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# Except for One Obscene Brushstroke

Dzvinia Orlowsky

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## Letter to Myself

Once, I confused my own hand  
with desire,  
once I held it there

until it promised love—  
*it couldn't possibly get better—*  
until I realized

I'd rather cry  
or take a long bath  
alone in the house.

Doesn't it seem  
the more thoroughly we wash  
the more we stink,

our bodies refuse  
to trade in  
their own damaged coats—

that even a moment  
can take more  
that all we've got.

## House Between Water

For someone else, this thirst  
that claims

a single drop's hand-held mirror  
facing the sky.

For someone else, this turning  
in bed, a downward

burrowing— call it *sleep*,  
if only for a few minutes

in that hour when windows open  
and all roads end.

For someone else, this silence  
like an ill-fitting leather jacket

that will never wear out  
no matter how hard time rubs

and burns— this house, its lantern  
lifted toward the ocean,

toward towns with families  
who wait out each storm,

who secure their yards with gods  
and birdhouses,

pinwheels and dwarfs.

## Elegy

*for Ed Hogan,  
for Solomea Pavlychko*

Black tree shadows along the paved road  
are a safe lake

intertwined with light, a rustling  
of leaves undressing,

eager for winter, the cold they won't feel,  
anticipating ground.

I'm going nowhere in particular today.  
I'm three o'clock passing onto four,

among others whose hearts pump anonymously  
at their own doorways, that swell

with excitement, occasional adventure-  
packed knife, the apple forgotten.

I was nowhere, last night, in particular,  
breathing in my room, dreaming of you-

taking off your jacket, untying your shoes, for you-  
making you lighter,

pushing back the water. Today  
leaves, scattered from trees,

fall from autumn skies-  
from four o'clock passing onto five,

from anything meant to hold or save us.