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Remember Chicago

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REMEMBER CHICAGO

Bill Lynch

Remember Chicago:
cracked steps and broken bricks?
Plastic signs above darkened windows,
tape on the windows, tape on the mufflers.
Picking up Jim Carroll's poetry
and a hardcover Rimbaud,
losing my car in the narrow streets
where your friend used to squat
before becoming a ghost writer
for a self-help millionaire?
Remember, I found some new clothes
in those thrift stores of broken vases
and empty frames. Your friend
kept her pipe in the sugar
and had never heard the first side
of Exile on Main Street. Remember.
We brushed by Rushmore to get there,
drove past Little Big Horn in the dark,
windows down, listening to Red Red Meat,
breathing in the damp air
that flushed through the Honda.
Your friend listened to us
laugh ourselves to sleep, her books
stacked tight and neat above our heads.
Chicago was rows of brick
and the law school kid who explained
that there was no Chicago pizza.
In her darkened apartment
we generously pried open
the shell of her computer,
drunk and fumbling,
the solder dabs like the lampposts
of a city far below,
muted under dust.

In the end we figured
it was static from our hands,
yours and mine, that shorted
out a chip, leaving her saved work
lost in a dead end circuit.

Why we couldn't have stayed I don't recall.
We scarfed burritos with green sauce,
drank bottled lager from Prague,
slept on a clean sheet in the spare room
of a lonely artist in waiting.
Yes, I suppose we wanted to go home,
to Los Angeles, Russian mobsters
above you, to the neighbor woman
inside out with Tourette's,
to the Armenian prostitute
who leaned against the corner mailbox.

But couldn't we have tried to stay,
to remember too well the heat,
and the on-ramps and taco stands,
that we lost track of time
and broke down for a while
in the dusty brick room in Chicago?