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.