Elements: A Love Song

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To H.W. Lenstra

Not even this life will perish entirely,
laying down my pen at the end of the
day, famished, I reach for a slice of dark
bread and a cup of tea, still simmering.

Death stops at nothing, but I have this,
these words from Euclid, derived from
Eudoxus, commensurate, as his units
were called, deliberately, not measured.

In these lines he speaks to me, across ages
burned to the ground by greed, gunpowder,
gusts of wind fed by the malicious storms
of misunderstanding. Alexandria burning.

In these lines he sings to me, past the hum
of my mother sleeping, the din of students
demanding merit, the timbre of requirement
rendered mute against a dark, dank silence.

I stand in the wake of this, the tea finished,
and the bread now turned to crumbs, a few
of which are caught in my freshly ironed cuff,
steamed with dignity, sturdy and unruffled.

And I think, whatever forces pull at me, at
least I have this—these truths: searing and
tender, rugged and binding, love-like and
whole, as I was once, in her arms, now dying.

Mathematics is not life, but it fulfills a life,
just as my mother will pass and leave me
wanting. I turn to Euclid again, as a friend,
there, listening.

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