

Swan's Cargo

And once a crate of grapefruit spilled out across the sands, odd yellow globes never seen before by anyone except Mr Stow, proprietor of Stow's Stores by the Pulley; where in the world had they come from? —Laura Cumming, On Chapel Sands

Live by the sea and you learn to accept its gifts, whatever flotsam
rides the waves into an unplanned harbor. The objects that float,

that spring towards the light when a hull cracks open, that ride breakers
all the way onto sand. Bottles with space for air in their necks, buoyant,

sticks of cheap furniture. Mahogany only knows how to sink. A cargo hold
of rubber duckies, a punchline trailed across the Pacific Ocean; four right feet

in the same brand of running shoe, crime scenes dotting an eastern current
along the fjords. A man has been searching for the wreckage of a certain plane

along the Indian coast, south to Madagascar, waiting, leaving word.
His first find was a scorched triangle printed with NO STEP. Villagers

hear from other villagers of the white man who comes around
with ready cash for whatever they save. And would-be roof-patches

or thin griddles are preserved, held for his call, tucked between clothes
growing brittle with salt. Forty dollars he paid, once, for weak metal

twisted like it had been bent back over a table, black on one edge
with warping, that rode the water in, its broken body like a sail.