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I Never Learned to Swim

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So much time looking at the water
the view from the kitchen
3 miles to the horizon
44° N, 65° W
the south shore
of the province of Nova Scotia

My mother still paints
its moods and seasons
dark blue to black
grey in winter and in storm
Rippling, undulating
sometimes glassy smooth or sparkling
or churning, hurling sea spray with every smash against the rock
Hurricane Juan jostled boulders onto shore like pebbles tossed
nearly washed us all away

More often
the water
a sea of whitecaps
tipped bits
brushed on the cusp
of each rippling wave

Or some days
the water concealed
yet fifty feet away
the fog and mist of sea air so thick
it's difficult to tell where air ends
and water begins

But for the boulders that hug the shore, massive there
smaller and rounder around the bend of Ballast Cove

where they tumble and rub into smooth grey spheres
The water here doesn't crash against the rocks
and spray as it does a few feet away
but rumbles and folds in a tidal pull

I learned to skip and run along these rocks
the jagged ones and the smooth
--they have different challenges
each liable to tip and slip under foot
You have to learn to move quick
to make it work

You can get to the lighthouse this way
a mile and a half down the coast
past Strawberry Field and Shelley Cove
All the way down
and then up the rock face to the light
And when the fog rolls in
the light circles round and sounds a muffled horn to an echoed thump

In a body mostly made of water
in tissue, bone, and blood
it's easy to look out and down
and to hear that sound make pace with your own pulse
And to feel there for a moment
part of that fog
whose boundary with the sea can be hard to perceive
And to be, in that blurry terrain
less sure of the geographical boundaries among body, water and fog
To know, for just a breath or two
that we're all bodies of water, after all
water molecules stirring in solid, liquid and gas
contained and constrained
by the pull of electric charge