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[Dalet]

If, finally, what binds me to you
is not need, bound up at the root, the loins,
the newly soil-bound rhizomatic tufts

of hair curled like black gauze — or gray,
as mine has become — around the sapling,

growing now rapidly into a tree's shape,
if because of this the xylem forms, the sap
rising against gravity, rising and falling,

if this is not one of the god's secret names,
then I have pursued a mirage, a hologram
that flickers like an almost-spent lightbulb.

This letter is a tent flap closing. When
what little there is of moon allows us to both
see and not see, together, our bodies

now one, briefly and never long enough.
When I turn my head to look at your face
behind me in what might almost be pain,

you have closed your eyes

to make at least some of this world go away,
its slow ruin, as if we were somehow locked

together like impoverished origami simulacra
of ourselves. What binds me to you is not

need. It's a door in the middle of a room,
grown dark, as the air does now, winter coming,

a door that, having lost it, I keep hoping
again to find. I had only to touch it once

for its trick lock to click open, unsprung.



Christopher Woods, *Awaiting Your Touch*, photograph

Letter to John Ashbery

September 3, 2017

The news comes in fragments, fits and starts.
VHS and audio tapes rewinding. You've died

today. Professor friends share links,
your face staring out from a machine screen.

I met you once—you won't have remembered,
of course, sitting with me when I was 23

in someone else's department office in Charlottesville.
We were supposed to be talking about

my poem, but instead your eyes fixed mine
like darts in a bullseye. You talked of smoking pot

in Provincetown with Elizabeth Bishop, how
you'd forgotten you'd left the radio on in another room

and thought the walls held mice who spoke
a language three times more complicated

than either of you could understand. My poem
was about clouds. After the meeting, I walked you

across the Mall toward the restaurant where
the faculty would fête you. You pretended frailty.

Pretended to stumble in the dusk so you could
rest your arm, brief as a muscle twitch,

on my shoulder. My beauty's gone now.
The news comes in fragments. It starts and it fits.