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Nocturne for the Eleventh Hour

You would like to know that what the body cannot remember cannot hurt you,
unless it can no longer remember how to forget and washes out with the tide,
taking you with it:— You know enough about memory to know that you have drowned

more than once. You know enough about insanity to know that repeating the same task again and
again, each time expecting a different result, is as useful as swallowing stones in the middle of the sea
and expecting to float. And still, you know nothing. In front of you: a salt gray sea trying to shatter itself

against itself. *Excruciating*: a word you taught yourself the day you watched a film about the first men to
explore the ocean floor, learned that even the smallest whisker in the window would cause collapse, would mean
metal tearing into itself, would mean— if you were deep enough in the soft tissue and dark matter of the body

of water—not even the sea would recover you. *Excruciating*: to be left on a cross for the elements.

In front of you: a sea that states, *If I cannot, escape*. Something that used to remind you of God has grown
small and hard within your chest, having sealed itself shut with light. When your father's lung collapsed,

it shrunk to the size of a closed fist. Within his rib cage, soft tissue competed with dark matter
for air. *Do not touch the dead*, he told you, *do not pity the living*. *Expect nothing—in the end, you will get
exactly what you expected*. At night you lie awake with your hands to each side of your chest

because you have forgotten which side of the body contains the heart: *Elemental God*,

*You who are excruciating pain, If I cannot be the bird that escapes the flood at the end of the world, make me
the arrow that kills the bird. Make me the pane of glass that the bird mistakes for sky. Make me*

the sea that consumes the man warned by the bird, make me his breath because no amount of breath ever saved a drowning man. Make me the soft tissue that collapses within him, the dark matter that nails him to the sea. In front of you: a sea that states, If I cannot escape myself, no one will.

Your grandmother remembers watching three of her four brothers pulled like bruised teeth from the river behind her house, watching the silt dry in their hair, the hollow shape their mouths formed after having their chests pumped

again and again. She told you, *they were sleeping*. She said, *they were dreaming a constellation of stained glass windows, dreaming the black lace of sparrows that crosses the sun at dusk, dreaming of a God so loving that he forged the heart from fire and ice, so damning that he caged it*

forever in bone. She told you, *fear anything that baptizes itself*. Your mother, soap in her hair, oil on her hands, salt between her teeth, remembers her house burning until all that remained was hearthstone, broken china, radio wire, told you how she coughed ash for weeks after, why she still

soaks her nightdress in water before sleeping. *If you ever lose something from your body, she said, send for soil from your homeland that you may grieve over it because body is both lighthouse and ossuary, simultaneously inhabited*

by its own need to burn and to bury, to plant as it uproots, to grow. And again:—When you dream tonight, you will dream

element, your right hand below your left breast, a finger between each rib, listening to the swell of soft tissue within your body, feeling the collapse of dark matter again and again. *Even breathing is insane*, you will say to yourself. *These are all the ways I have failed to love you*, you will say to no one. You will try to

remember how to let go—*Even hands know to let go of themselves at the end of prayer*. You will try to remember how the body surrenders itself when crossing through itself into sleep: simple as climbing a flight of stairs, hard as hammering moonlight into glass.