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Claire Hellar
Letter

I told you I was going to China on business.

in my arms you threw your head back,
and your mouth quirked
like a gull surprised off a wharf.

you said it would be all right,
but to call when I landed,
or you'd have dreams of dark
birds hitting the earth.

in a cafe I sent you messages.
short bursts of flowers,
a's that curl and taste of oranges.

the curve of your laughter held my mind
like the arc of a teacup shattering
on a café floor: summer afternoon
where it is always tea time.

on the streets
I helplessly buy things that remind me of you -
bell towers, a globe sparked with gold, scarves whorled
green and blue - things that tingle.

a cup, a castle - icy:
fragility of steel, ceramic, snow.
your mind, thousand-toned.

my longing
rolls on and on until it falls flat and tender
like a quarter in the street.

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in the hotel I wrap everything in scarves;
they cling, static and electric.

I wait for tiny shocks – your calls.

you send letters that seem to never stop (rivers) –
I read them pacing hotel room windows,
looking for the you
everywhere

or never

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Sky

(Dear Alejandro)

I cried the day you held an orange to my cheek.

Slipping out of my white moorings I anchored myself on your brute, beautiful strength.

You were warm and a sail and I was fire, we flared...

Days later I burnt enough in sun and body to shiver in the water.

You held me like ripples, your arms bulwarks. Every night I stood on the boat's edge and cried red and gold while the sunset flamed the river. Months later I'm thin like paper. A long beautiful sail you say, but I'm vertical. You try to steady yourself on my coils but I'm unwinding. As I hypnotize the sky it melts to brown sugar wide and I turn, my eyes coals: you kneel like an oak but not all your boards can keep me pinned to a wooden shore. I've turned light and prism, swallowed in a mouthed sun. White walls held me but now everything is horizontal and I need the sky: incandescent fish, tangled ocean, you at the bottom, gone. Sky.

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Love Story in Salt

Look back at me laughing as you steer the boat,
And remember to turn
At the turning of the stair.
Pick me up where the salt comes to the sea
Let me be lost in you
Lost like a star confused.

In an uprushing of tenderness, sway me confused
Float me on your lime-green boat
Back towards me, towards you.
Wave-wandering, let's ride the turn
To the abrupt utter murmur of the sea.
Remember to turn at the turning of the stair.

The first time we went down that stair
I was in love, and you were confused.
There's a way to the moon through the sea
And you said, "I'll take you in my boat.
Blue-green towards the stars. There's a turn
For lovers, I hear, a sky for me and you."

I wanted to be condensed in you,
Blue on sky, sky on stair.
But when we came around the turn
You stopped, confused,
Ashamed of the color of your boat.
Mown-grass green, like the deeps of the sea.

Turning towards the sun, I repented of your sea.
But the shelter of your boat beckoned, and you
Beckoned. We climbed into your lime-green boat
And glided down streams to the star-stair.
I trusted you, to not be moon-struck or confused.
But we forgot the right turn, the wave-turn.

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The earth shifted under our feet. I turn –
The taste of salt on my lips. Lost at sea.
Silver glides into my spaces. Confused,
I walk straight paths, missing you.
We took the wrong turning of the stair
And were shipwrecked, you, me, your boat.

I no longer turn to you.
The sea spins grace-green down the stair.
Confused, you ride it alone on your boat.