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London, dear

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London, dear Jessica Stern

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.

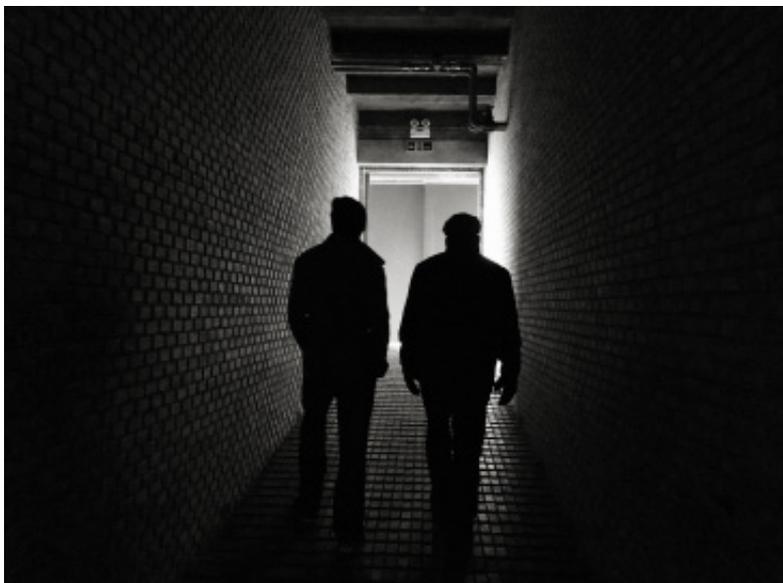
Tonight I will meet Los Angeles
 in its full glory of smog and streetlights,
 in its full regalia of frank colors and car horns,
 and in pairs of indoor sunglasses with imported coffee;
 I will meet Los Angeles
 again and for the first time,
 makeup-less
 and in my plainest sweater,
 without the right currency
 or shoes.

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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.



Patrick Liu