

Red Is My Heart

Antoine Laurain

Le Sonneur, Illustrator

Jane Aitken, Translator

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Antoine Laurain's experimental novel *Red Is My Heart* is an artful articulation of the discombobulation that follows when a relationship is severed without warning. Written as letters sent into the ether, to a party who does not wish to receive them, this is a succinct, painful, and earnest book.

"I have always thought there was a certain charm in living in the early days of an era," writes the lonely lover: "Now I'm not so sure." Thrown by his ex-partner's sudden desertion, he at first tries to reorganize his life around the gaps left by her absence—hiding his watch in a drawer to reorder time; ordering flowers for a woman murdered on his block over a century ago. His notes burst with yearning, but also confusion: he longs for someone who was not as they seemed. Finally, after much painful introspection, a new woman appears in his life, and he begins to believe in second chances: "will she be a source of happiness or suffering? ... Anything is possible."

The lover's notes appear among street artist Le Sonneur's stark images, which are evocative of cutouts and are rendered in black, white, and red alone. They depict lonesome scenes: a woman disappearing in the basket of a hot air balloon, red tears trailing in her wake; an assembly of balconies, from which are removed the shape of a looming person. These empathetic visual appeals are mimicked in the layout of the prose: lines appear upside down and sideways, mirroring the speaker's lost sense of grounding; others flow like poetry, even as they speak of ordinary goings-on.

An emotive, striking trip through the barbs and empty spaces of a heartbreak, *Red is My Heart* is a dexterous love letter in reverse.

MICHELLE ANNE SCHINGLER (January / February 2022)

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