

MICHELLE GILLETT

Rowing from Monhegan to Manana

I leaned into the dinghy's oars, pulling through the brightness,
Indian summer brightness, mute and clear

as if earlier,

the portable radio in the lobster shack had not buzzed with news
and the lobsterman in his Red Sox cap and faded t-shirt,
painting his buoys as he did every September,
had not beckoned me inside.
Something terrible

has happened, he said.

I moved closer to the words until we were complicit
in the salt-pocked windows, the torn green shade,
the swag of shocking pink buoys, the radio
repeating itself as island light spilled through
the narrow door, the silence we kept

until he returned to his work
and I walked down the path to the beach
where rowboats shouldered each other,
trash smoldered in metal drums, and gulls feasted
on corncobs and lobster shells.

Between Herring Gut and Smutty Nose
rocks cinched the harbor. The ferry blasted its horn
nearing Pemaquid Point. I needed somewhere

to settle the fear that rose with each stretch of oars,
threading me like light through strands of water.

But when I climbed the wooden steps to everything abandoned,
signal house, keeper's dwelling, boathouse, and bell,
gone too was the sense that anything can keep us.

Because there was nothing to hold I crouched low.
Under my palms lichen's rust clung to stone.