Necessary Light

Fargnoli, Patricia

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IN THE WINTER OF MY SIXTIETH YEAR

I

In the morning all things are released again
from the snow that sculpts the earth into its frozen self.
By the time the sun falls behind Daniel’s Hill,
my hands will again know the shape of my face,
my legs will understand the weight of my body.
Then the night will erase it all again.
Each day, one more bed of intention; each night another erasure.

And what is the future—Vesuvius, the way it hunkers
over the village that has been buried seven times?
The mountain is quiet for now, but who knows?

There, somewhere in the long range of days behind me,
cameo carvers chiseled the faces of women
into orange shell carted from the Bay of Naples.
I was alive then.

And also on the Sunday in Chelsea
when a withered gypsy
told me falsehoods and the truth.

And alive also in the green land where
even the pasture-stones have names,
and all the names are incarnations of beauty.
If I don’t tell them to you, you will imagine them
even more lovely than they are.

II

If I could find the wilding spirit
that used to animate my body,
with imagination this day could be anything,
and anyone could come into it.

The gypsy said: You will go on three journeys.
I have been on three journeys.
The gypsy said: *What is it you want?*
I want love to flow like sap through my veins,
I want a good wind to lift me beyond here;
I want to dance in the land of named stones.

And she said: *Is this really what you want?*
I am tired far beyond words.
I want to live in a cabin in the woods
and bake wheat loaves that rise
from the heat of the woodstove.

*Do you want to live alone?*
I have been alone
in this crack-cold landscape many seasons.
The icicles on my roof are long, and depend
toward a ground too slippery for my feet;
I keep counsel with myself and my old dog;
my bed is narrow with habit, wide with grief,
unfriendly to strangers.