You Aren't Sure & I May Not

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YOU AREN’T SURE & I MAY NOT

You aren’t sure & I may not be made of the right kind of mortar, but how else to answer the ice axe of memory, the urge—part mechanism part scarsong—which says return is instinct & instinct is absolution & absolution is all we know of quench. We go. All praise to your iron smile & hips solemn as a staircase, your anointed fingers, the complicity of denim & windows white with hometown frost. Praise the place where I could not have met you. Praise the tiny city down twelve miles of ice-rutted highway, all I knew of cosmopolitan, its several thousand inhabitants, stone courthouse scrimmed in copper, square-jawed houses on streets named Magnetic, everything built when the mines seemed eternal & earth was another word for come right in. Before
the blast that siphoned
an underground river
into the Barnes-Hecker,
filling the throats
of 51, ripping
at the boots of the sole
survivor who terrored up
800 feet of ladder to
the one bright scratch
of sky. Before the new
mines, sliced open like boils,
those too containers for
ache. & when we arrive
if the people are insular,
if they are hard as the jeweled
snout of a northern pike, if winter
is a shut vault with the lock
cycling & we never
learn to hunt deer or any
more minor creature—
does it mean we wouldn't
flourish? Couldn't we find
a house with cut-glass
windows & let it go to ruin,
tear up the lawn for garden,
watch our collard greens palm
the sun? At night, wouldn't
I close my mouth around
your knuckles, taste broccoli
flowers & the sand which drifts
everything, the frozefish tang
of Superior mawing the harbor
five blocks down? October
fold us into the creed-cold
winter, snowstorms
like the shed blood of nations.
Sundays spend in the pews
with the fierce & lowly.
Nights slake & burn.