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Sun and Moon

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No other cars on the narrow, icy lane; no house
or barn for miles, until the lights of a Christmas tree
shone from the small windows of a trailer.
And then I knew I couldn't be far
from the East Village and the main road.
I was terribly wide awake. . . .

To calm myself I thought of drinking water
at the kitchen sink, in the circle of light
the little red lamp makes in the evening. . .
of half-filling a second glass
and splashing it into the dish of white narcissus
growing on the sill. In China
this flower is called the hermit,
and people greet the turning of the year
with bowls of freshly-opened blossoms.

SUN AND MOON

for Donald Clark

Drugged and drowsy but not asleep
I heard my blind roommate's daughter
helping her with her meal:
"What's that? Squash?"
"No. It's spinach."

Back from a brain scan she dozed
to the sound of the Soaps: amnesia,
infidelity, shady business deals,
and long, white hospital halls. . . .
No separation between life and art.

I heard two nurses whispering;
Mr. Malcomson had died.
An hour later one of them came to say
that a private room was free.

A chill spring breeze
perturbed the plastic drape.
I lay back on the new bed,
and had a vision of souls
stacked up like pelts
under my soul, which was ill—
so heavy with grief
it kept the others from rising.

No varicolored tubes
serpented beneath the covers;
I had the vital signs of a healthy,
early-middle-aged woman.
There was nothing to cut or dress,
remove or replace.

A week of stupor. Sun and moon
rose and set over the small enclosed
court, the trees. . . .
The doctor's face appeared
and disappeared
over the foot of the bed. By slow degrees
the outlandish sadness waned.

Restored to my living room
I looked at the tables, chairs, and pictures
with something like delight,
only pale, faint—as from a great height.
I let the phone ring; the mail
accrued unopened
on the table in the hall.