

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

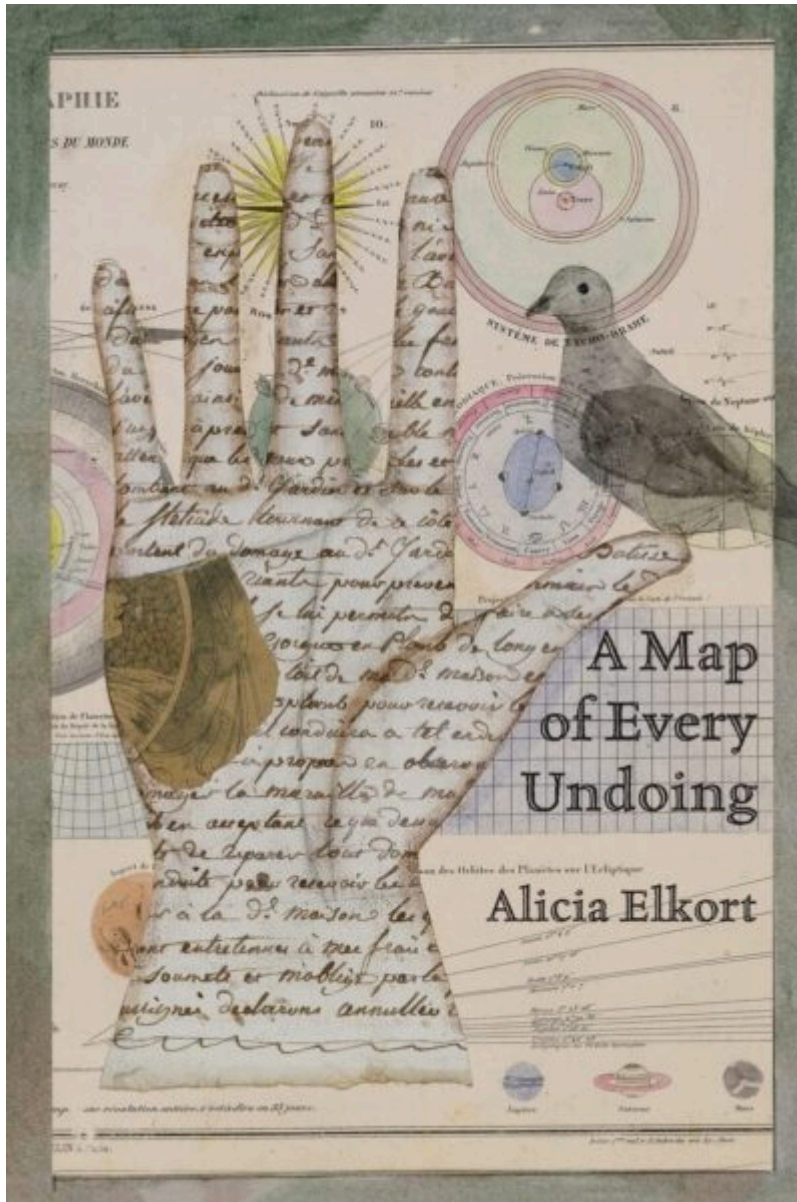
but I was wrong then,
the bargain was not

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.



A Map of Everything by Alicia Elkort

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