

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,
puckered 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.