

Open in case of emergency, daughter

By Jason A. Maas

On the night you find
yourself in open water—when whatever
ship you fell in love with or
you carved inside a generation,
sweated and bled out your twenties over—when that ship will be
left in crumbles, stinging the sea
in steam as it sinks, know that
we are dry land, we are beyond the long night.

But when the night is not over,
if it will not be over soon;
if you must turn back to the ship
now more a rib basket opened
wide than much of anything—
when you swim back and
put your hands on it not
because of any other reason than
you needed to try one last time,
to check to see if you had
gotten all you could
or done all you could; when you
go to ask one last question
to the hole in water, in the splintering wood
and the metal moaning and turning
like lovers under a bed sheet before
ripping like a brillo pad and
sinking to the bottom of the murky
dish water—when you watch the
last of it shrink into a bubble
that gasps and splatters like tears
on your face—whenever you have
spoken what needs to be said into
the silence: remember, my daughter,
we are dry land, we are
beyond the long night.