

“Winter Wars”

by Wanda Brown

We move into a new house at the beginning of winter
on the edge of war
drop worried faces into our hands
try to smooth clenched brows
listen to the news get worse
sliding
out of control

In between
unpacking the boxes of our lives
we take you to a doctor
who finally says
the pain and swelling in your upper mouth
is a tumor to be removed
sounds interesting to the doctor
hideous, unbelievable to us

True friends come from out of town
to love us
in a snowstorm before Christmas
we drive to the city
put your future into the hands of an artist
you survive, begin to heal
recover exhausted

You begin to look great very fast
to those, including me,
who don't look into your eyes enough
your outsides conceal nearly everything

I am lost
lean on you too much
expect too much
want too much
distant, angry, alone
we pass each other in daylight
tending to outside realities

At night we fall together
in sleep remembering
love we always knew

A friend we counted on to know us forever
dies of AIDS, we watch helplessly
loving but not saving him
begin to feel we cannot save even ourselves
I wonder whether we'll stand together as he dies

but you are in California at your uncle's funeral
both your father's brothers at the ends of their lives
today Uncle Moishe, in just four months, uncle Saul
in your aunt's minds you stand taller
with every death
a promise of life beyond their generation

With every death you are orphaned again
unpacked boxes still stand in closets
hidden from view.