Mrs. Ramsay's Knee

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RECOLLECTION OF TRANQUILITY

The first time we ever quarreled
you were cutting an onion
in the kitchen of our rented cottage.
I remember vividly. We were making creole
for a late night supper with champagne,
and you were taking it seemed forever
to cut the onion.
Each time your dull paring knife
chopped on the counter, I shifted my feet,
and I saw once in a glimpse over my shoulder
a white wedge of onion wobbling loose.
I sighed inaudibly. The butter I stirred
had already bubbled and browned.
I was starting over with a new yellow lump
that was slipping on the silver aluminum
when you brought, cupped in your hands,
the broken pieces, the edges all ragged,
the layers separated, bruised and oozing
cloudy white onion juice.
I complained:
the family recipe stated specifically,
the onion must be “finely chopped,”
for what I explained were very good reasons.
Otherwise, the pungent flavors would be trapped
irrevocably in the collapsed cellular structure
of the delicate root.

You sighed, I guess, inaudibly
and adjusted your glasses carefully
with two fingers (a fidget
I have since come to know
as a sign of mild perturbation)
and explained:
the pungence of onions too finely chopped
would be simmered away. The original sharp
burning crispness could be retained
only in fairly large, bite-sized chunks.
But you wouldn’t fight tradition.
I chopped onion on the counter
with the dull knife, while you set the table
and figured the best way of popping the cork.