

Karen Chase

Arranging Books as Elegy

After you died, I fixed the garage up, moved
my desk and books out. Today I walked from shelf
to shelf, pulled out the books you wrote.

With stack in hand, I moved through the new place,
rubbing them—to say stroked would be more true.
How I rubbed your legs as your words went out.
Same spine—book, bone.

After I gathered your books, placed them on a shelf,
I walked again from shelf to shelf, picking books
you gave to me, or those admitted to our talk.

“Adam Bede,” you once said, “Try that one first,”
(she’s next to you now—she’s close)
“George Eliot’s my friend.”

“Keats Keats! I don’t want Keats and I don’t know why.”
You were telling me what you wanted read out back
when you died.

You wanted my Hopkins by your bed, wanted me to read him
in the yard, you said, when you went, and I did,
but where to put him, I’m confused.
At least for now though Keats is shelved far from you.

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