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North Wind is an Old Friend

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The North Wind is an Old Friend

Howard Schaap

In fall,
as I round
the corner of
a squat prairie house,
he's come uninvited, jumps
out with a sucker punch to the gut, takes
my breath into himself, and laughs as I gasp—
that kind of friend. I should remember.
The squat prairie house is built to lean
into him slightly. We should both
collapse were he not there every
fall, holding us up.

Stillness is worse,
silence
from the four directions with nothing to
anticipate,
an abyss without promise of even the coming storm followed
by reprieve.

Besides, he brings clarity,
the absolute crystalline atmosphere, dispelling
the cloudy-edged falseness of summer humidity, lethargy,
and delusions of self-sufficiency—
even the good hair days of fall.

So I lean into
the north wind,
an old friend with
a hoarfrost beard who
greet me with hacking-cough cursing.
He's someone to rely on, to respect but
not quite like, someone to drive against,
lest in unforgiving friendship he find me lax or
leaning the wrong way and put a knife
in my back and walk away.

Over my dead body.