

Tell Me, Muse

Tyler Caroline Mills

The child's room balances single beds, mine, my friend's.
Blue light closes ship-decorated curtains. Unaccompanied
Bach under my arm, I bring my violin to the chapped sand slopes
along the Boardwalk fence—the thin stripe of beach,

same tide in morning as evening when the jumper-plane pulls
sky with its ribbon of advertisements, omens we stop
talking to read. Along the beach men replace planks of wood,
rotting boardwalk, and the summer homes have plywood

nailed over windows as though a hurricane ocean is swelling
the way my belly rises with my breath. I stretch out on my blanket.

Breathe. I wrote

*Breathe, my teacher clapping her hands under the instrument's scroll.
There is a story. You are traveling from one place—the return,
do you hear this? Back to the beginning, listen, as though you never left,
as though you are returning.*

My friend joins me with her backpack,
drizzles forest green yarn between her calves. She knits rows of loops,
pulls them out, goes inside to shower.

We had packed

so many people in that house, I barely knew the couple who drank
Diet Coke by the liter to have sex again in their room and argue.
New Jersey shore towns are palisades of concrete—one vinyl beach
house drops the shadow edge over the smaller house

where the front lawn would be and is rented out. Chained-link fences
wrap around each plot and glisten in the pink evenings, seeming
to move with restless silver cats. Sometimes someone burns sausages.
We go to gift shops, handle crystal shells, set the name key chains

swinging, and touch rims of purple hats that seem like a good idea
propped up on the arms of the hat stand as a child whines outside
the open doorway. *I want, I want.* In my dream, the ocean
swirls to the house and I climb out the window and on top the roof.

Our beds float, rafts that are too far, and the patch of tiles
shrink my feet. I am going to drown here,
violin inside, nestled in the heavy stones of my shoes.
We are going to drown—

I try to wake my friend,

make tea, sit by the window on a pearly chair. Rain.
I am at the part in my book when Stinking Lizaveta,
shoved against the shed, or held down in the mud—but no one sees,
you woman, O you woman. Outside the kitchen, the ocean rolls and rolls.