Mrs. Ramsay's Knee

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KEHAYA HOUSE

I had no mind for winter when I arrived
and saw the snow outside and entered the house
where you lived in the heaviest coat I owned
and borrowed gloves
and stamped ice from my boots
Already dark or near dark
yet I remember that first
moving into as shadowless, noon-lit.
Blue-patterned plates from Old City, Jerusalem
propped in your Irish-pine hutch.
I thought I’d known you in another life,
that first summer. Talk
over menus before Othello
in Santa Cruz. The waiter kept returning.
Copper pots from Italy. A cluster of houses from Camogli
on the coast of Liguria.
From the kitchen ceiling.
On the mantel in the living room.
Cities you’ve lived in, objects of your world.
What we had said then and what we had done.
Tickets. Seats. Intermission.
The long late drive
to where I lived, north through mountains.
Animals roamed every surface: olivewood camel,
ceramic rhinoceros, soapstone elephants, ebony hippo.
Zambia, Kenya.
A trooping of antelopes
carved in a curve of pale Nairobian wood.
Up the coast on a narrow black road, Desdemona’s skin
whiter is than snow
and smooth as monumental alabaster.
I was quoting everything I know by heart, how he’d won her
with stories of dangers he had passed.

A painting in your dining room “Turkey Pond in Snow”
of water and shadows and cold.

And “Mumble” a big-lit
square on your bedroom wall: children in a ringed
conspiracy of faces,
their shoes, their rumpled clothes,
the boy with his hands pushed in his back pockets.

*Put out the light, and then put out the light.*

A handkerchief dropped.

. . . there’s magic in the web of it.

How far would one go to keep what is loved?
Her pillow. His smothering kiss.

Some things yellow.

Some things, like stories in a bottle, unfold and endure.

Everything you owned packed up and moved across a continent.

Above our kitchen sink “Leaf,” a slight
gold thing unfurling—could paint be
so transparent, I thought then?—
a delicacy you couldn’t resist
when you saw it. In Milan, was it?
or Florence?

You imagined washing dishes looking at this.

Beauty so every-day, ordinary.

Looking out again in the snowy wood, a bright glare
in the just-dark,

I’d thought of daffodils you’d planted
in the fallen leaves, two hundred hard, secret knots.