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Two Poems

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THE PIKA

for Jennifer

Jennifer, the pika knows a lot.
Even without being told. He knows
about eating and digging and peace.
And peace is always what he's after.
The peace the pika seeks is peace
underground, the quiet life beneath
a rock. He will even dig a hole
in his cage if you come around,
or squeeze himself under a stone.
Though he would altogether prefer
that you simply left him alone,
because he knows, he already knows
the best hole he digs is not good
enough, the largest stone is too small
when someday something somewhere
comes, finally, to hunt him down.

AWAITING GAME

Sixty-five degrees and dry as dust
three days running. Nothing for it
but hunt and wait. Watch the weather map.
Watch the breaks. Each day push your luck.
Under the rimrock, watch the draws;
box elder, buck brush, yellow tamarack.
Take a stand further off the ridge. Watch

the side hills. Nothing moving. Crouch
in a twist of juniper. Mingle smell
and contour. Think pungent, down wind,
invisible. Watch the canyon. Too steep
to pack out meat. In the bottom, deadfalls
and water running. Listen. Nothing
but the lies water tells about the weather.

The fourth morning McAllister Ridge turns
red. The sun slides behind an overcast
to stay. The thermometer drops ten degrees,
and nothing moves the rest of the day
but clouds, a Steller's jay, a raven
so unhappy he gargles overhead,
hurry up hurry up hurry up!

By five o'clock it's cold enough to snow
but starts as rain instead. The slope turns mud.
You're climbing wet when things turn white.
Night is held in check by confusion.
Snow light illuminates nothing. Only
the wind is visible, slanting. Direction
is a failing memory. The road is at the top,

but the slope doesn't seem to go up.
White is darker than a moonless night.
Push your luck. It will change.
And when you find the road and walk

the blizzard home to camp, this snow
may bring the elk back in. Tomorrow,
cold and dry and early, you can hunt again.