



# Orphan

*Jan Heller Levi*

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Praise for Jan Heller Levi:

"It's Levi's humanity that ultimately won't let you loose, words as direct as bullets, as kisses."—Bob Holman

*Orphan*, Jan Heller Levi's new collection, is an unabashed confrontation with loneliness, otherness, and abandonment. These poems—ancient, immediate, serene, disgruntled, wickedly humorous, unsettlingly earnest—are also daring explorations of what love is. In the new millennium, with so much loss to mourn—and so much more still to lose—*Orphan* contemplates how “we make our griefs our tools.”

## What Love Is

*To forsake all others.*

*To float the beloved on your back  
from flood to land, to wrench bread  
from the beggar's hand, snatch  
the oxygen mask from a child's face.*

*To ransack hospitals and nursing homes  
for drugs to ease the beloved's pain,  
to stumble down 101 floors, beloved  
slung on your back, not stopping  
for the other ones in wheelchairs  
waiting at the landing doors.*

**Jan Heller Levi's** first collection of poems, *Once I Gazed at You in Wonder*, won the Walt Whitman Award of the Academy of American Poets, and poems from her second collection, *Skyspeak*, won The Emily Dickinson Award of the Poetry Society of America. She is editor of *A Muriel Rukeyser Reader*, served as consulting editor for the new edition of *The Collected Poems of Muriel Rukeyser*, and is currently writing the biography of Rukeyser. She lives in New York City with her husband, the Swiss novelist and playwright Christoph Keller, and teaches at Hunter College.

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