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Two Poems

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FROM AN ALBUM

—*after Mary Swander*

My grandmother glares, interrupted,
her shadow a stroke of upturned earth,
her hands planted in the pockets
of her skirt. In this picture
the curls are plaited from her hair.
It is almost the color of her eyes
though there is green still
in that granite, in those eyes
like cliffs my grandfather saw
when they hauled their lives across the sea.

Once, my grandmother told me
how the waves were blessed with a book,
a blouse, her rosary thrown in the furrow
of the keel like seed. "This too
is a country of water," she warned,
"dredge sand, hoard soil between the stones,
trust only potatoes, the sparse inscrutable green."

THE COUNTRY OF WATER

Always, it is the first time
the same stranger struggles from your clothes
as if desire were a form of drowning
and it is the same face, the eyes
no longer fists but hands, desperate,
drawing me from my shoes and clothes.

*

The wind is water at its own level
a random shifting in the staggered cast
of trees. You drift into the filtered light
your face diluted with darkness, eyes empty
in fear of what we have fallen into
or from. Here, what we hold is our breath,
what we see is solid only after letting go.