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Spank once to pinken, twist twice to lengthen. We're all embodied. What we trust and require, we draw unto ourselves. Trust in me, she said, westing her voice, normative to the mother-may-I, thrust from tarnished spoon or burnt mission, and come where and when needed, even if a woman's worst friend. Images might not substitute for physical life, but neither can life imitate well-wrought images. One ruminated a long while on the background and almost missed the frontal grandeur—one's historical urge. Brush against to redden, touch in vicinity to loosen. Although a compass means to maintain one's bearings—not to induce moisture as a divining rod—it pointed me toward iridescent breakers, where you won my lungs with oceanside air, ignoring one's desert inclinations, bypassing my sky-cogged heart. Neither of us could ever refuse invitations to climb aboard peak-trains, but now is a

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time to surf with our eyes, burnished or shore-tourmalined. We can't expect to navigate toward favored endings—one ruins a victorian surface with one's modern emissions. Brand with scarlet, ring to sustain. The arc makes a circle, makes infinity, makes a pupil in an iris. The patient cock waits on her back stoop, angling for admittance. Morning brought a sober gaze, but no gaze stays undrunk when staring at convergence, cotton outskinned or towel lifted. A fake strongman has nothing on a genuine coquette, and one held the fury a beat too long for the result to be spectacular. Round-the-bend obedience wavers. We skirt broadest daylight, and my anger grows straight at your dusk. The hen clucks her recognition of his coxcomb. All of this steers us toward drama without conviction, compassion without resolution, hubris without justifiable cause—one's stevedore days are behind

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one, as are one's cabaret days. One knows not to expect one's town or its townies to remember one's gait, to not ask for spare change, to not embrace one longer than is strictly appropriate, to not nod to one's ordinary particularity. As one's sun-child down south, you accept the lineman's need—you'll stand the strain, you'll love the making. The sea will be there when you need it. The water in the tub's just hot enough and the music you chose is the perfect contemplative choice. Candlelight befriends the blue walls. The smoky-rose skin knows a true tongue when it feels one. Contemporary time connects age-old distances. All of this—brought to bear upon any array of life's disappointments—unparalyzes the imagination, sets free the confident bird. Waist to sensitive hip, flank to stiff certainty, coastal eyes to upland eyes, baby-talk to aggressive delay, weight upon weight and weight under weight

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and the exhilarating wait in passages dreamt—these are lives worth living. Meet me halfway up the staircase and be ready to fight for your autonomy. We'll lose—the urge to merge too God. He took her out of his self-reliance, as any self-respecting universe must escape its own light, its own omega point, and be exposed to the spiraling of want. She took him for what he was: fate come calling—a chance to speed around taut curves above the diamond-blue gleam. Isolation and desire are palimpsest—we efface and we scrawl. Inexpressible ink. Indelible fix. Stretch your neck to peer over the wall into heaven and fall down stricken—you should've known better, you could've been content with a cold oval or sought a celebrated anvil, you might've tempted the devil for soulful fame and not this phosphorescent hum. We've been thrice forsaken by beaches of over-common shells, and perhaps he

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could've rigged alone and she shouldn't have mixed her words. Mysterious moods frighten flat angels and they abandon mercy—one must come within the select vessel. The exit's been denied. Pamper to stir, challenge to harden. We're our children, raised to open and rise, our failures assured by duotones. Against the window, eight flights high, sun-poured with goodness gathered, resolved within a cavern beloved under moss. Stare by stare we burn time in outer paradise. One's ankle hidden by an immaculate wisp discarded. One's sternum engraved by scorpion clench, bone shy of monolith, stones meant for a rescue cur, involved hearts shielded by accrual. We can't live more than one life at once, no matter how clever we think ourselves. It's all part of a single sloppy effort, observing our variant lives strung together. She found a vacant cliff-bench above the nearest surf and waited like a

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mantis for him to drift closer, attracted to an empty horizon and her unspoken claim. His wax softened into palm juice, a timeless gift from desert reveries. A true mouth absorbs a mister with a generous nod, and somewhere sails billow in a fresh breeze. We may think we know a good deal about this big place, but we full don't—dreamworld, mindworld, fleshworld—we can't ever know enough, and the saltwater swirls around my calves as the sun sinks away for another night. If only she would drink his winter, if only he would drink her spring. A vital sunflower thrives from out of a favorite promontory and a stark blue tree is at ease in its frame. All it takes is one long look in the mirror in the wrong light for one to want to die. We try to disavow our shared histories—whether they're salacious or quotidian—to stave off culpability. To fend off shame—whether lifelong or

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trending—we explore the tawdriness of bourgeois materialism to stoke our own bohemian tastes. We can't win this unfortunate game. If only he could parse her summer, if only she could reverse his fall. A dead lizard doesn't absolve anyone of empathy, and we're mammals of foibles and fables. Socks can't hide the paint. Haircuts expose the templed gray. And the hearth in that house that hangs off the edge of the universe can't burn actual logs, wouldn't survive authentic flames. One longs for an open floor plan in a building too old to gentrify, for a tree unnoticed by jacks or huggers, for a friend who can get there just before one gets there. One longs for a different kind of longing. For what do you long, and what are you willing to sacrifice? he might ask her, without expecting any reply. In those zones where things happen (conflations and disappearances, conflagrations and

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submissions), more than in those spaces where life is lived (mice relocations and raw hands, petty comrades and shrunken diaries), forgetting is forgiven. If he has wolves in his closet, she has wolverines. She bothered his lap, engaged in a most awkward hug, but the candles had been snuffed before dinner. This hatchet and this hatcheteer won't split that chunk of wood. You can't give away secrets you've never held. As glare of winter gives way to Monday's spool, as bath suds linger on an inner thigh, as magnetic fields loop back upon their properties, one might rather lease than own, one might rather wince than snarl. One's seven deadly thoughts bend round the sun. That the spirit outlasts the body while anticipating the body. That our purpose on Earth isn't to understand much of anything, much less everything. That you're still out there somewhere. That most of us are lazy and good, beyond

redemption. That I probably did the best I could, without compromise. That one lusts after what one lacks because one lacks faith. That your warm lotus is the place wherein I wish to perish. He came upon her unawares, and the dark side of the sun is a damp dream worth having. Mother's curves were sharp, but adjustable. One lately prefers one's currented strait to one's unmanageable dome. If only he would spout her charms, if only she could post his gift. There's no spirit, there's no real purpose, there's no utter one, there's no permanent cleansing, there's no eternal best, there's no absolute faith, there's no final haven. So what, we must live. We can learn grace as readily as cynicism. I put my hand on your crest and you swamped my skiff. Father shaved with crescent blades. Above us only, the sky borrows light. For what do you long, and to whom are you willing to commit? she

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might ask him, expecting a dodge. The challenger won't usurp the champion. Trust me, he said, traveling east again to claim her, having been given a nominative green light as the man on the move now making a move, surfer to tomgirl, thinker to thespian, archer to belle-goat. Fate always delivers on its promises, and cupid boomerangs impress more than arrows. I can't remember the coordinates of the bungalow above the sea, but I've an inkling it's where I belong, it's where the boots would rest most comfortably by the door, it's where the breathing could make most sense. Tap to tingle, clutch to thicken. Once one's folks are dead and gone, one's waking journey flavors into a briny squint and a tensing of one's mouth, the certainty that one's next, a mingling of disparate memories, one's arrival at the windsurged cliff. By the scruff of the neck he grasped her, pushing her uncomplaining face into

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the pillow, adjusting his position, paying closest attention to make sure her sounds were the sounds of pleasure, not pain, and not rote. The panoramic view grants us perspective, shining sea to curl of hair, sun-caught and breeze-favored. Waves of feelings cross one's coasting nature, zipped to endure—we've seen the bluest edge. Neon trees can't salvage a spilled night. What we know to be amorous fits into our sweaty colors. There's that awaited trembling, the clench and see-saw. She's been to the glittering pink midway more than twice, when he's not dogging her turnstiles. What one loves, one loves, cottoned and candied, leathered and rusty, wood to hood or velvet to steel, memory of the deep and rivering of the dark, she scratches him to mark her territory, one manages to laugh and we struggle to untangle, I taste your absolute and you flourish my circumference all-hallowed.