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The Little Boat

Jane Kenyon

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The Little Boat · Jane Kenyon

And, as the year
grows lush in juicy stalks, I'll smoothly steer
my little boat, for many quiet hours. . . .

Endymion: Bk. 1

As soon as spring peepers sounded from the stream
and boggy lower barnyard across the road
mother let us bring out the cots,
and sleeping bags—red and gray and black
plaid flannel, still smelling of the cedar chest.

How hard it was to settle down that first night
out on the big screened porch: three times
trains passed the crossing, and the peepers' song
was lost under the whistle—two long,
two short—the rumble and clacking,
and clang of the crossing bell. The neighbor's
cocker spaniel howled the whole time
and for a full two minutes after. . . . Or rain
sluiced from the eaves, and we saw black limbs
against a sky whitened by lightning.
The gloom was lavish and agreeable. . . .

August came. Mother took us to Wahr's on State Street,
bought each of us a reader, speller, Big 10 Tablet,
a bottle of amber glue with a slit like a closed eye,
pencils, erasers of a violent pink, a penmanship workbook
for practicing loops that looked to me
like the culvert under the road, whose dark and webby length
brother and I dared each other to run through . . .
and crayons, the colors ranging from one to another
until what began as yellow ended amazingly as blue.

One morning we walked to the top of Foster Road,
and stood under the Reimer's big maple.
Ground fog rose from the hay stubble.
We heard gears grinding at the foot of the hills;
the bus appeared and we thought we had to get in.

All day in my imagination my body floated
above the classroom, navigating easily
between fluorescent shoals. . . . I was listening,
floating, watching. . . . The others stayed below
at their desks (I saw the crown of my own head
bending over a book), and no one knew I was not
where I seemed to be. . . .