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Like Water

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we will and will not do for love. Sometimes what's
miraculous is what's most purely human. That morning
the old man turned away from promises of a perfect world
in favour of one whose flaws could not obscure
its simplest joys~the small warmth of the boy's hand
on his father's breast, tender flesh perfumed with
sweat and sunlight, how the caged bird of his heart
beat fiercely in its mortal keep, the single shadow
their bodies pushed across fallow ground, even the
remnant fear which saw them free a ram tangled in thicket,
cast it upon unbloodied stone, its mild eyes rolling
white as fire unteased its matted fleece, burnished
each cracked hoof and spiralled horn, gave it black
wings with which to fly to a heaven blacker still.

LIKE WATER

which cannot break its
contract with earth, the
immortal rising and falling,
shreds of mist
called home by sunlight,
thunderclouds torn asunder
in wind, or the way, before
rain, air smells like
jars of bright pennies and
the need to be spent.
What lives holds its breath
until the sky opens like
hands unfolded in prayer, or
answered prayer, and each

leaf flickers its small flame
like a concert hall
filled with longing for one
more melody before the
shroud of silence falls.

Something ephemeral takes
on a form bound by time,
descends in clean water~
the kind we imagine soft
in pails or catching light
on the silk muzzles of horses.

Last summer, in a cemetery
we thought belonged to no one
but us, rain shawled your
bare shoulders as you lay
under me. Solstice: the year's
longest day. And what we made
with those extra glimmers
of fugitive light was room for
a little more love. We'd no
regard for the eyes of grave
angels or, finally, the woman
wrapped in grief who braved
the weather to lay a single
red rose against a stone cross
woven with garlands of sinuous
vine. The body has its hard
lessons as well as sweet, and she,
like us, was learning, her
gnarled hands pressed to wet
grass, my ear against the
thunder of your heartbeat, an
echo of watches which kept
dark time against a hundred quiet
wrists beneath us.

Tonight, someone you loved is
gone, her blood having turned
against itself like a black
tide. And what can I tell you
except that I believe the
simple lesson of rain~nothing's
ever taken which isn't given
back? Let me be that solstice
storm again for you. Let the
dinner you made be forgotten, and
its elaborate settings; salmon
roses going soft in their crystal
vase, candles guttering
against brass followers. Let me
move past the breathy curtains
filled like sails, beyond your pale
dress disregarded on a chair,
over sheets spilled across parquet
like the frothing mouth of a
river. I want to be like water
which moves beneath and
above you, like the fist-sized purse
which cushions your heart,
the damp between your thighs, or
the first warm shower which
falls in spring, knocking against
cold earth as if to say there is
no distance great enough. Or small.
No distance that can still
blossoms which stir in sepulchral dark.