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Rosemary Leaves

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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.

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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 motorboat—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.