**LEARNING DEATH**

The first time I knew myself mortal,

that unmistakable catch in the breath,

we were new to each other still.

I was stroking your face as you sank

towards sleep, and said without meaning to:

call me if you need me over there.

Full moonlight, the square white bedroom,

your eyes startling open, aftershock

in the cold air of what I had just said.

The crackling electric thought we took,

one breath between us, so close we lay —

how matter of fact that was, how clear.

And there we were, borne up on a void

soundlessly opened, shy with each other,

stricken all of a sudden to know time

might contrive to part us against our will.

I knew what mortal meant: you might call

and I would not be there for you — grief

worse than any I had felt, my life until then.

Now, facing the white blank of the page,

that thought again, unbidden: there will be

an end to words, an end to compact, breath —

you shaped my face in your hands, you said:

“You’ll be there. I’ll be there.” And we slept.