

THE FIVE STAGES OF GRIEF

The night I lost you
someone pointed me towards
the Five Stages of Grief.
Go that way, they said,
it's easy, like learning to climb
stairs after amputation.
And so I climbed.
Denial was first.
I sat down at breakfast
carefully setting the table
for two. I passed you the toast—
you sat there. I passed
you the paper—you hid
behind it.
Anger seemed more familiar.
I burned the toast, snatched
the paper and read the headlines myself.
But they mentioned your departure
and so I moved on to
Bargaining. What could I exchange
for you? The silence
after storms? My typing fingers?
Before I could decide, Depression
came puffing up, a poor relation
its suitcase tied together

with string. In the suitcase
 were bandages for the eyes
 and bottles of sleep. I slid
 all the way down the stairs
 feeling nothing.
 And all the time Hope
 flashed on and off
 in defective neon.
 Hope was a signpost pointing
 straight in the air.
 Hope was my uncle's middle name,
 he died of it.
 After a year I am still climbing,
 though my feet slip
 on your stone face.
 The treeline
 has long since disappeared;
 green is a color
 I have forgotten.
 But now I see what I am climbing
 towards: Acceptance
 written in capital letters,
 a special headline:
 Acceptance.
 Its name is in lights.
 I struggle on,
 waving and shouting.
 Below, my whole life spreads its surf,
 all the landscape I've ever known
 of dreamed of. Below
 a fish jumps: the pulse
 in your neck.
 Acceptance. I finally
 reach it.
 But something is wrong.
 Grief is a circular staircase.
 I have lost you.

—Linda Pastan (in *Carnival Evening: New and Selected Poems, 1968–1998*)

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