

WINTERING PRAIRIE

Megan Kaminski

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Snow drifts the prairie white
each gathering a prayer a knife a candle
water crystalline seeding warmth
ground expectant bootfall above sod below
the ground between us the ground we share
ground that sprouts green that holds roots deep
soft porous mealy with bug and vole
and this poem will be a long one
will widen will drift like snow
like language like dribbles and arctic chill
will stretch to Dakota fox alone in the field
to field mice buried deep
will follow the compass's pull magnetic north
oil in shale beneath us tallgrass roots beneath us
bodies of fathers and mothers beneath us
the sod the Kanza-call the warmth of snow on this day
will stretch north to you and children by the fire
to pipelines and trains and fractures in bedrock
to arctic-alpine fingernail clam and mourning cloak
will carry me wrapped in sound breath encased

I do not cry

I do not tarry

I do not break

on this cold day

Long shadows and sun-melt spread
across lawns across asphalt
neighborhood strip mall and shop
spread west past town into farm
past county line and field
cottonwoods on the river
switch grass and bluestem crowd
over limestone around barbed fence
tree-creak warm goat-graze in sunned patches
this afternoon this house-break this reprieve
from bone-chill and ache this call this flutter
dry leaf on a branch light coating shadow
this grasping for mile after mile
this swallow this sigh this heartcrush
for all that surrounds
for all the comprises and connects
hair bone skin made tissue from
dirt from water from sun from mineral
temper this break and empty balance
tally our remaining days

Morning toll campanile echo
through the valley over the frozen lake
graying sky barely gray more
an absence a want for things
to come that will not green trash receptacle
green hose evergreen bush
hardly green tipped in snow
the widest main street in Plains, Kansas,
twenty cars deep median treed and empty
wheel tread wind wobble call and kaw
no people today just wind down the street
no plows scraping asphalt concrete
no boot-tracks through field
hawk-call and chimney-smoke
freeze unending absence unbroken

Muddy boots inside the door
bricked salt-brined
another day started the same pallor
hour indistinguishable from hour
water-logged field brown grass brown
twig on ground on branch
mini-van grayed from the week
and quiet this intersession
lull between holiday and book-bury
desk chair warmed ear cocked riverward
heavy drag of ice down the roof
cold-carry of virus and spore
lungs wrenched open dry sputter
flock of birds out the window
cedar-berries warmed to taste
slow migration north snow receding
fall of pit and berry seed and spittle
expectation for months far-flung

And in absence no flowering
old snow piled corner high in parking lots
these same bare branches and wind howl
clouds wall up the western sky snow flurry
and tire screech contrails fading east
whispers from north ghost this morning
my heart-swallow my back-fade
lines carry from forehead to page to prairie
disintegrating town and county
marsh memory of coot and woodcock
gar and spadefoot and ringneck snake
black shadow across lawn dry leaf glimmer
this memory this place this warble-cry

I carry absence

I carry want

I carry body ache

on this bright day

Motherless this morning
dry wind and daybreak slow
white tatters cast cloud
on ground on browned grass on faces
squirrel-hop and leaf-shiver
response to questions unearned
no answer no sigh
parcels pack into truck beds
ice melt in gutters
skin cells slough off
dust the field our bodies
layered permeable
layered tissue softening
giving way making room
absorptive clay and limestone
wet-rot and daily decay

Snow drifted up to knee
front barricade of white
warm air seep turned ice
a ridge a remainder
a crescent opening north
eyes malnourished too bright
to bring leaf or tree
or handprint into focus
field-follow and scatter
ice pellets across the ground
across town and holding syllables
gathering us close yielding
to day to shadow to owl-call

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