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# Lingo

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Poems by  
Clare Rossini



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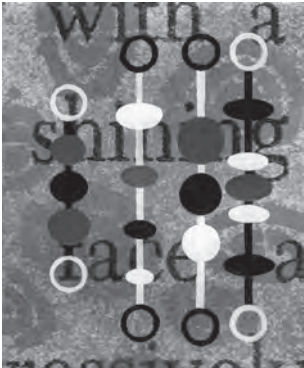
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*for my parents, Reno and Rose Rossini*

Love—is anterior to Life—  
Posterior—to Death—  
Initial of Creation, and  
The Exponent of Earth—  
*Emily Dickinson*

Foreword



My son's first word:  
*Star.*

In a monosyllabic burst,  
He tethered a thing

Huge and lonesome  
And bright,

Made it  
Locally burn.

Don't tell me the tongue's  
Not a magical place.

*Ain't it something?*  
As my German Grandma

Would've said,  
How the very sounds

That in Rilke can make  
The heart full,

Reshuffled, can sell  
Cans of beans,

Reshuffled, can  
Toughen into prayer?

Still, who'd trade "hand"  
For the warm and living

Appendage, who'd  
Substitute "love" for love?

No wonder  
The dead don't speak.

I've been waiting  
For my sweethearts of ash

To drop their stubborn  
Habits of silence.

Nothing yet  
But my own heart

Ticking, the tedious  
Razzing of tears.

If there's *spiritus*  
(As I believe),

It inhabits the space  
Between words and all

Words hope to name,  
That Midwest buzzing

With ions, ghosts, roots,  
Griefs beyond

Mere sound.  
Of the Between, I ask

That from these words  
Only useful

Meanings rise.  
And that music

Sashay out,  
Sashay out,

I say, on my  
Syllables' small feet.

I



# Rice County Soliloquy

I come from Minnesota.  
What do I know of the flamingo?

Its long and s-curved neck, its awkward flight?  
If fly it does.

In my town, foreign food is pizza.  
In winter and in spring, it snows.

The thought of something pink with wings  
Wounds all of us, we natives

Of this land of grays and whites,  
Where the template of winter was struck.

I've stood in arctic winds and felt them  
Grind against my human frame.

I've looked out bleakly and borne up.  
That's our way here.

Coral reefs, cabanas striped and scattered  
Across beaches, blue-colored drinks:

What god made them and this place, too?  
I guess he had range,

A taste for the superfluous  
Exhausted by the time he shook out north.

When the going gets tough!  
If the shoe fits!

Sometimes, we're surprised to find our bodies  
Beneath the multiple layers,

Radiant with mammal warmth.  
Dear, if the trees

Would not stand leafless  
As long as they do, each rivulet of bark

Caked with frost, each forked twig scratching  
A sky so blue and deep it hurts—

Busy hands! Light work!  
After all, we have our lilacs,

And the balm of our May dusks will thaw  
The most Protestant among us.

But the days grow short.  
The light grows small.

Come those Januarial hours  
When I turn the TV chitchat off

And stand on my porch, in the brittle air,  
The backyard steeped in snow.

Comes something pink and winged.  
Goes.

# To the Lilac Bush

Flowers who have not labored  
To be among us,

Who freely ladle purple  
Into air,

You, lilacs,

I can't smell you  
Without growing young,

This spring becoming  
Every spring

I've entered,  
My senses opening

Like mouths.

Blossoms bordering  
On memory,

Forgive me  
For pursuing liquid sound,

I suspect  
What comes so

Musically.

For a few days only  
Your clusters fill the vacancies

Of art,  
I decant

Lilacness

Ask words to blossom  
Lavenderlike

In what hours  
They're spoken to.