULL

for my students

I know quickness
like.....the longer we lie
the more

I wanna drown

it's not a question
plastic drowns me
like the middle class
it isn't a release

grass, a tongue
paper cup, a tongue
when someone says LA
I drive

a hundred twenty
milligrams / whatever / I don't love
the fuck of doubt
and on and on

let me assure you
forever means wax
insomnia
blank as your name

ROMANCE

Love turned me into a liar
Lies turned me into a god

chapter eight

I DO NOT LOSE HOPE

TO THE DEATH OF FORESTS

Trees are insufferable

Their giant leaves

Sad

Showy

Their relentless introspection
and their clarity

They know how to stand there

In the absence of anything splendid
In the limited season of my voice

Devoted
to an antiquated predicament

Trees rise

REALITY STEVE

I have googled existential crisis so many times in the last month
It only matters how you move on from it
I'm not judging

I'm going to send you a drawing and a letter
The drawing is going to have spit all over it
and the letter is going to say
I don't want to be your friend

The man on TV has nice hair
When he walks away
on TV
the back of his hair
looks like a heart
You never even had hair

The feeling of being with you
in the sense that
being with you feels
is being nowhere

Is the feeling of being
on vacation when you are
sitting on an airplane
half-asleep

You say when I'm sad
my lips are white
I think you mean
I don't wear lipstick

AS A MAIDEN INTACT / HISTORY IS POINTLESS

[move like an idiot, move
wildly
move until people laugh and you fall down
and wear the mask
in which
appears
a collaborator
a ritual
a human eye
which could see only what it's shown
then move
by a plant
in the night like a flare]

I TOLD YOU I WAS SICK

The innocents all dress the same
Their mouths open
Their mouths close

They flush and bleed and wonder where they are
Happy to be leaving
hesitant and
unprepared for the departure
when it comes to them
like penicillin

Are you pinching yourself?
What I want
and how I want it
That is what they told me
They were right
Skin is just like fabric
and
All violence is in defense
of something

I lay on my back
and wish
I do that now
I wish for good things, all the good, good things
Why not

Fabric rolls out like a cloud of paint
A moan into a square of gauze

I don't know
and so I write about it

I care about life
and the ones who never say a thing

We are in the hands of providence
who is unqualified

There are those who would protect us
from the possibility of good

APOLOGY IN A COMMON TONGUE

of, through, for, and after Ally Harris

my senses arched
off since / lanced
like language: be / he
was a spider
was a pill
I spread on / crushed
what gesture locked
the life inside
you thin as sleep
and blue as cutting scissors
still I must believe
that there are some
who could
forgive

INSIDE ME IS A SEPARATION

standing like a Y

a crease

light falls

thick as meat

you can stand in place

and still

the world will blow on you

a shape on a wall

the sound of a freeway

I don't care if it lasts

baby, I am writing this to you

I did not consent to destiny

you can stand in place

and I will pay

exactly what it costs

when I have nothing left to say
it is because life
is happening away from me

I MISS YOU AND I'M GLAD YOU ARE NOT HERE

the smell of water on hot concrete
is more beautiful than any word
it is a merciful blade
into the center of pain
the delta of what feels dull

BESIDES IT ALL

I walked around this beautiful life
in excellent weather

A stoned philosopher
who yearned to be attractive

If I have failed
it is to become callous

Though I do
have some regrets

They aren't
dimensional, or precious

ROMANCE

When I tell myself a story
I decide the end

ROMANCE *or* THE END

This is a book about love.

And it is a book about lies.

Love can be a lie, but it is also always true.

This is a book about truth.

This is a book about story.

There is no such thing as a true story and so there are no stories in this book.

Without a story, there is separation.

This is a book about separation.

Everything is a story. Even the truth.

There is nothing truer in this world than the lie of love.

EPILOGUE

SOMEWHERE THERE'S A NOTHING I'M A PART OF

the status bar circles my iris

it isn't insurmountable
or permanent

though, boundaries do exist

you don't dissolve by going through them
and I went

are lovers people?

what I mean is

shit

wept from the gutter

is a kind of present

of desire of

the sexuality

of death

like, they control me

into me

but I am more

and other things

I am alive
so I stay up all night

enjoying feeling
sick with pleasure
I read Dolores O'Riordan's natal chart
we have hardly anything
in common

I want to be more
than anything I want

if I listen carefully to certain music
I can just remember what it's like
to live
inside the perfect closeness
of another's breath

it seems extraterrestrial
in hindsight

Dolores said
I'll miss you when you're gone
and I think of this
while scraping 3-day-old smashed cockroach
from the sun-bleached wooden floor of my apartment

it's like the refrain
or the stain of the refrain

I don't pay it too much mind

there is real joy
in understanding

no one else is going to do it for you

I want so much long fake hair
and I want to win a dance off

I want to be disciplined
and prompt, I want

to cum
by barely even moving

desire really can be simple

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ELAINE KAHN is the author of *Women in Public*, as well as several chapbooks, including *I Told You I Was Sick: A Romance*, *A Voluptuous Dream During an Eclipse*, and *Customer*. Her writing has appeared in *Frieze*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *jubilat*, *Poetry Foundation*, *Art Papers*, and elsewhere. She received an MFA from the Iowa Writers' Workshop and teaches at Pomona College and the Poetry Field School. She lives in Los Angeles.