Fire

Elizabeth Morris

I burnt my hands on the words you threw at me
my fingernails are still singed
my skin calloused and cracked.

The doctor said I’d never recover—not completely
I’m beginning to believe him.

When I was lying in the hospital, the nurses grafting new
skin to my bones
I focused on the searing pain because it reminded me of you
it was the only thing that reminded me of you.

They wrapped bandages around my body, up my arms,
bandages as white as the snow that fell the first time I
told you I loved you, cotton so soft
yet it still burned against my raw flesh
making me gasp for air when all I wanted was to scream your name.

I lay there for weeks, staring up at the cream-coloured ceiling
waiting for the flames to descend again
not believing you were gone—not truly.
Then they released me, skin pulled taught over jowls, pucker and twisted, angry and red one huge mass of broken promises descending down my chest, to my heart where I could only find the space you had excavated.

You are gone and the fire has abated my skin now the only sign left of our love that love, if that’s what it was, if that’s what you’d call it and it repels people, terrifying them, this contagious disease spread across my skin, a premonition of the destruction that could come.

You branded me at first I didn’t think you realised but the power behind your departure I now can’t mistake for anything but what it was — a claim of ownership, and I crawled back to you and saw the whip in your hand and the fire gleaming of hell in your eyes and still I smiled scar tissue tethered to my heart but the only one pulling the strings was you.