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Crossing

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When I was young my mother wore
Dr Pepper flavored
chapstick, tinted red
that she would let me use
for special occasions
and I thought that adulthood was
wearing Dr Pepper flavored chapstick, tinted red.

When I went to college she sent me letters
just because, and in one letter she
included a tube of Dr Pepper flavored
chapstick, which I took to mean she thought I
had finally grown up,
though she, most likely, simply thought
of moving north, where it is cold
and dry and where I would need
chapstick for chapped lips.

And always after,
the taste of Dr Pepper brought back
memories of running home laughing
through the snow, jacket too thin for this
and an independence translucent enough
to wake up every morning
to her letters taped to the inside of my door.



Decades later in a hospital room,
I wake up post-op, next
to an old man who insists his bed
is a ship on the South Pacific.
A nurse stops by and sits down on the chair
beside my bed, and she asks how my children,
grown and moved to Louisiana,
did with the hurricane last week.

I sleep again and wake to find a can of
Dr Pepper she had left
on my bedside table, as if to say
nothing more or less than
you are here and this is what we had.
Merely I was here, briefly, with you.

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