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Two Poems

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ODE TO THE LIFE

It is not important to have a name.
You meet the edge & break
into mist.
The land rises up as the sun passes away
& your hands
will be two bloody fish on the rocks.

You will sweat out nights with the fever
chewing the boards from under you
& in the gray slack
before morning
grab for the pulpy new thing
that carries your chest throbbing to the surface.

There will be more women.
You turn from the sun dying in milkweed
& she is there.
This doorway where a candle inside fur
stares with its one good eye.
Her dark sisters
set fire to your handful of fragile maps.
You orphan your words.

It is almost another lifetime.
Your voice
alone on the skin of a northern lake.
Beneath the oil of splicings
a spirit
scratches among grains of thirst.
Close beneath the cork
of your voice
the terrible monotone of pike running
the coldest spots on earth.

Your voice will see itself
a pale child
riding a bus through snow,
through a wilderness of afternoons,
riding with grief
smoldering in its tiny lap.

Beneath the cold sill of this life
the earth spreads wide
& small clouds of breath
rise
from the common grave
of your work. Now your fingers
are gently removed one by one
& you believe in the life.

FOR THE GIRL WHO THOUGHT SHE WAS A TREE

I won't sing you into the soft life
we keep inside for ourselves, you
with sisters in rocky places.
Your skin was lovely even then . . .
Before the doctor talked you finally
down, you learned to bring
each day's dying to your center
and now among us, your strength.