

FRAGMENTS

Brenda Liebling-Goldberg

1

A man I loved once sent me a letter. I still have that letter, though I haven't seen the man for any number of years. In the body of the letter, he wrote the following words:

*In the Bay of Sumi
The waves crowd on the beach.
Even in the night
By the corridors of dreams,
I come to you secretly.*

Beneath these words, he signed the name Fujiwara no Toshiyuki. I have often wondered if this man wrote these words himself and merely signed the name Fujiwara no Toshiyuki because he and I used to go to the theater on Polk Street and see the films of Toshiro Mifune and because he loved all things Japanese. Or if Fujiwara no Toshiyuki was a famous writer and this man expected me to recognize his name.

2

One summer, I dreamt every night about a man I once loved. I would be walking down the streets of San Francisco at dusk, sometimes past the tower on Telegraph Hill, sometimes past the ferryboats at the edge of the bay, and this man would appear before me, stepping out of a taxi or turning the corner or just walking straight toward me. At first, because I knew he would appear in my dreams, I went to bed early, before it was dark. Later, when I hadn't seen him for a number of months, I refused to sleep at all, though I no longer know if I was afraid I would see him or afraid I would not. I only know that, after a time, I began to sleep well again and no longer had dreams and no longer cared.

3

A man I loved told me he loved me after I had known him for just a few weeks. I did not answer him at the time. No other man had ever told me he loved me nor had I ever told another man that I loved him so that to me, the moment seemed awkward and clumsy. Later I often said that I loved him, later when I thought I knew what love meant. Of course that was many years ago when I was still young and thought love was something that lasted forever.

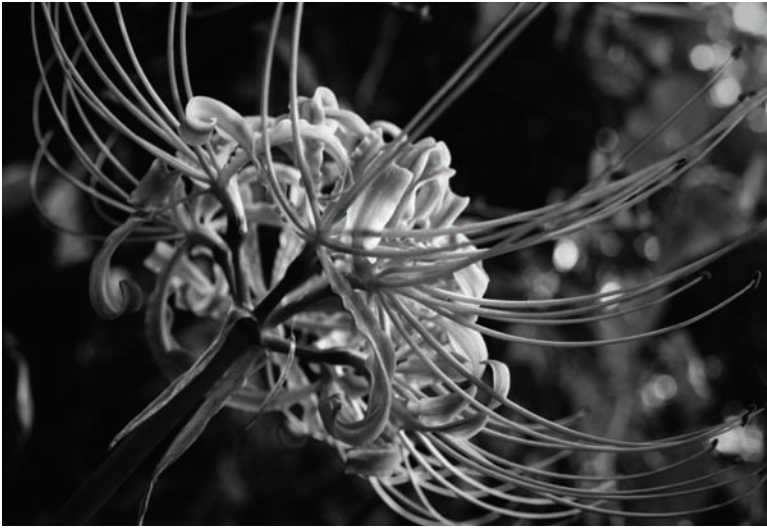
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I once loved a man when I was younger and open to dreams. He struck me, at first, as a bohemian type, quiet and intense and immensely attractive, or so I thought at the time. Later I would see he wasn't bohemian at all. That he loved expensive gifts and was capable of great kindness and that he wasn't quiet in the least, though he remained immensely attractive, at least in my eyes, for all the years we were together, and several years after.



Russell Peagler

Otosan no Niwa (Father's Garden)



Russell Peagler

Untitled (reaching)

5

A man I loved once sent me a poem by Fujiwara no Toshiyuki. Or perhaps he wrote the words himself and just invented that name, I was never quite sure. I kept his letter in the back of a drawer where my husband was unlikely to find it. From time to time, I took the letter out, though I never took it out for exactly the same reason. In the beginning, I took it out to prove that he existed. Later I took it out to prove that I existed. One day I couldn't find the letter at all. I thought, at the time, I might have stashed it inside my box at the bank and then forgotten I had done so. Still, I was so distraught I might have lost or misplaced this letter that I wept in my car all the way to the bank. I was relieved when the letter turned up, along with mortgage papers, insurance certificates, snapshots of household belongings, and so forth, although I haven't reread the letter or even thought of it again for any number of years.

6

The man I loved became very ill and called me from the hospital to tell me of his illness. He was living with another woman at the

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time, and I had been troubled by this and had started to see my ex-husband by then. I did not react well to the news, either because I was put off by the fact that this man was now living with another woman or because I was angry that he hadn't written to me for several months or just because I was young. Whatever the reason, I was insensitive to his condition, though I only see that now that I have come to understand the nature of illness and fear. I try to tell myself that this man has probably been dead for a number of years, so it is pointless to feel guilty. Still, the thought that I was so callous toward a man I truly loved, at least for a time, still bothers me to the point that I wish, on those occasions when I think about him, that I could go back and undo the past.

7

I once said to a man I loved with all my heart that I felt I could not go on living without him. He replied that he could live without me



Russell Peagler

Shinjuku no Hana (Shinjuku's Flower)

and that, despite what I thought at the time, I was no different than he was in this regard. At the time I thought he was rude and unfeeling. Now I can see he was right.

8

One night I sat next to a stranger who looked just like this man. My husband and I were seated, at the time, in a restaurant on the outskirts of Sausalito, an intimate place where the chairs were jammed in together so that this stranger was seated directly to my right. Though he was with another woman, I touched him on the arm, and then I could see this man was not the man I loved but just a stranger. The man looked surprised when I touched him on the arm, so I apologized profusely. Then I turned my attention back to my ex, who would not be my ex for at least two or three years, but, all the same, I couldn't stop thinking that the man I once loved might have been seated beside me in a restaurant in Sausalito.

9

The night before I married my ex-husband, I went out to the incinerator by the back door of my apartment and threw away everything the man I once loved had ever given to me as a gift: a lava lamp, a string of glass beads, an Escher print. I did this not because I was angry at this man but rather as a demonstration of loyalty to my husband-to-be. Later, when my husband was unkind to me, as he was on so many occasions, I could see how naive I had been. Still, I did not burn my memories that night, just the physical evidence of the years we had spent together.

10

I once loved a man so much that I thought I couldn't go on living without him. Later he became ill and I moved away and got married and became another person entirely.