

Poems by *Loren Graham*

Translation

I still don't know what happened then.

Suddenly, I found myself in an unknown place, lying under foreign sheets with a stranger's arms around me. I got up that day and dressed in another woman's garments and put on her leather shoes, long molded by the odd shape of her alien foot.

When I wore her tank tops, I could never keep her bra strap from showing on my shoulder. Her brushes made my hair come out in clumps, and her toothpaste wasn't my brand. Her mirrors reflected a face that resembled mine, but with the chin off somehow, the eyes a bit too far apart, the hair slightly long and never exactly the correct color.

Who was she, this stranger who was the original of my sudden and poor translation? Whose concealer and blush, whose eyeliner and lip gloss on the bathroom vanity? Whose underwear folded neatly and placed in the wrong drawer?

Whoever she was, she never returned.

In time, I let her husband hold me. I didn't know him, but the feeling coming from him was overpowering, and I pitied him being stuck there with me.

He didn't know I wasn't his wife.

LOREN GRAHAM

The Transformed

Once I had become someone else, how could you remain the same?

At times, I took you for my father, at times for the older brother who, long after I was grown, still treated me as a child.

Newly shaven, you smelled like the boy who was my high school life, who told me I was pretty, who devastated me at last.

Occasionally, you resembled the boss who paid me well and talked to my chest, the man who pursued me for months with such vehemence and bitterness.

Behind the reflection on your glasses, you turned into the young professor I worshipped, to whose class I always wore a short skirt, whose attention could render me unable to speak.

You became anyone that anyone I used to be, used to be in love with-my collection of fading images that never fade away, the strange faces on stamps from old letters, forever saved, but not to be answered.

Loren Graham teaches creative writing at Carroll College in Helena, Montana. His first book of poetry, *Mose*, was published in 1994 by Wesleyan University Press. The work published here is from a just-completed collection of sonnets and prose poems entitled *The Ring Scar*.