

**Fear and Love are not exactly separate**

He rubs away the rust from her lips with his  
"It's been a while" she says.  
It takes a village to raise a child and she  
grew up in a slew of foster houses.  
His heart hammers as she chips at her plum nails.  
*My god she's so beautiful* he thinks.  
He watches her bat away her insecurity  
and then watches her cower when he raises his arm.  
The look in her eyes reminds him of another night  
when there was a boy and this same girl,  
a night no amount of counseling or consoling is going to erase.  
So he reaches down to zip up her pants  
and then just holds her  
trying to restick the pieces  
others broke off.

**A Lover's Gift**

I wanted to give you  
all of my heart,  
so I took the scissors  
straight to my chest  
and tried to cut it out.  
But safety scissors  
aren't sharp enough  
to pierce through my hide  
they're much too dull.  
So I made you one  
carved of wood not marrow  
small enough to hold  
to let you know  
I love you.

With love,  
Yours

**five letters**

it starts all exchanges

sometimes two or three

depending on who's giving them to whom.

Said with relief between lovers late to lunch.

Said with ice to those who were once friends.

Said with joy by baby with stumbling tongue.

Whispered behind pant leg by preschool children to teacher.

*"Hello"*