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Two Poems

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WARMING UP AT CAPE ALAVA

In weather like this
my grandfather's people
wore buffalo robes,
coats that weighed down
even warriors. Here
on the coast, lean men
hung hammered cedar bark
about their shoulders,
let rough cloaks toughen skin.

Shivering, I shed my flimsy bag,
move to Sally and slip on
the warm shirt of her breath.
Down the beach the sea
hones her thick tongue
on rocks. If she says anything
it is "Yes, yes."

WHERE THE LINES CROSS

"Remember: Wherever you go, there you are."

1.

Below decks my shipmates dream
in dim quarters, their pulses
the pulse of the engines.
I balance above them on the flying
bridge, knees flexed for the ship's roll,
here for stars, their chilled light
bright ulcers caught in the sky's lining:
Altair, Betelgeuse, Capella, Deneb.
They catch in my sextant's mirrors
and I bring them down, bring them down
plumb to the smooth line
of the sea's belly, rock them
in a slow arc and match
this angled kiss with the *tic*
the precise *tic* of the stopwatch.

If I followed these sparks back
on themselves, kept to a straight path,
the stars would not be there,
would have spun away. This does not matter.

The moon grows old, grows pale and old,
snags in the rigging. Light
whets itself into the bright blade of day.

2.

In the wheelhouse
I settle down to figure
the intricate choreography
stars dance to, avoid lies
of height above water, sky's refraction,

distance from Greenwich. And time,
the four glass-cased chronometers
rocking in brass gimbols.

I set the rules on the compass rose,
walk them across the chart
over Australia, over islands unnamed,
over miles of blank ocean,
draw my lines. In that delicate asterisk,
where the lines cross
in this slow breath of dawn,
I can tap my finger, thinking

There I am

even as I move on.