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Excerpts from a Secret Prophecy

No one knew how to live there merciless mid-
Atlantic heat grime on the hot car windows
and trash-heaps along schoolyards we went
to neighborhood markets for collards
Saturday the humidity at 9 A.M. already un-
bearable in grooves down our cheeks
rough trust that we wouldn't have to stay
make a home there never a grand
city at night where blue-sooted evenings
you could stand on the sidewalk and look in

Windows fire-bleed so that figures at meals
seemed to rise in gray radiance

Who looks inside says less and less
the years abandoning their force I remember
black shades of red wine the books I could barely
afford twice a day to the library
homeless men asleep by its pillars afternoon
rains in Baltimore dark blue
against the energy at work in my head

And so often in the afternoons I have felt this
strange mental life curving separate
as if my blood were iron the storms
arriving in patterns of lush thunder
a cool spray spun back from the grass

Once I lived throatless believed that
holding back sorrow would make sorrow
soften So easy to place an X
over who you were the soil under rain
now the fires shifting plates
beneath this wet cement

And if I have hoped for more
it is only the whole of loneliness
swept away by understanding

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Who were you then wanting to learn
reading all day all night fall in a strange city
year after year No one knew what to tell me
keep studying through the bay window sirens
and the silences that followed snow blurring down
to the sick city-trees walking to campus hi hello
the women in Italian boots for seminars
four hours later at the crosswalk you saw
no one you knew

You greet each person on the street and the dark
civilization of wind slams through you

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No one knew what was coming miscarriage
divorce disease the country at war air
brightening and darkening around the notebooks
I hauled wherever I went was I meant
to understand then how little I would
matter to the future I spent winters
summers trying to see driving out to the horse farms
poplars lining the road pools of sunlight sinking into
fields the air darkening how long
can you wait your body crowded-over with
clouds and grasses whole childhoods of grain blown
back and forth inside your eyes

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I waited a long time to find you
late in my life homesick for nothing I could
recognize another winter in an eastern city

iron grates dusting over with snow quiet cells
at night undetected forgettable by dawn
Still I watched you place your hand against the window's
ice-burned sheet and trace wet stars that
rose in ghostly lines during the city's
night-slowed snowfall warehouses
leaping to your touch roughed in brick
Your eyes everything worth striving for
to be what you saw There were times
with you burning through skin marrow shadow night
after night what you brought to my body when we agreed on
silence I never imagined such closeness

Despite the terrible predictions we drove to the coast
minus 10 and the beach was frozen pressed
transparent ice against our eyes
And nobody stood with us troubled by the ocean materials
oily debris carcasses of sea fish languishing
frozen by the iced seaweed a kind of tundra we crossed
as though had we kept moving a creature might simply
turn alive the gulls huddling in their slicked
wings for heat our lungs
draining filling with ice air

And the wide stillness
where the gull-cries should have been

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Place an X over who you were
it doesn't help Shut your eyes there are
abrasions beneath the eyelids Coming to understand
the ones you most love will die out here
I can feel the weight of the sky the evening
turning black its arid grasses

You changed who I was around you I felt
the need for pattern a physical need
to bring the hard light of the stars
inside it never worked Under this moon
the mountains ripple in moth-thinness
they would be crushed if you touched them

and the old oaks bracing the street the theater
whose placard is half-stitched by frost are nerve-endings
where the sting of being-alive can't stay captured

Night-watcher Pillar Winters
passed iridescent ice
filming on the lake the water caught in
merciful shades of white

The lines were cut deeply by skaters
I moved the words in my head
trying to say what it has meant

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So much yours I hardly saw what was
happening to me give yourself like that
and you are sure to lose something
Holding up all the beams of a life you paced along
bookshelves smoked constantly nicotine
arching through the cranial vault the same one
splendid with thoughts some days whitening to
disarray Who looks inside says less and less
I felt below the blue-brown seasons of snow
the desiccated grooves of branches something
shift my love leaving you

Spring pre-spring an increase in pests
and parasites plants blooming too early
I let it fall apart and when it did
couldn't understand what was being asked of me

Spring rains refilling the aquifer all summer
alone again orange cat sprawled across
the dictionary standing at the window
night after night remembering the prairies
where I was born under deep lakes of cloud
It didn't help nothing helped
No one knew what to tell me keep living

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How long can I wait what I say
today and what I say tomorrow perish equally
I loved you but have already forgotten
how it felt perhaps a joy that came in droves

Out here you can hear everything at night
a dog in the distance calling out for company
someone slamming a door Just to stay
and not be drawn forward light
in the afternoons slowly sailing into pines

I have tried to be both *open* and *among*
and find myself always moored by
inner anchors
But most hopes are private and flicker
between burdens we can't share

Perhaps like the wooden rains that drop across
this valley you are drawn to stillness
perhaps like me you are clearing a space
inside you a floor where everything might spill
The clouds above these ridges show no hint
of any cause Night falls again
we river into one another not understanding
how much debt we owe to those we pass on the street
Like you I would have done things differently
would have held on longer The world
breaks is always breaking our bodies
bear tremendous sorrow and still
we stay as long as we can