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Necessity

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Necessity · *Jeanne Murray Walker*

Trees are minimal in winter
as the x-ray of a hand
showing bones, ghostly, white
but indisputable.
Every day these bones suck sustenance
from water, meat, and air
into long corridors
where they factor stories out.

Think of the stocking cap
that waits in the closet for a hand
to seize it. It may protect
as dearest warmth against expensive cold
but one day it will be delivered
to fire or garbage.

The bones say when.

Everything has brought them to this act,
birth, and food, and the chains
of swings in the playlot
which were so cold that children
told how skin would weld on contact
as it stuck with sweat
years later to other hands
it never trusted, but desired.

All our lives
skin comes and goes like weather
but bones are ghosts
which lurk beneath the skin
storing all our winters in their marrow.
They are like the fingers of snow-covered trees
whose shape we can't recall in summer,
the acts we won't believe in
till we feel ourselves
perform them.