ROSEMARY LEAVES

Doug Swift

for R.M.

(overture)

Near evening, your tiny rowboat founders
in Ellis Pond, no drama; even the wind
is not frantic; a fishing line winds
the meddling birch calmly. You are the founder

of this small shore, these Weymouth pines
weaving dusk into that fabric she'd wound
around your gashed toe. The rowboat is a wound
dragged on the rocks. The silent cabin pines,

its windows closed eyes. Not there. You tear
needles from the pine, incense of Mass.
It happens each time you come home: she leaves

once again; the open door, the slipping tears
of needles through your hand, an airborne mass
that leans to the smell of rosemary leaves.

* * *

Summer rain is sudden; only the bass
notes of bullfrogs, from the pond, can
be heard through the tenor patter. A coffee can
of earthworms overflows; the bass

had barely nibbled all morning. You two play gin
inside, by the stone fireplace; you refrain
from speaking, listen to the refrain
of water pouring off the roof. Your gin

and tonics condense, beads drawing like tears
that surprise, with their coldness, despite the mint
sweetness of the simmering stew. You draw close,

warm flesh, lips meet . . . as something tears—
a treelimb, a lost moterboat—through the mint
of rain, that parts like a door that won't close.

* * *

You like to whisper into each other's ear.
There were not always, in this cabin, two sounds
to meet each other. The creak of an unsound
floorboard meets you, as you lean for another ear

of corn to shuck, to look outside for the bear,
you tell her, who sometimes visits. She wears
an old flannel shirt of yours. Elbow threads wear
thin; the pattern of her own shirt bears

through, as she lifts the pan lid. The incense
of rosemary-seasoned stew fills the pine close
of the cabin, to the open eyes of windows that might

see something rare. But a sudden incensed
roar beyond the trees, tearing at something close,
something perfect: tearing, with all its might.

* * *

(reprise)

The sun is filtered through the pines
like candlelight through rosemary leaves;
the scent of the cabin refuses to leave,
and even follows you out to this pond. You pine

for the sound of her voice as you row
in the shadow of these shores. You wake
to silence each morning, and it lasts. The wake
of your boat fans the shore. All was in rows,

the path of your boat, jars of spice and seasons.
Now the smallest of meals is too much to swallow,
so you come out on the pond, where the two of you

used to drift near the cove and watch the sky. Seasons
return without her; you take in water; and swallows
rise up to a moon so bright, its mares are clear to you.