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A Cosmology of Clouds

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A Cosmology of Clouds

*“Under our igloo skies the frozen mind
Holds to one truth: it is grey, and called Rochester.”*

—ANTHONY HECHT,
“SESTINA D’INVERNO”

You’ll soon forget the constellations—
Orion, Perseus, all those nightlights
for children. You won’t last long here
if you need to draw gods and heroes
on your bedroom walls. You’ll miss the moon
at first—nine nights in ten, it won’t be visible—
and you’ll lose track of Venus and Mars.
No more delays hoping some occult
alignment—Mercury ascendant, Jupiter
in retrograde—will finally make you brave
enough to act or wise enough to choose
without regret. Nor will you speak of “heavens”
or expect the pole star’s steady glow to tell you
where you are or what you’re headed for.
At sunset there’s not much to wish upon,
if what you wish for needs a diamond
surety and not this rock-salt overcast,
our mezzotint of weathered grays.
Taxonomy can be a comfort—stratus,
cirrus, cumulus—if you’re the sort
who thinks naming things means knowing them.
Later, you can add smokestacks, car fumes,

your own ghostly exhalations on winter mornings,
the contrails of sullen afternoons. After that,
electron and computer clouds, the mushroom shroud
above Hiroshima, the cascades (pileus? altocumulus?) Bernini carved
for Saint Teresa's ecstasy, those flocks
of migratory birds and butterflies that break
apart and realign, instant by instant, scrawls
and rapids never twice the same, ripsaw
currents, convections, all the not quite
almost recognizable shapes that seem to form
from nothing and into nothing disappear.