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The Dense Color of the Biologist's Room

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THE DENSE COLOR OF THE BIOLOGIST’S ROOM

I’ve spent years collecting anecdotes
of natural separation—
tales of salmon on a last run upriver,
the mating dance of stoneflies, the quiet
thrashing of bees.

What a waste of time. These rooms
empty like abandoned mirrors.
I spend whole afternoons watching winter:
the yard outside my window littered
with papery leaves, the spare lines
of church steeples and damp alleys
where dogs turn against the wind.
This year I feel a primitive comfort
in bare trees, like a ragged,
one-eyed crow.

It does not matter that light fails
early this far north.
It does not matter that wind mutters
in the stairwell like a familiar voice.
All I need is in a drop
of pond water under this lens,
all the basic arrangements
of predator and prey.

I sit at my desk keeping careful notes,
accumulating data, writing words that always
mean lamp, letter, autumn and dust.