

Two Poems

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Living in the Past

San Francisco 1982–1992

The views were what everyone had:

the hills, parades of paper dragons,
the prison surrounded by sugar water.
Tourists laughed in the crumbling showers.

Climate? Mild. No fear, no regret. Life
stared like a lizard, blinking back
the salt of our climaxes.

Outside, the epidemic spread.
Ten years.
We sipped champagne

from small black bottles, followed manicured paths
between trees that had lost their bark
and smelled like medicine. I wish

I'd kissed you then. You seemed distracted
as we crossed the shell
of the band that only played anthems.

It wasn't hot but you were covered
in hard bright beads of sweat.
The newly infected slumped on benches,

a garden of vanishing plants.
You seemed to be staring at their shoes.
I'm seeing stars, you said.

Wrestling

And he rose up that night, and took his two wives, and his two handmaids, and his eleven children, and passed over the ford of the Yabbok, and sent them across the river, along with his possessions. And Jacob was left alone; and a man wrestled with him until daybreak.

Genesis 32:23–25

You wish you'd stayed on the opposite shore.

Not that you're losing.
Everything is on your side. Wings snap easily
in the vice of your thighs

the angel gropes,
searching out the sinew of light,
the blessing you stole in disguise

from a father who could only love
what he couldn't recognize. The angel
threatens to kill; to die;

claims to be your father's God;
the fear that took his eyes;
your father himself, abashed and blind.

You wish you could let him go. Lose
to keep him alive.
Even that's a lie, dissolving

in the breaking light.
He begs you to let him fly,
feathers melting,

running down your thighs.