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The Integrity of Time

I quicken the animal out with the in of where I've been. Overheat of wood smoke. Oil from my frying. The creek is iced over. Only the topcoat of snow melts. *Disgrace*, the novelist writes of desire, snarling. I realize I have talked with you about this novel before. It was before I read it. Before I met you. A kind of flecked shining off the fever dream still, like flakes of dried ginger, scales of salmon. Look, this was a house where there was much pain come. I want to learn to love again, be calm in it. Outside is below zero and I haven't yet fed the birds. I want to re-establish pain's mortality. You read to me from a book of meditations on death. The author says we come into the world crying. To imagine our own death should make us laugh. But not to imagine another's. If time is the movement we divide into anniversaries of gain and loss, how did we ever agree on a common measure? I drive to town, the blue darkening above the strange yellow hill. As if someone were entering a room at the same time that someone else were waking.

Winter Plumage

You read from the Japanese cookbook. The recipe Wind in the Pines is named for what the boiling water sounds like. Outside, a quiet shoveling. No sound but the scrape, hitting the ice below. Winter plumage: duller for the gold finch. You have come to the end of a certain relationship with your brother. You ask me to go with you, perhaps initiate a change. You say you want to know him in a way you haven't known him. In the institution, where he sits amid the grotesque faces of the deformed at birth, all mute, all the product of a curse, his shirt is dirty and he, rocking, recedes. The kind of person we would be if we had been so abandoned. While off in the distance, the young family, still on the farm, stand waiting for you to bring them news of his speaking. *All sentient beings*, for whom the Buddhists pray. *Place in them, like the snowflakes, a sphere of light*. We spot the Townsend solitaire, with its white eye patch, asleep. The cottontail the exact color of the gray stone. When the finch return in summer, their feathers will have turned a brighter gold, an arrival too much for any of us to imagine.