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The Subject Turns to Death

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With a deep breath and a shrug, she pauses
briefly at the icy bend, then blacks out
but can taste the air, she says, sharp on her tongue.
She wakes dull in a hospital bed
with a broken hip. Her fiancé, seatbelted, dies—

When he is twelve, he dives first
into the limestone shelf. He has revelations,
he says, when, after his parents' anxious relief,
someone shows him his own head screwed
to a bright steel halo and scaffolding in a mirror—

He imitates what he imagines is the wet sound
of his chest cracking open as he unbuttons
the top of his shirt. When at the sight
some wince, he reassures them:
The procedure was *a success*—

Then, up from the disbelief and awe,
another story begins: the mugging on the west side,
unconsciousness, broken nose and jaw,
and another: the eternal moment
of weightlessness, the plane in free-fall,

another account from a voice impossibly risen
from incoherence, from a ghostlike body
telling everything it went through,
the accidents it survived only to appear
here,

deep in a couch, propped up
by the arm of a chair, leaning against a doorframe
or a wall, tired and amazed, as a woman
tells about a suicide attempt, now thirty years old,

how she is shocked to see the room's slow rotation

at the end of taut rope, staring at the drink
she twirls, crashing to the floor—
There is silence, then someone says, *We are blessed.*
They laugh, agree, disperse into new topics.
The party over, they shake hands with the host, and leave.