Necessary Light

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It is dusk, Roger, and already you
are sleeping on the pillowback couch, head
back, mouth barely open, gray hair in tufts.

Across the courtyard, the windows lighting
have nothing to do with us, and I curl
in the old vinyl chair, watching you sleep

and watching the nightclouds roll in over
the thin margin of woods that surrounds us.
In this unguarded moment, the deep lines

of your face are as relaxed as rivers
that have wandered beyond their boundaries,
even the small, tight muscles of your eyes

and lips softened, as though in sleep you had
let go of your history: the pills you’ve
swallowed; all those admissions.

Dear one, the time I have feared the most
has nearly come, and I write this poem in
tenderness and longing for all I cannot change:

the way your illness slowly takes your mind,
what manner of living is left to you,
the shadowed space my arms encircle each night.

How I have wanted to take all of our
fears in my arms and run with you while we
still can, back to those years when your room was

one flight up in a house on River Road,
my poem was on your wall and beyond your
shaded window there was no world.