

1999

For Laurie

Lydia King

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For Laurie

We know the clichés about women
and roses, but this is true.
As I sit in your rooftop garden,
on the bench that you built
with your small, scarred hands,
a shaft of city sunlight pierces
the clouds like an iron nail.

Your fingertips rasp canvas
as you trace the heart, the spiral
of petals unfurling. You capture
the clean, white shaft of sunlight
that glows inside the single bloom
and sets it shimmering like blood.

The muscles in your lean arms shift.
Your hands swoop from palette
to canvas as if you hear music.
You hum to yourself, smudging
slashes of red on the thighs
of your carpenter's jeans.

Across the city, between the grey,
flat slabs of buildings, the river
shimmers red. I wonder what protects you,
Laurie, small as you are, woman like me,
as the sun sinks, with clouds outstretched.
If I had the strength to hold you,
would we be safe?

I follow the slope of your shoulders,
specific, unbowed, as you frame
a branch of roses between your hands.
It's not enough to paint you, wingless
and mortal, with the scars that we share.
I need the clean, unbroken lines
to hold you, to capture your mind,
hard and alive as a slender green
stalk that arches, studded by thorns.

—*Lydia King*