Heart of Stone

Neile Graham
HEART OF STONE

He comes from all directions.  
First the wind is from the north;  
the trees shudder under the weight  
of the snow. He stumbles through your  
doorway, shaking clumps of twigs  
and snow. His eyes are ice-blue,  
clear, the way the sky will be tomorrow.  
His breath is cold  
as the wind in your face.  
His first words to you: This time  
I stay. You are not ready  
to believe, you offer him  
a place by the fire  
and not your bed, but  
already his clothes melt  
on your floor.  
At the doorway, later, he swears  
he'll be back when the wind  
changes. He hands you a stone  
made of ice, which you throw  
in the fire as he disappears,  
only days later the stone  
has not melted.

From the east the wind  
brings him with the stink  
and push of cities. Tossing smog  
from his hair, he walks  
down the hill to your house  
and pushes the brush  
from him as he would  
strangers. He stares at you  
through the open window,  
saying he's left it all behind.
He smells of too many other women, and climbing through the window he tells you that only your flesh will wash the scent from him. Though the smell sickens you, it is too hard to tell him to leave when you know he's already leaving.
The wind turns and the stone he's left spreads the grime of cities all through your house.

And he's back again with the wind from the south moving slowly now as though the heat has drawn all the winter from him. He doesn't say a word and your clothes fall from you like birds. His eyes hold yours too closely; you aren't surprised when everything happens at once, but slowly, and it almost lasts forever in the languid night.
In the morning you wake as slowly as you fell asleep. He's left one flower for your hair, and one stone.
As you move through your house that day the new stone in your pocket rubs against your thighs warm and breathing like some small animal.
If the wind is from the west
you have pockets full
of shells and sand.
He asks who you are:
you tell him the wind's name
and he takes it for his own,
pockets it like a talisman.
He tells you he never had a name,
that he is come from the same
western wind, that he has pockets
of shells and names his fingers
sift through.
It is not that you have
something he wants, but that
you are his stranger: in place
of his hands he gives you pebbles
to weigh your pockets and hold
you there. He tells you
he will stay
until you are his lover
and already you are left
holding only a small stone
turning it over.