

LESSONS

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My mother boils water in a tin pan, sifting
in the powdered chocolate and stirring.

"The horizon is not a destination," she instructs,
not turning from the stove. Her hair falls

in a thin braid down her spine; when I was small,
I spiralled it beneath her breasts & around her hips,

imagining her body as a lighthouse, the braid
as the lighthouse stair. "The horizon is a beacon,"

my father says from the other side of the room,
bent over his table, a sharpened nub of black charcoal

behind his sunburnt ear. The winter storms
have erased, reshaped, displaced every sandbar

in our bay, and he is hastily re-making
the maps that decide our shores.

"Get the mugs down," my mother points
her chin at the cabinet. As I pass, she tugs

at my braid, still so short it comes to rest
between my shoulder blades. "The horizon

is a siren; you should learn to grow
roots, instead." She pours the steaming chocolate

and swells my head with stories of her childhood
inland: lakes, rivers, ponds, and rills – water

formed by the land it fills. "And then the floods,"
she sips, "swallowing our farms up, every year.

Sometimes sandbags saved us. Most times,
they were swept away, too; with our shoes

and dolls, our clocks and books; even our bones.
That's why you build a cemetery on a hill."