



Issue 4: Love Poems in the Age of ICE

Distributed on Valentine's Day 2026

Hannah Lim

FORWARD, OR, THIS IS A WEIRD TIME FOR ALL THESE LOVE POEMS BUT I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT LIKE THEM AND IF WE WERE TOGETHER RIGHT NOW I WOULD HAVE READ THEM TO YOU.

The deportation defense training where we were taught to spot, disrupt, and report on ICE in our neighborhoods was hosted in a church basement around the LES. All church basements are the same (some kind of normalizing effect of living under God?) – yellow fluorescent lights, foldable chairs, the sweetish smell of old people...mundane. We were shown what the agents would look like and what information to gather for rapid responders, and who to contact so the documentation made its way to case workers, and how to advise others during investigation or seizure. We were taught our rights on warrants and arrest and detainment, and we were shown some photos of agents wearing masks with the Totenkopf. Since New York City remains a sanctuary city and has no 287(g), we were taught that the NYPD badge is a safe signal – not ICE (how far we've backslid to be relieved at the badge of the notoriously fair and just and reasonable New York Police Department).

We were reminded over and over to move with composure and care because for the person being detained, this would be the worst day of their life. Everyone in attendance looked very normal. One instructor was late coming from work. In fact, most of us had clearly come from work, and we were sitting around spills of our own disrobed winter jackets, scarves, and hats.

When I was dating the musician, he told me that all little boys had hero fantasies. He had dreamed of saving the world. I had no such dreams. I never wanted to learn how to stop a kidnapping. But when it happens, they said, I will need to note where I am, and in what direction they leave. I imagined the scenario where I would need this information. We imagined it together, over and over.

I kept thinking, I'm just some fucking guy. I can't stop a kidnapping. I'm just some fucking guy. But looking around the room: gray-haired women, college kids, a few folks from my mutual aid group and from my the

collective, regular-degular dudes, all of us. We wanted desperately to sit at home and read books and take our glasses off and sleep soundly. But we were here: practicing counting how many guns they had, and what kinds of vests they wore – the E in SALUTE is for equipment, the U is for uniform. We are so abandoned by our systems (supposed systems of justice, protection, and democracy) that the artists now are being prepared for war. They have brought it to us. Where is the congress? Where are the courts? *All we have is each other*, the instructors said to galvanize us, but it also haunts a little, right? *Only we can keep us safe*.

And it's true: A few weeks ago, I met a woman at the library to hand off some care kits with soap, pads, tampons, socks, handwarmers, toothbrushes and toothpaste. She thanked me and then she thanked God, and then she asked me if I belonged to a church. The sun was warm that day, and I entertained it for a second, amused at her boldness. I told her I used to believe in God. She told me I should try to pray. I tried it, walking home that day, and it was the first time I'd prayed in over ten years. He, of course, did not answer.

To be honest with you, Dorothy, God didn't pack these fucking kits; I did. He doesn't give a fuck if you have soap this month; I do. *All we have is each other*. God has clearly abandoned us and the Congress is choked with cowardice and the police are white supremacists and the market is dominated by vacuous, insatiable war criminals. Love is the only thing that can save us. *We are all we have*. How can you not get that by now?

So anyway, Happy Valentine's Day. Get trained by reaching out through your local mutual aid networks. Join your neighborhood signal group. Persistently resurrect hope like it's your lifeline because it is. I hope you enjoy these poems. These things, the things we make for each other, that's the way I'm getting through. Try to hear them, their tenderness despite all this noise. Tear them out and give them to your Valentine. I hope we never lose sight of beauty and sweetness and affection. And I hope we can return to these at the end of the long fight.

Yours, Hannah



From the Summer, Central Park, 2025

HOW PRAYER WORKS

by Kaveh Akbar

Tucked away in our tiny bedroom so near each other the edge of my prayer rug covered the edge of his, my brother and I prayed. We were 18 and 11 maybe, or 19 and 12. He was back from college where he built his own computer and girls kissed him on the mouth. I was barely anything, just wanted to be left alone to read and watch *The Simpsons*.

We prayed together as we had done thousands of times, rushing ablutions over the sink, laying our janamazes out toward the window facing the elm which one summer held an actual crow's nest full of baby crows: fuzzy, black-beaked fruit, they were miracles we did not think to treasure.

My brother and I hurried through sloppy postures of praise, quiet as the light pooling around us. The room was so small our twin bed took up nearly all of it, and as my brother, tall and endless, moved to kneel, his foot caught the coiled brass doorstop, which issued forth a loud *brooong*. The noise crashed around the room like a long, wet bullet shredding through porcelain.

My brother bit back a smirk and I tried to stifle a snort but solemnity ignored our pleas—we erupted, laughter quaking out our faces into our bodies and through the floor. We were hopeless, laughing at our laughing, our glee an infinite rope fraying off in every direction.

It's not that we forgot God or the martyrs or the Prophet's holy word—quite the opposite, in fact, we were boys built to love what was right in front of our faces: my brother and I draped across each other, laughing tears into our prayer rugs.

DEATHLESS APHRODITE OF THE SPANGLED MIND

By Sappho, translated by Anne Carson

Deathless Aphrodite of the spangled mind,
child of Zeus, who twists lures, I beg you
do not break with hard pains,
O lady, my heart

but come here if ever before
you caught my voice far off
and listening left your father's
golden house and came,

yoking your car. And fine birds brought you,
quick sparrows over the black earth
whipping their wings down the sky
through midair—

they arrived. But you, O blessed one,
smiled in your deathless face
and asked what (now again) I have suffered and why
(now again) I am calling out

and what I want to happen most of all
in my crazy heart. Whom should I persuade (now again)
to lead you back into her love? Who, O
Sappho, is wronging you?

For if she flees, soon she will pursue.
If she refuses gifts, rather will she give them.
If she does not love, soon she will love
even unwilling.

Come to me now: loose me from hard
care and all my heart longs
to accomplish, accomplish. You
be my ally.

A DRINK OF WATER

By Jeffrey Harrison

When my nineteen-year-old son turns on the kitchen tap and leans down over the sink and tilts his head sideways to drink directly from the stream of cool water, I think of my older brother, now almost ten years gone, who used to do the same thing at that age;

And when he lifts his head back up and, satisfied, wipes the water dripping from his cheek with his shirtsleeve, it's the same casual gesture my brother used to make; and I don't tell him to use a glass, the way our father told my brother,

because I like remembering my brother when he was young, decades before anything went wrong, and I like the way my son becomes a little more my brother for a moment through this small habit born of a simple need,

which, natural and unprompted, ties them together across the bounds of death, and across time . . . as if the clear stream flowed between two worlds and entered this one through the kitchen faucet, my son and brother drinking the same water.

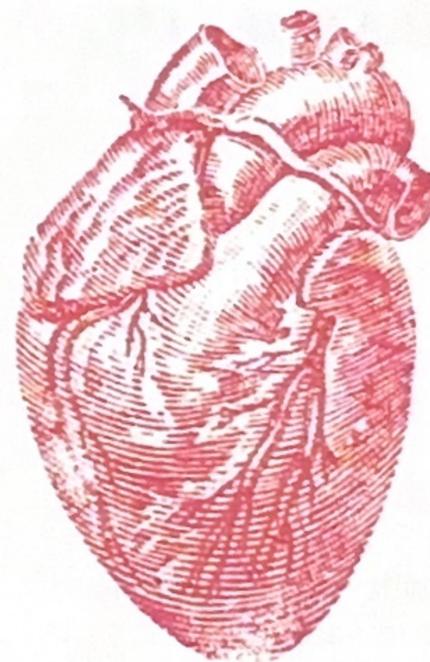
SELECTIONS FROM A LOVER'S DISCOURSE

By Roland Barthes

[IN PROUST: *The Guermites' Way*] Charlus takes the narrator's chin and slides his magnetized fingers up to the ears like a barber's fingers. This trivial gesture, which I begin, is continued by another part of myself; without anything interrupting it physically, it branches off, shifts from a simple function to a dazzling meaning, that of the demand for love.

Meaning (destiny) electrifies my hand; I am about to tear open the other's opaque body, oblige the other (whether there is a response, a withdrawal, or mere acceptance) to enter into the interplay of meaning: I am about to make the other speak. In the lover's realm, there is no acting out: no propulsion, perhaps even no pleasure—nothing but signs, a frenzied activity of language: to institute, on each furtive occasion, the system (the paradigm) of demand and response.

Language is a skin: I rub my language against the other. It is as if I had words instead of fingers, or fingers at the tip of my words. My language trembles with desire.



ON HEAT DEATH / SLEEPING NEXT TO YOU

Regarding those days that sweat
as soon as they begin,
my coworker Serge says
"It seems like the sun moved down
an inch closer to New York."

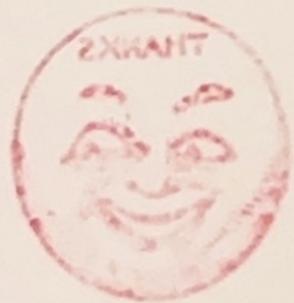
I step away from my desk
to break from the action
and consider the devastating
nearness of such
infernally bodies.

COME TO ME NOW: LOOSE ME FROM HARD
CARE AND ALL MY HEART LONGS
TO ACCOMPLISH, ACCOMPLISH. YOU

A
FU
FU
FU

I made
stickers!





COME TO ME NOW: LOOSE ME FROM HARD
CARE AND ALL MY HEART LONGS
TO ACCOMPLISH, ACCOMPLISH. YOU

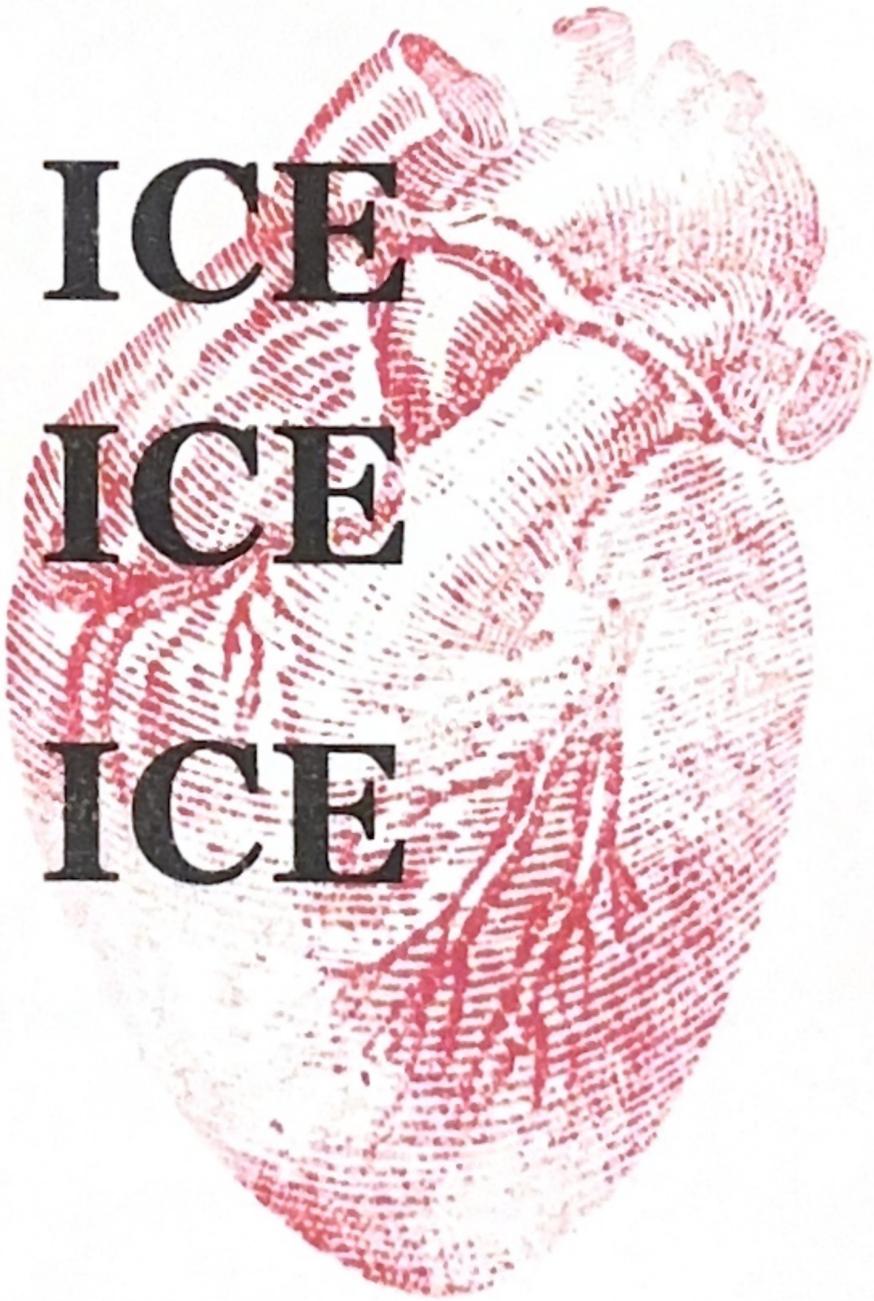
BE MY ALLY.

AND FUCK ICE,

FUCK ICE

FUCK ICE

FUCK ICE



I'M GOING TO LOVE MY
NEIGHBORS AS I LOVE MY
SELF AND THERE'S REALLY
NOTHING YOU CAN DO TO
STOP ME.

WE KEEP US SAFE.

