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
Every cycle of seven is a completion,
    a wholeness, a ripe
blackberry on the cusp of detaching, no hurry.
It’ll come from its branch when it comes.
    In the word for sword
lies its root—nourishment, food. It’s work
that gets me through these difficult days.
    In the yard this evening,
acorns almost drop like little lost earrings.

It’s not time yet. A raven alights on the fence.
    Almost he doesn’t but then
he does—spreading his black wings out to shake
off the rain, or where he’s come from the makeshift
baths, the pocked puddles
that collect in the alley behind the house. Despite
the psalm, there will always be a kind of pestilence
    in the air around us. Always
the fowler’s snare. For bread, for fruit on a vine
more exquisite than gold, we’ve lain in this grass
    with our eyes half-closed.
The lion and the cobra long gone, as summer
soon is. Now I take up the shears and prune
    a still unruined oak branch.
How some things will grow more handsome
    the more they’re maimed.
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.