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London, dear

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London, dear
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I fly back to California
on solid wings, on reaching-out-into-space wings,
with these words in my chest
sounding like Joni Mitchell with
Canada on her lips like
late spring in parks I used to
give my flowers to
so willingly like
a little water spilled around thirsty mouth.

But London—
having deprived me of my righteous springtime
with its melancholic heavens
and inexplicable wind tunnels
sweeping through the Underground,
having dressed me with a half-pint
of its cheapest ale and sent me to wind
and weather my way through
the mobs at Oxford Street,
having undressed me at the window
of the coldest academic building
so that the passers-by remarked upon
the nakedness of the American—

London, dear,
you came far from courting me, anyway,
and in my last glimpse of your shrinking suburbs I spied
a little dirt on your nose.

Tonight I will meet Los Angeles
in its full glory of smog and streetlights,
in its full regalia of frank colors and car horns,
and in pairs of indoor sunglasses with imported coffee;
I will meet Los Angeles
again and for the first time,
makeup-less
and in my plainest sweater,
without the right currency
or shoes.
But Los Angeles, by God,
has waited all these months to receive me
and in that alone there is love enough

for this child of purple mountain majesties—
knowing the smell of wet asphalt on her playgrounds
and knowing the sound of lonely dogs in her canyons
and knowing also the sublime geography
of that armpit of sand and tanned bikini-bearers
lounging between the hills and the Pacific—
and knowing now what it is to return to these
with hair windblown and skin paler from lying on other beaches,
with hands dirty from touching other earth.
But Los Angeles, by God,
for all her flaws and street noise,
welcomes her longtime lovers
in all their infidelity
with salty kisses on tortilla chips,
with the long embrace of its highways.