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Red Hen Press

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A Brilliant Loss

A MEMOIR-IN-POEMS BY

Eloise Klein Healy

A new collection of poems from the former Los Angeles Poet Laureate who suffered from Wernicke's aphasia in 2013.

Eloise Klein Healy's *A Brilliant Loss* is a poetic journey into the loss of language and the reclaiming of it. Healy had Wernicke's aphasia in 2013 when she was the first poet laureate of the City of Los Angeles, and the virus hit her the night of her reading with Caroline Kennedy at the Central Library. Also called fluent aphasia, Wernicke's aphasia affects language and the use of words. Healy's collection shows that her brain has access to its deepest unconscious, and that place is poetry. Her deepest language is poetry. It's as if a dancer was denied the ability to walk or run, and could only dance. Healy writes of losing her words and finding big love.

ADVANCE PRAISE

Eloise's illness, encephalitis, took her on a journey to a strange place, which she is revealing to us in *A Brilliant Loss*, her new set of poems. She teaches that without language there is no self, no sense of past or future. And no way to express love.

I've had aphasia (much lighter versions than she has had) twice so far, and may again, so I know it as a lonely, frightening, lost-in-the-forest-of-meaning place. To lose recognition of person and geography, to experience a shattering of the brilliant patterns of literacy and verbal expression. To see objects and be unable to name them. Yet recovery can also be full of quirkiness, exuberant joy, and humor—states of feeling Eloise has exhibited for all the forty-two years we've known each other.

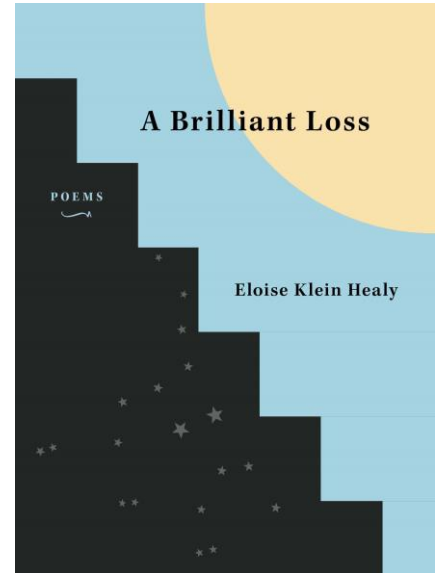
Eloise, with amazing support from her partner and others, uses breadcrumb words—poignant—scary—sweet—informing—to show us how she wended her way step by step out of her lost forest back to love, to words, to social life, and to poetry.

I recommend this book to anyone who has bumped their head.

—**Judy Grahn**, author of *Touching Creature*, *Touching Spirit*

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Eloise Klein Healy, the author of nine books of poetry and three chapbooks, was named the first Poet Laureate of Los Angeles in 2012. She was the founding chair of the MFA in Creative Writing Program at Antioch University Los Angeles, where she is Distinguished Professor of Creative Writing Emerita. Healy directed the Women's Studies Program at California State University Northridge and taught in the Feminist Studio Workshop at The Woman's Building in Los Angeles. She is the founding editor of Arktoi Books, an imprint of Red Hen Press specializing in the work of lesbian authors. *A Wild Surmise: New & Selected Poems & Recordings* was published in 2013 and *Another Phase* in 2018.



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MORE PRAISE FOR *A BRILLIANT LOSS*

“As a young poet, Eloise Klein Healy “fell on her knees and promised/that poetry would be everything . . .” Imagine then her terror, her shock when one morning she awoke without language. This book is testament to her long, painful, continuing rediscovery of words, of life, of love. Her brain profoundly changed, her heart profoundly changed, she’s sustained again by poetry. She’s sustained by her devoted Colleen, “the wild river whose bank you are.” Her brilliant loss gives us all the gift of these brilliant poems.”

—**Peggy Shumaker**, former Writer Laureate of Alaska

FROM *A BRILLIANT LOSS*

RELEASING THE TEARS AGAIN

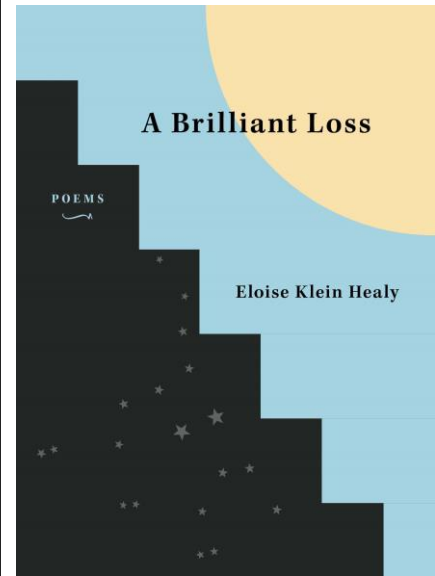
Here’s the worst thing I’ve learned.
My brain ripped alongside my *aphasia*
and, thereafter, nothing “remembered” my language.

I have a different brain now,
but all told, I’m just “new” again,
close to what I write and read.
What I see is clearing the path
to my workroom door.

Emptiness of the space dissolves
as I open it, but that room lifts me,
knowing again for more years
than I could count.

When I was thirty-seven
and bigger than my blessing,
I fell on my knees
spilling moonlight through the window.

I fell on my knees and promised
that poetry would be everything,
the basis of all choices, and here it is again.



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