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Rigging?

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Rigging

In Memoriam Edwin Kenney

They’re burning back barrens across the reach, among the Camden hills. The smoke is just that pale blue will cloud the ripening berries. On the beach of an island we left to leeward, reaching over to Castine, the shallows are cold, gently swelling, clear as a museum case for gleaming garnet, quartz, and puddingstone. It is the same work we talked of, securing your sloop after an autumn sail. Looking, reconciling distance with detail.

All the talk that overcomes me now is just testimony, too late, but you were kind to me, and admirable beyond my understanding. We took eight long reaches out and back across this bay, so empty that day it seemed we’d come upon the undiscovered coast of September. Squalls we dodged finally drifted over to gauze those smoldering hills. These waters, that day, those hills—distance and detail. The work you were doing was merging, blending, healing them. In the silences we would return to, I watched you at this work, until the sail thrumming overhead, and the hull’s smooth heave handed me back across the swells my childhood voice, calling out the solid, ancient names of things that translate the wind: Traveler, gooseneck, luff, leach, and clew. Outhaul, jam cleat, telltale, sheets. Tiller, spreader, keel . . . Saying them, distant friend, saying them again, until we came about and headed toward these hills, foretold I’d never put to sea again without you.

ROBERT FARNSWORTH