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How to Love an Old House: A Poem for My Wife

Learn to detest drywall, which makes finding studs
an easy job anyone can master without the aid
of earth magnets, inspection cameras or cursing.

Remember the words *knob* and *tube* sound so much
better than *Romex*, their single syllables ending
in labial fricatives like a slow lingering kiss.

Know that ninety-degree angles don't occur in nature, either,
and gaze lovingly at widening cracks in walls
because smooth surfaces are merely polite fabrications.

Believe that spores of black mold are abstract
art, shrug at radon, and proclaim that *sick building syndrome*
is an easy excuse, some paradigmatic modern myth.

If the house starts to pull away, play hard to get or talk
loudly about leaving it for the condo next door,
the one with vaulted ceilings and the double-wide drive.

Remember this thing you love was built
of brick and hard wood in different times before
shiplap was chic, when silence was still a virtue.

Above all, remember he'll always be older
than you, that he may creak and grumble and grate
when you're around, but each time you leave he springs

leaks in low places, treats Lexapro like some construction
adhesive until cellar walls beneath the sill plates start
to bulge, until the bitter world and words I've bought and paid for
come home to me.