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Mother Superior

Bridget N. Scott-Shupe

I went chasing memories on the banks of Lake Superior, the waters troubled and dangerous despite how serene the vast surface seems. “Mother Superior,”

they call it, which is frighteningly appropriate; so kind by nature while so cruel in action. Sandstone cliffs, brilliant in their orange and reds, standing vigilant over aqua swells; their strength and safety illusions against the certainty of passing time. Grey skies offering little comfort to me watching them from the dreary shipyard docks, lost in my anger, grief and guilt.

I stood here with you once, wind whipping our faces as we drew our coats tightly around us. Even as we silently observed the icebreaker cutting through the frozen lake, the bleak day surrounding us with drizzle and fog, you were happy. The unsettling cracking of the ice filling the air, whispering hints of betrayal through the placid and suffocating quiet. Your soul a perfect mirror of the splintered plane, perpetually distressed despite the seeming calm.

Mother Superior. This is the place of your birth, the force that raised you, the origin of your confused mind. Despite your best efforts, your desires ebbed and flowed like the tide whose steady rhythm of waves echoed the beating of your heart. I wonder if you even recognized your own violence, or, like the lake, were you simply ignorant to the damage that sunk ships down into cold, dark water. I can't forgive you, but nor can I forgive myself for the thought. I shouldn't be here.

As I pick my way through town back to my car I'm flooded by regret, not for myself, but for you. This place you loved but will never see again, these streets you once walked, these shops you once browsed, this feeling of escape you had longed for as you long approached your end. I'll see them, walk them, browse them for you out of a disturbing sense of duty I can't rid myself of. I'll keep you alive; a torture I deserve and a comfort I do not.

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Mother Superior, the trees on your fickle banks are changing colors. Striking red and golden leaves speckle the thick forests, catching the fleeting light before being choked again by the dark evergreen thickets. I'm going to see your old friend, my friend now, I suppose. Dark and rain-slicked pavement gives way to muddy dirt roads as winding and complicated as you were. I'm retreating into the storm and wilds you called your own, and my heart sinks. I shouldn't be here, either.

We stayed here once, a cabin filled with light and laughter. Thinking back, perhaps it was just you, alive and emboldened by the ghosts of your youth. I'd sneak out to walk the black roads, more comfortable in the dark, alone and silent, stealing a cigarette when you'd gleefully overestimate my painfully thin skin. Jokes too much wine formed on your lips rang in my ears as I self-medicated and self-destructed at the same time. You didn't bruise my flesh, not then, but I still trembled. I couldn't tell which was truly you: this glowing creature, or the troubled wraith which haunted my childhood.

Mother Superior, I'm leaving again in search of your quiet side. I've seen your storm, I've seen your

brilliance. I need your calm. Even my car offers no solace as I speed across the miles of wilderness. I've been here with you, cowering and huddled in the passenger seat while your temper broke across my back. A little more to endure, a little more patience, a little more time, play in my head as mantras you've made necessary to me. I should thank you, I suppose, but anger wells up and painfully closes my throat. I still need you, and I hate it.

We sat on the beach together, there. I had never seen you so at peace. The full moon hung heavy as gossamer clouds painted the velvet sky. You looked so far away, watching the moonlight bounce off the impossibly still water. I wish I could live in that memory and erase all the others, wish that one night of peace was a reflection of us. I turn my car away from the road that would take me back. I won't find you on that beach no matter how many nights I desperately search. I find myself on a new road, to my own life and future. Through the tears that spill unwelcome down my face, I bid a bittersweet goodbye to Mother Superior.

Lighthouse Samuel M. Haville

