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The Drowning

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Bruce Bond

THE DROWNING

And when they had reached the ocean shore,
the woman turned
to her girl and said,
see there, and that is the territory between
you and your better
self, and the child
said, what? and the mother said, that is
the place of all
the buried limbs,
at which the child said, I don't understand,
I can't quite figure . . .
and the mother cut
the child's speech at the shoulder, saying,
the place of your foul
and painful birth,
and the meager waves breathed like a massive
iron lung, once,
the mother said,
once there was a way out of my loneliness,
my mound of broken
shells I called "not
yet" or "almost home" or "come back, dear one,"
and the child said, look,
the gulls are crying
with wonderful terror at the blue above them
and below, like meat
in a blue sandwich,
and the mother said, no, no, you can do so much
better, see here,
give me your leg,
and the child did, and off it came, waves
raked the pebbles

with their claws,
their foam, their pleasure, and the mother said,
look at the blue
wound of being so far,
so cast out of your bluer, your better self,
look at the filth
of the sea on fire
with day's final word, no, no, you are not
looking, give me
your eyeballs,
and out they came, which is when the child turned up
to the mother, gazing
through the graves
of her missing eyes, and a pleasure-foam skimmed
fearlessly over
the polished sand,
shackling the child's ankle, drawing back
through the bubbles
of the burrowing sandcrabs.