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The Girl Down the Hall

Tom Hill

Outside, there was rain in the air. I said to you,
“Poems, when they come, are never easy.
Sometimes, though, the words are like a train,
full of steam and throbbing along an inside track,
and when words like that hit you, when they shatter
around your shoulders, sharp and new, it is like nothing else.”

In the mornings, when I wake
I feel your hunger through the walls,
I know your faith in God,
I can taste the time we sat on the floor, drinking rum,
your face flushed with it.
I have seen the beauty of your knuckles, red with warmth
against my arm,
and I waste these words, trying to say something worthwhile,
I set traps in the stream, wait for them to fill,
wait for the brimming over,
words I can use;
slippery, urgent, alive.

Last night, you spoke of Christ's love,
and I let the gentle sweep of your words
fill the room. I began to cobble together in my mind
your woozy whispers, your Rum and Coke secrets.
I thought,
If I cannot write them down, at least I can have them,
these words she says now,
bright and soft and pulsing,
in the dark
we sang, and waited for the rain.
And when it came, its rhythmic patter on the glass,
we went to the window to watch.