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Topsail

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TOPSAIL

We watched the beach roll over on itself
before my aunt turned to coke,
turned up mug-shot in newspapers.
I was seven, and she and her three
lovely stepdaughters sent me up and down
the steps of our rented timeshare
just out of sight of the water.
We were always out of sight of the water.

They told me what they wanted
by color, and I would carry up from the line
small scraps of sunbleached, wind-dried
clothing so they could skinny into them,
throw on a t-shirt, head for the waves.
My dick got hard, my fingers just
pressed into things I didn't understand
but knew I wanted, needed.

Years later when they were lost
to bad boyfriends, a suicided father,
ripple and swell of divorce—all of them,
long gone—I remember mostly the sand
along the edges of the street. How we skipped
barefoot across the pavement, bubbling
of the tar for as long as we could stand it,
and then back into the sandy, weak grass

to cool again while we walked
endlessly toward the ocean.
Its break and rise, wind through
gulls' mouths drowning our laughter.
My aunt looking over her shoulder
while those girls of hers paired up,
surrounded me, took turns
ferrying me across the last of the streets.