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James Richards

Before I Came to My Body I Entered Elizabeth Bishop

Like a timid word through the ear,
I became an image behind her eyes.

She was ambrosial—the way her hair
curled out of her head, the way her lips

parted. I wanted to swirl in her poems,
warm as the spin of her breath.

I spilled myself desperately down
the slant of her neck and shoulder,

leaving footprints like a chill
shuddering across her dimpled arm.

I ached in the chords of her dewy palm
and spread heavy through the curl of fingers

but couldn't enter the cold clink
of her pen. She looked so worried.

From the whites of her fingernails
I watched every word grow. Her one art.

A cruel mastery, and I enslaved, always
enduring the rise of sweat on our skin,

always knowing that I was one more thing
she was losing.