



Required

Kristina Marie Darling

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"Where would I travel if you hadn't stopped me on the bridge to a brighter city," asks the narrator of *Required*, Kristina Marie Darling's brilliant new essay-in-fragments. These spare, elegant prose poems describe a love affair salted like the "marble façade" of its frozen freeways. Lush flowers brittle into "iced-over fields of dead poppies" where "plaster doves have cracked from the cold." Each poem poses a question meant to haunt the reader, much as Darling's mysterious narrator is haunted by miscommunication: "There are always so many things that can go wrong in a conversation." This gorgeous collection evokes passionate emotion through precise imagery and startling detail: "You are the display of lights. / & now cold water, / its bitter taste." —Carol Guess, author of *Tinderbox Lawn* and *Doll Studies: Forensics* "Why," Kristina Marie Darling asks, or, more exactly, doesn't ask but states in the form of questions in her star dusted book of meteorites, "Why can so many things be mistaken for metaphors." Metaphors, meteorites, these are the last telegrams of nano "narrative." Distilled fragments, de-can't-ed, that are then fermented again in the redacted and deduced subliminal "Epilogue. These are subatomic automatons, little engines that should. They are like, well, liking. They are like nothing else. And I like liking all this liking. —Michael Martone, author of *Michael Martone and Four for a Quarter* Kristina Marie Darling's latest collection, *Required*, follows a relationship through its frozen expanse, to the very edge of its thresholds, and beyond. Along the way, images offer themselves up as luminous signs: an injured deer, marble, a winter garden. Words recur and reconfigure themselves in a bright, shifting constellation. Darling's brief, haunting poems mesmerize with their cold and captivating light. —Eleanor Stanford, author of *The Book of Sleep* The prose poems that open Kristina Marie Darling's *Required* gradually recede, through erasure, into the quieter fragments of the "Epilogue." The closing section deftly reframes the juxtapositions and silences that come before, making one question whether the collection's title suggests love or retaliation. —Sandra Lim, author of *Loveliest Grotesque* In *Required*, Darling mines the last moments of a dying relationship for something more than its cold remains: she distills her own narrative down to its fiery parts, its sparks, so that next to a field of "dead poppies," "Girls / still cling to bouquets," and the lining of a winter coat holds an "imperceptible glow." In a series of resonant erasures and reconfigurations, Darling transforms a sad love story into fragments of song from the weirdly elegant universe. —Laura Sims, author of *Stranger Required* must be savored—word by word and line by line—to fully take in the uncanny lushness of the relationship at the center of Kristina Darling's poetry. There is a beautiful spiraling away in these echoes—where "the meadow's dark flowers bursting into bloom" surges with a reverberating aloneness just as "in the distance, the strip malls have begun to glow." This is a wondrous collection. —Alex Lemon, author of *The Wish Book*, *Fancy Beasts* and *Happy: A Memoir*

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