

SELF-PORTRAIT IN ACCIDENT, MARYLAND

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Nothing can be left to luck for us.
In a town like this, one only slips
 into love as into a noose—my mother's
breakneck marriages warned me. Fools,
 we built a home here anyway,
settling on the shifting dunes of youth.
 Nightly, the river sneaks from its bed
just to crawl beneath our sheets
 and touch us like a tender drunk.
Black water cradles our porcelain heads.
 Every morning we walk a tightrope
from the bedroom to the kitchen,
 each year the twine a little thinner.
Over burnt waffles, we weep
 into the electrical outlets, driven
in our fear of loneliness to kiss
 the wall's slicked socket-lips.
In our worst storms, instinct points
 our fingers like weathervanes
toward lightning. Some evenings,
 our bones break in place
of bread at the dinner table.
 The dunes around us collapse

in the greedy hands of the river.

We reconsider each other.

Our voices rise as the sky falls
and rights itself all night

in the frame of our picture window.

How can we leave if the world
outside is just a shoddy cardboard prop?

My mother's old foible

becomes a fable when I find a lesson

in the slack of the softest rope,

our love a rough tongue at my neck

and you like a stool beneath me:

it's not an accident—this perpetual itch
in my clumsy foot to kick.