

The Current

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Unmoored, we cut the motor and drifted lazily
eyeing a lithium burned sunrise.
The cool box of wax-papered ham on rye and blood oranges
beat against the aluminum hull, our metronome,
no faster than the lull of a pram.

Mid-morning, our bodies warmed enough to expose
our shoulders,
we paused
to glance back at the shoreline, now distanced enough,
our bodies warmed enough,
for buildings to shrink.
A waterfront raised from the raze of the last beautification,
blurring familiar landmarks that bound
West Rock,
The Heights,
Garden Circle,
Broad Street.

As I cut blood orange, a slow peel of skin
before quartering the flesh,
you tied and untied and tied braids
of rope through scaffolds of bench and hull,
coarse and fraying.
A mariner's web, you said.
You spoke of our country within a country,
our steps forward and back
in time with our father's fathers and mother's mothers
and the tide.
I leaned over the stern
washing the blade,
a blush upon the water, like shame.

The first wave rose unannounced.
Clouds coalesced as a giant amoeba

swallowing the sky.
The swell lifted us where sky met sea,
our yells muffled by the gale,
sea spray on our cheeks formed tears
we were too frightened to shed.

The motor gasped like lungs
full and stiffened, dead.
A current dragged us powerless, farther a-sea.
We intercalated our arms and legs
within the mariner's web,
our fingers braided as a single hand
growing ever mottled
with each whip of cold sea spray.

The second wave grew with slow fury
that we measured helpless, as every drop of cloud,
every bead of sea spray on our skin,
every thought of before and after and now
sucked to the towering arc
before its ultimate pounding exhale.

I lost your hand in a blush of pain,
deep enough, cold enough,
where the surface tide moaned then trailed.

Prone and abject, I spit sand of the storm's detritus,
lifting my head to industrial smoke
fingering skyward, the fluorescence of the never night,
and the unmistakable din of Broad Street pier.
My legs still braided in coarse mariner's web,
I gazed to the opposite end of the shoreline
where Coast Guard ships circled, lit with urgency,
near the slip of West Rock.

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