

Ocean Vuong

To My Father / To My Unborn Son

The stars are not hereditary.—Emily Dickinson

There was a door & then a door
surrounded by a forest.

Look, my eyes are not
your eyes.

You move through me like rain heard
from another country.

Yes, you have a country.
Someday, they will find it
while searching for lost ships . . .

Once, I fell in love
during a slow-motion car crash.

We looked so peaceful, the cigarette floating from his lips
as our heads whip-lashed back
into the dream & all

was forgiven.

Because what you heard, or will hear, is true: I wrote
a better world onto the page

& watched the fire take it back.

Something was always burning.

Do you understand? I closed my mouth
but could still taste the ash

because my eyes were open.

From men, I learned to praise the thickness of walls.

From women,
I learned to praise.

If you are given my body, put it down.
If you are given anything
be sure to leave no tracks in the snow.

Know that I never chose
which way the seasons turned. That it was always October
in my throat.

& you: every leaf
refusing to rust.

Quick. Can you see the red dark shifting?

This means I am touching you. This means
you are not alone—even
as you are not.

If you get there before me, if you think
of nothing
& my face appears rippling
like a torn flag—turn back.

Turn back & find the book
I left us, filled
with all the colors of the sky
forgotten by gravediggers.

Use it. Use it to prove how the stars
were always what we believed

they were: the exit-wounds
of every
misfired word.