

# Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

## Alicia Elkort: Four Poems

Alicia Elkort · Tuesday, January 31st, 2023

### After An Exhaustive Study of the Girdle of Venus\*

1. The whiskey all sour went down sweet
2. on the tongue, his lips across my thighs
3. I name Eden, garden of bridge & gospel
4. & esteem for my parts—breasts, skin &
5. spit & the way he grazes, savoring groan
6. & delight, kindling the palms of his hands
7. I follow, eyes closed & the warmth of fire
8. as we coalesce, two oceans against tide.
9. I praise this love. I think heaven but propose
10. sex & revelry, ten enraptured fingers
11. across his brawny back. I bless my hands,
12. the lines across my palms & the absent Girdle—
13. my Venus birthing meadow & thorny brush
14. heeding the urgency of bramble.

\*The Girdle of Venus is a line on the palm of a hand, the presence of which was, at one time, interpreted to indicate licentiousness & debauchery in women.

\*

### On driving all night to find the shaman who will help me &

then I breathe, draughts of air in my lungs,  
a \$30 white t-shirt

wet with dew, I bought from a store with a blue  
awning, down the street

from where I live by the ocean, I am far from there  
now; the awning gray-blue

like any sky at dawn, & now it snows & snows,  
a hand in the air

conjures a different scent, sweet like juniper & cold

like rosemary, but today

clouds clamp the trees in a silver wrap with no loose ends,  
here in the mountains

where sweat evaporates from my neck, I've come to heal,  
my mind is split—

there's the me & the child me who is screaming &  
terror rides us both

into a numb frenzy, the shaman holds my head in her arms,  
*There now, I got you.*

Sage burns. *Let it out, she says, terror must have its day,*  
& by that she means

repressed terror, & by that she means for me to take up more  
space than I ever have before

while coyotes wild against the stars, wet fur & fangs—we are all  
howling together,

& now a clearing, a quiet so dark the black sky lays out the cosmos  
as if I belonged

to something majestic, instead of twisted on the floor remembering  
what I never wanted

to forget, the child by the door, it never should have happened,  
when he stole her light.

\*

## **I should have been a cheetah or a drum roll.**

~ after Diane Seuss

I should have climbed the splintered fence and curried favor with termites.

I should have praised the bramble and cherished burnt rice.

I should have smoked a joint and slept with Scot.

And not held back.

I should have never held back, except when my father died.

If I had cried a little less, I might have remembered more of what he said.

Memory is unreliable, so I'll make it up.

On hospice, he said *my bed is always warm, but the pillows are too soft.*

Or maybe he said *my bed is always soft, but the pillows are too warm.*

Either way, I have played it safe.

I'm not alone in that.

Have you never done something you regret?

Like shooting fish in a barrel?

That's a metaphor.  
 I've got a barrel of regrets.  
 I don't get angry enough.  
 I let things slide.  
 I'll grant a second chance, but, no baby, not a third.  
 I know who I am—  
     a half moon swinging a starlit sky aching for a full moon. I'm galaxies and tequila shots.  
 Pass the salt, and I'll tell you more.

\*

## Triptych in a Minor Key

i.

I remember yellow  
 tulips in the blue glass

vase when Jodi's  
 father entered

her bedroom  
 his bony legs &

silver rings, the grip  
 on her ear

the blood  
 on her white carpet

as he dragged  
 her away

his bathrobe  
 hanging open

his penis  
 in full view

the screech of her  
 begging for mercy

*forgive me father*  
 her voice a chalkboard—

laced hieroglyphics  
 of contrition,

but no mercy  
 was shown that night

her skin red,  
stinging, seven

birthday candles  
lighting her face.

**ii.**

My sister's face—  
morning's glory

at the kitchen  
table, golden hues

down her back,  
she asked father

for cash  
to buy a new bra

& he pulled  
bills out of his wallet,

so I asked for money  
to buy band-aids

& mother snorted  
coffee out of her nose

cuz my breasts  
were tiny—

I meant to have fun  
but father said

*don't ever demean  
yourself again—*

he never knew  
about "uncle," his hands

across my thighs  
at the family picnic

or the boys in school  
who rubbed my ass—

I swallowed it all  
until I was starving.

**iii.**

I starved my young body,  
disappearing

female signifiers  
beneath the rice-paper

lamp, its ochre light  
across the keys

as I practiced a piano sonata  
in C minor

ivory under my fingers—  
I stopped playing

lost in reverie, wondering  
why I was born a girl

when it was clear  
that boys

had the advantage,  
so I begged God

to make me happy  
instead of smart

but I was wrong then,  
the bargain was not

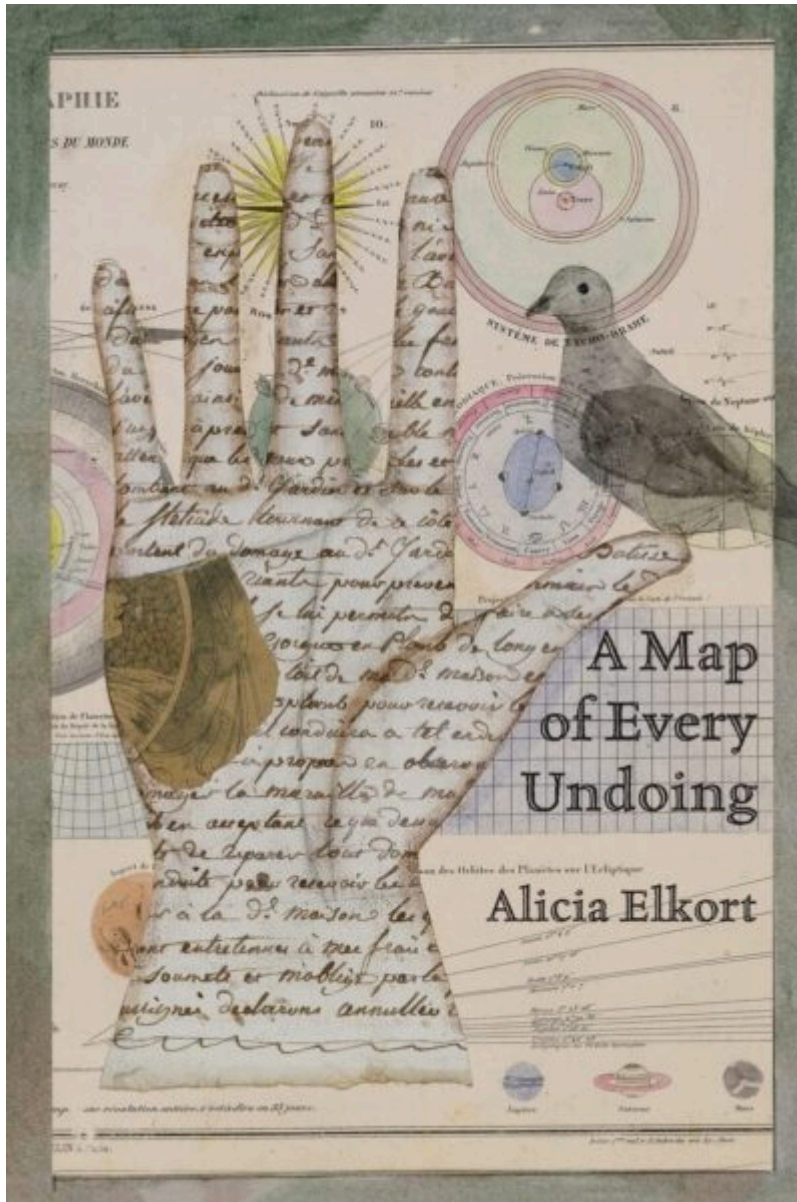
smart or happy, male  
or female,

the bargain  
was really a prayer—

show me O father  
a simple sweetness,

grant me the dignity  
of respect.

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*A Map of Everything* by Alicia Elkort

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