Necessary Light
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Published by Utah State University Press

Fargnoli, Patricia.
Necessary Light.
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ROOFMEN

Over my head, the roofmen are banging shingles into place and over them the sky shines with a light that is almost past autumn, and bright as copper foil.

In the end, I will have something to show for their hard labor—unflappable shingles, dry ceilings, one more measure of things held safely in a world where safety is impossible.

In another state, a friend tries to keep on living though his arteries are clogged, though the operation left a ten-inch scar and, near his intestines, an aneurysm blossoms like a deformed flower. His knees and feet burn with constant pain.

We go on. I don’t know how sometimes. For a living, I listen eight hours a day to the voices of the anxious and the sad. I watch their beautiful faces for some sign that life is more than disaster—it is always there, the spirit behind the suffering, the small light that gathers the soul and holds it beyond the sacrifices of the body. Necessary light. I bend toward it and blow gently. And those hammerers above me bend into the dailiness of their labor, beneath concentric circles: a roof of sky, beneath the roof of the universe, beneath what vaults over it.

And don’t those journeymen hold a piece of the answer—the way they go on laying one gray speckled square after another, nailing each down, firmly, securely.