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Envoi

Imagine your life is a movie. You
are not so beautiful, would
not be cast in the movie that is your
life, but the light might transfigure
even you, so you focus instead on
the box. Not so special
sitting there, dullness of brown
reinforced at the corners,
gestures of care expressed in strictures
of tape. Gifts from your mother
(here, take them) but no doubt sealed
by your father's hands, eager
for something to do. The movie would
begin with the box, how it
beckoned, suspiciously still on the hand-
wrought planks, perhaps some
decorative rug lazing beneath as trees
cast an eerie green light
throughout the house. First the box,
then the voice. "In the middle
of my life, there was a box." Maybe
a voice-over about how thoroughly,
most days, the world refuses to
acknowledge what you desire.
Take the box. Take what is given to you.
Your life isn't a movie. No one
waits in line for you. But there
was a box. There were floors,
no rugs at all. There were remnants
of an age past. How much less lasting
they are, those near to us in time. You were
waiting for a new life to seize you
but all you had was this box,

the painted legacy of *LIFE* magazines, sweet
and pungent whiff as paper crumbles
to dust your fingers. You almost
think you can see the ink disaggregating
before your eyes. It is, like most
things, too slow to be seen. "We're getting
rid of them all." That was all she
said, urgency of another forgetting,
no room for the past, except
that voice, first voice, voice singing
words to me when I knew
I was you. When I knew not words but
song alone and unending. That was
what lured me: the song of the world
disappearing before me as I will too.
I write so I might disappear. So yes,
I took it. I tried to seize
what was never mine just as in 1936
Henry Luce seized *TIME* and *LIFE*.
He could see in his mind at night
images that made *the American century*,
enormities glimmering in the faces and sketches.
What was it I desired, there, in the middle
of a life scarcely lived, a life buried in pages?
Not in 1936 nor at 36 could I tell you.
And the years kept passing, all the pages
passing so swift and delicate they might tear
as I touched them. Didn't I want them to tear?
Didn't I want history to rip itself open
and take me in? Green light on the brown box
and the box that moved as I moved
and waited for me as the world would and
when I could not, when stuck, somewhere,
unable to travel downstream in the lush
wake of time to wherever history
would take me. I didn't have a story, which is

not to say I didn't have a past, but
no one transfigured me in black and white.

If I write to tell you, dear reader, I
was changed, you'd have to care what I

had been and what I was coming
to be as another American century passed
and left me behind. Green on brown,
the dense leaves around the house protecting
me from death and convergence,

from life in time. Imagine you could say, *this*
is the middle of my life. Here it happened.

Whatever it was. But it did not happen in the middle.

Don't you remember? Late, once, in
the ancient dark of night, you looked up
and some celestial woman gazed down.

Mother of infinite stars, here I am. This is
my story now. Every word was your gift,
and every word, mother, I return to you.

Now, I am ready to begin.