

“Self-Portrait as Shards of Mirror”

You're the handful of reasons I know
and won't say. the questions I've refused
to ask: a telephone ringing in an empty apartment
whose door's been left unlocked, an opened letter
face-up on the desk. Your hand examines
and rejects a city subtracted to snow inside a glass
sphere. Who wrote the book of promises
from which we took turns reading aloud,
the primer without a present tense?
By then you were asleep: and woke
in time to watch the illuminated numerals
of an electric clock turn like a page,
remembering the title of that unfinished
book. (Someone on a late-night radio
was singing something I couldn't quite catch,
snatches of someone's confidences.)
Looking back in something less than sorrow
on the captivated hours, we smile
about the riddles on the bottle tops,
and the papier-mâché clues we confidently
buried. How ironic we make ourselves
seem. Whole nights spent that way: talking
at the same end of an unmade bed,
sending each other home to a vacant lot
with a bus stop to light the way,
pockets lined with exact change.
Memory, we grow too much alike, turning
the same corner at four A. M.,
turning back the same sheets across
half a city, where your hands mean more
than promises, a simple household task.