Astoria

(for Erik)

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Winner of the Editors' Award in Poetry

Sophomore year, and my friends
learned of sailors, renewable crews
on the docks in downtown
Astoria. Be, but don't look
too grown up, the girls would tell you. Better
than the boys at school, these men bring
flowers, a box of shells
from overseas, write letters. They know
how to please a woman, can say things
in Japanese. Run your hands
over their pleats and tell them
you're seventeen.

I was afraid of walking
past the gulls, past the speckled
piling beyond the tracks. I wanted
things to be easy, but not
that easy, so I hiked with a boy
from biology up the hill to the Astor
tower, sat barefoot and laced daisies
between his webbed toes. Afraid
to admit things, we talked about chlorophyll,
sunlight, the water slapping itself
out there in the Columbia. We talked
college and greenhouse gases,
rumors, the wind making a whistle
across the cement sidewalk,
a howl on the historic brass boat,
shaking its wooden blocks,
fancy plaque rocking.

Why didn't I kiss you then,
while my friends went mad
over *Officer and a Gentleman,*
while I was still spotted with salt
and good freckles? I could hear
the foghorn baying, a new
ship crushing the perfect wave-dents.
Barnacles on the hull,
prow dipping like a mad whale,
and my hair, a thick rope
over sea-brown eyes,
its wet and heavy net.

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