Mrs. Ramsay's Knee

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3. ANNIVERSARY

Not knowing how we may spend our Saturday, I tinker early in the garage, fitting a new tube around the rear rim of my broken-down bike. Pumped up inside the tire, it’s tight and cuts in like a dull blade. Nothing’s easy. I want more than two hands but can do without, knowing where yours are: one’s holding the phone in the kitchen. You’re talking to someone I don’t know, too long but very sincerely, she needs you. The other’s stroking the back of your best cat, limp in your lap, she’s almost sleeping. I ride out in a warm wind, morning light cool on my hands, streaked with grease from the chain. Cars speed by. With the jagged edge of my key, I cut an armload of tall yellow flowers, blowing open, balanced all the way home on my knees. Pumping faster to come sooner, I’m hearing that voice again, envying her and her.

4. ROUSSEAU

Surrounded by museum glass, the white birches seldom sway. The only motion’s tiny green leaves budding, and high up, frail as breath, the shedding tissue lifts. So every tenderness growing faster splits noiselessly. We could have found a bench in Central Park and talked. That’s what you wanted. I could walk no further, wanted Rousseau’s “Dream” again, a quiet place in the garden. Pastels of one painting so unlike him, lilies larger than flamingos, larger yet than figures darkly human—planes of life, a grace of composition. Outside, reclining figure leans her head in a pool of water. April’s breeding. Moore and Matisse conspire, faceless forms emerging rough-hewn from the wall. Five slender trees rose up against the glass. I imagined Monet’s water lilies losing light.