

## 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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