BOOK EXCERPTS

THE GIFT

*You play well*, John says.

(I’d only played piano for two years.)

*I thought you played as a child.*

I think he’s my boyfriend

me a singer dreaming of togetherness

he a pianist, composer, conductor.

*Something you can play, sight read*.

A handwritten, one-page composition

he gives me for my 24th birthday.

It’s a slow and somber piece

whose final notes float skyward as he

drifts away in the arms of a dancer.

TEXAS TROUBADOUR

Never had I been a groupie. Not until a raven-haired son of Amarillo walked into the Palomino. Your Native features and lanky stride stopped me in my tracks. A singer myself I thought we shared a bond, so I took you home. At four in the morning, you sent a new song on cassette via taxi to your manager. When I gazed into your eyes, I knew you’d be polite Texas boy, as you lied to my face sayin’ it had been so long since you’d held a woman. I pulled you in if only for the night. Leaving, you took my number, but I knew you’d never call. I should’ve known you’d be dismissive when I saw you the next night. You’d said nothing to lead me on, but I was hoping for a second helping of cowboy wine, one more night to hold you. Will you remember me in song vague images, references to the night you slipped through my arms and for a moment I held a singer stranger, took a minstrel home, and made love beneath a cornbread moon?

FOR LEONARD

*My first husband who was gay and died of AIDS*

Fate

impartial, cruel

devours man.

Such are the workings of the universe.  
  
I cry

for all the Leonards

families torn bodies broken.   
  
Fair, innocent  
ravaged by disease  
beauty scarred by pain.  
  
Over half a million died the skinny death.

Your laughter, smile  
fair hair, gentle eyes  
we, lovers and friends  
  
together but for biology.  
Fleeting camaraderie

men we admired boys we craved.

Husband of my heart, lover of my mind.  
  
When sick, you returned to Australia.

My last letter mailed the day and hour of your passing.

Sent back unopened June 1994.

You slipped away

lost beyond temporal existence  
existing in memory.

We twin souls entwined.   
You rest fly expand.  
I shall meet you on the shore of eternity.