

PATRICIA YOUNG

## ELAINE AND AFTER

*There are so many places a bad love poem can go astray! Taking the poem or yourself too seriously is dangerous.*

—Rebecca Hoogs

It was after Elaine left. After she left me.

It was after Elaine confessed to peppering the burnt grass around the perimeter of the house to express her disappointment. Generally speaking, Elaine was a disappointed woman.

It was after she started wearing umber and rags, but before she dragged a loaded pistol back and forth across the lawn in a threatening manner.

Did I say that? Did I say Elaine threatened me with a loaded pistol? It was after her failed public performance, but before her personality fragmented.

Elaine was Elaine and thus disappointed.

She confessed as much while peppering the grass.

She was also a card with a bounce, awkward and jittery, indiscreet, a scowling but nevertheless bracingly attractive woman in a crowded theatre lobby, sipping a glass of Chardonnay.

It was after Elaine skittered like a water creature across the lake.

A blurt of white heat, she destroyed me utterly.

It's three in the morning and I can't sleep.

If only I could stop thinking about loaded pistols and failed public performances. Still, I miss her scowling indiscretion and bracing attractiveness. I miss her umber and rags and ... Elaine, oh Elaine, how could you leave me, an upturned ox-cart stuck in mud ...

## LITTLE CHAINSAW

*An overturned tricycle in the gutter ... can stand for everything.*

—Stephen King

The tricycle lying in the gutter (bent front wheel, pink paint flaking) reminds you of the old women in wheelchairs parked haphazardly in the hallway each time you walk past to visit your grandmother in the institutional room with the garish orange floor tiles.

Crippled for years with rheumatoid arthritis, she does not babble or drool. She does not forget your name or the chainsaw she insists you buy with the money she gave for your sixteenth birthday. To cut up firewood, she says. I could've used a nifty little chainsaw myself when I was living in the bush.

Your grandmother is blessedly cognizant and a tricycle is more than a philosophy or destination. It is the three-wheeled, human-powered vehicle she once rode up and down a short stretch of sidewalk on summer afternoons—five-year-old girl in a striped bathing suit, pedalling madly into a future of sorrow.

On the bedside table, her transistor radio is playing *Chapel of Love*, a Dixie Cup hit. Everyone has memories, she says. Everyone knows how it ends. Everyone understands that everything stands for something else.

And then she's singing along in her mother tongue, Spring is here, the sky is blue, whoa, oh, oh, and somewhere, an overturned tricycle, bulwark against nothing, stares at the sky, uncomplaining.