

MY THOREAU SUMMER

Under the Sun, June 2015

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If, on an afternoon in midsummer, I happen to find myself near a small lake or pond, opening like earth's blue eye before me, and then catch a whiff of the water's clean mineral scent, overlaid with algae and mixed with the head-clearing resin of white pine, all of it intensified, cooked by sunlight, I am instantly transported to South Pond, in Marlboro, Vermont. There I spent my twentieth summer, living in a cabin without heat, electricity, or running water. No matter where I am when I recall the pond, when I do it is 1973, and I see myself as I was back then, long legged and slender, my sun-streaked auburn hair tumbling wildly around my back and shoulders. I walk down the soft, pine-needle-covered path through the woods, past Kenmore, the defunct summer camp, with its abandoned buildings, towards the water. The pond gleams just ahead through the fringe of trees, radiant with sunlight. No matter how far I travel from that New England summer, I carry the pond balanced inside me, a bowl of bright water. Now trembling, now still, it shows me who I was, who I am, and who I might become if I dive again beneath its shimmering surface.

I wish I could say, like Thoreau, "I went to the woods to live deliberately." But the truth is, at least in the beginning, I went to the woods because I didn't know what else to do. Halfway through college, my heart broken over a split-up with my boyfriend, horrified that I might have to go home for the summer (where my father and stepmother's marriage was imploding), I was lost, miserable in the way one can be only when one is twenty. Pale and wan as the heroines of nineteenth century novels I favored, I wandered the hills. It was May and the apple trees were blooming on campus. The air glittered, golden with the dust of pollen blown off the pines. But my heartbreak underlay everything, like granite under the Green Mountains. Everywhere I went, I seemed to stub my toe or bash my knee against the immovable hardness of my loss. Neither old enough to realize that this moment would pass, nor psychologically astute enough to understand that my response probably had to do with earlier losses in my life, I was miserable and obnoxious in my misery. Even my friends were sick of me.

Except for Grace. It was about this time that she asked if I wanted to live at South Pond with her for the summer. The pond, a pure, spring-fed body of water, with an outlet that ran into the Green River, lay a mile away from campus. Shining softly as a polished pewter platter, it was nestled deep in a forest of mixed hardwoods—maple, oak, paper birch—and surrounded by Vermont's signature pine. The word "pond" is elastic in New England, and South Pond was really a small lake, accessible on one side by a long dirt road and on the other by a footpath that led in from South Road, running from Marlboro town to the campus. Grace had worked as a lifeguard the previous summer at a small beach on the north side of the pond. As part of her pay, she was given a cabin at Camp Kenmore and acted as caretaker, chasing out any intruders. Lonely on her own, this year Grace was eager for a companion, even a woebegone one. "It will be great," she said in her breathless, excited way. "You're a nature girl. You love the woods. We can be caretakers together."

I liked Grace, and the idea appealed to me because it gave me somewhere to go for the summer that wasn't home. But the pond and the woods seemed an oasis, too, a private place where I could lick my wounds and brood. All I had to do was secure a summer job, necessary

since I was paying for school on my own. I already worked in the college library, so this was easily accomplished. There were no formal summer classes at our campus, which was taken over by a classical music festival, so it was an ideal time for housekeeping projects at the library. I was hired to help conduct a manual inventory of the complete collection, going through the library holdings book by book, shelf-reading, checking each volume against its card in the catalogue. It was tedious and exacting work, bearable only because I stopped to browse each new discovery as I went along. But it was a job. I told Grace we were on.

I had been to South Pond before, the previous winter, during my ill-fated romance. My boyfriend had given me a beautiful pair of golden Vermont Tubbs snowshoes, and the half mile or so out to the pond afforded the perfect opportunity to try them out. Snowshoeing is easy, even for a novice. I clumped along behind him, enjoying the splendor of the forest. Vermont is a brilliant place in the winter. Everything sparkled and shone; the pines bent gracefully beneath the weight of snow, with the chalky birches outlined ghostly grey against the blinding whiteness. We don't usually get to choose our soul landscapes until we leave home for the first time. Vermont, with its fragrant pines and mountains rolling one into another, was mine. I felt, there I could become who I was meant to be.

We lumbered on, and there was the frozen pond, a hushed white field, lying smooth and untrammelled as tundra before us. My boyfriend strode out over the surface, tromping out "I love you" in three-foot high-letters. I thought it romantic, even as part of me wished he'd left that white field alone, as pure and unsullied as it was when we came upon it. But even as he trudged away from the message, the wind began to blow, filling in the letters, leaving them to lie there until spring, when they would melt and become part of the pond itself. It felt like a wonderful secret, and I clapped my hands together in my brown and white Ice Wool mittens.

I didn't see the pond again until the afternoon in late May when Grace and I moved into our cabin. Three miles down a dirt road, Ames Hill, then two miles down Camp Kenmore Road (a narrow, infrequently travelled track with a spine of thick green grass running down its center), then down the hill through the camp, and we were there, at our own private Walden. Part way down the hill, Grace's ancient blue Volvo sputtered to a stop, a stop that would turn out to be permanent, forcing us to rely on foot power and hitchhiking for much of the rest of the summer. The car was laden with everything from bedrolls to a Coleman lantern and camp stove to my large collection of houseplants to an absurd Victorian wicker desk, where I imagined I'd write poems. A battered silver Grumman canoe, which I'd borrowed from the college's outdoor program and planned to use to commute across the pond to work, saving several miles of walking, was strapped to the top of the car. We had everything we needed.

As we got out of the car, the pond called to us. Before unloading anything, we careened down the path of pine needles, an avenue I would travel so regularly I'd learn its every twist and turn and root, even in the dark. Adjacent to the camp's overgrown playing field, with a natural cove that seemed made for swimming (where skinny dippers sometimes came, and where we ourselves would take baths in the evening), the pond opened before us. As I stood under the pine trees, drinking in the way the May light flashed over the water, illuminating each ripple and wavelet, something creaked open in my chest. For a sunlit, pine-scented moment, I forgot my sadness. Looking at the water from the sloping bank, I was taken inside its quiet reflection. There was nothing visible but sky and water, everything encircled by a ruff of green.

I stood there, looking at the pond, and it looked back at me. Something floated between us, and I fell briefly still, held in the pond's clear and pitiless gaze, my troubled thoughts dispelled by its quiet beauty. There was a presence there with us, though I could not have said what it was.

I sensed, though, that my emotional drama had no place here, that the pond asked me to be bigger than that and to turn my gaze outward, regarding the kingdom of ordinary things—pollen drifting in a golden veil on the pond’s surface, the plateaus of chartreuse lily pads scattered across it, and the scent and sound of water as it lapped in small waves against the shore. I wanted to stay forever.

When I tell people about the cabin beside the pond, they envision a rustic log structure, cozy despite its lack of modern amenities. In fact, the cabin that Grace and I moved into that day was a rickety, rundown former campers’ cabin. Built of slatted brown boards and lacking insulation (chinks of light glowed between the wallboards), the cabin, which was set up on concrete pilings and could be reached by a short, steep flight of stairs leading to a tiny landing, was one big room. Entering through the squeaky screen door, one went briefly blind in the shadowy space, assailed by the cabin’s scent, a mixture of sun-warmed pine, dust, and generations of girl campers’ sweat. There was a raised, stage-like platform at one end with a huge table that we made into our cooking area and built-in bunks at the other end.

The bunks were missing mattresses, so Grace and I stowed our suitcases on their rusty springs and opted for two metal cots with ancient, blue and white ticking-covered mattresses on either side of the cabin interior. Narrow shelves ran along the wall beside our cots, where we placed our books. Grace was studying psychology and working on the thesis required by our small, tutorial-based college. I was reading the Transcendentalists and working my way through the American Impressionist painters, trying to find a focus in American Studies, though all I really wanted to do was write. Our walls were decorated with photographs of Freud and Jung on Grace’s side, and cheap prints of landscapes by painters such as Childe Hassam, John Twachtman, and William Merritt Chase glowed beside my bed like dream places. Although there were six large windows, the cabin was dark inside, even during the day. Beyond our 1950s rusting screens, wooden shutters were propped open 90 degrees, held in place by splintery supports. The shutters looked more like awnings, and sometimes gave way unexpectedly, usually at night, with a loud bang that sent us bolt upright in our beds. But at mid-day, with the front door propped wide open, a rectangle of yellow light fell through the length of the cabin. Looking up and out through the door, one always had a perfect view of the pines that crowded the opposite shore and the pond reaching toward them, its blue surface rippled as watered silk. This reflection bounced off the walls inside the cabin, painting it in wavering gold, as if it were the background for a religious icon.

At night, the ferocious glow of a large, dangerous and unpredictable Coleman lantern illuminated the cabin. The lantern required that one person pump it to the correct pressurization, while the other one dart in at just the right minute with an Ohio Blue Tip, lighting the mantle of fragile ash, which, if disturbed too much, fell apart and had to be replaced with a new one. The stove was exhausting, requiring two hundred pumps for proper pressurization. But the lantern was plain scary, forever on the verge of flaring up out of control and exploding. Hung from a hook in the middle of the cabin, it lit the rough boards inscribed with former campers’ names with the harsh intensity of rural security lights. Grace and I read beneath its eerie glow every evening, but we always turned the flame down with a sigh of relief, our faces disappearing as the incandescent mantle faded to black. We kept flashlights beside our beds, but the velvety dark of the cabin was part of its charm. I loved lying there at night, snuggled in the cheap blue and gold sleeping bag from Caldors my father had given me when I left home, listening to the wind sigh though the pines, the scent of pond water washing over me like a benediction as I slipped into

sleep.

Like Thoreau, we weren't entirely cut off from civilization. Way up the hill stood two crumbling Victorian houses, which had once housed camp administrators and were now rented out to Music Festival participants, a couple we rarely saw, though the music of their flute and cello sometimes floated through the woods. The electricity was on in one of these houses. Grace and I were granted access to a refrigerator there, where we kept a wheel of blond Vermont cheddar and our stash of Colombo yogurt. Whole wheat bread, peanut butter and jelly, and Campbell's Chunky Clam Chowder rounded out our simple meals. For a privy, we had the woods, keeping a good distance away from the water and, like animals, buried our scat in the thick pine needle duff.

From first light, when I'd rise and kneel beside the water, cupping it in my hands and washing my face with Dr. Bronner's biodegradable peppermint soap, to the end of the day, when we gathered water, heated it on the stove and washed our dishes on the cabin steps, then shed our clothes and slipped into the indigo-colored depths to wash ourselves, the pond was our compass and reference point. Everything we did, from gathering drinking water, to washing dishes, to bathing and washing our hair, to simply musing about our lives, revolved around the pond. Still water invites contemplation, and South Pond was a length of silver held out daily before us. The cabin was our ark, but the pond set us sailing.

A blue rowboat came with Grace's lifeguard job, and she used it to shuttle over the pond. But my canoe gave us swifter, easier access to the water. I paddled it across the pond every morning, stashed it near another rustic cabin, hiked out through the woods, and up South Road to work. The rest of the time, we used the canoe to explore the pond, from Camp Kenmore at one end to a beaver dam at the other, where the plush, industrious creatures were engaged in keeping the pond a pond, damming it at its outlet. Grace and I floated silently in the long, light New England evenings, watching the water first turn violet, then nearly black, hoping for a sign of one of the beavers, only to be startled by the emphatic slap of a tail as one surfaced, then dove, catching us out before we'd even glimpsed it. Other times, we followed the resident loons across the pond, marveling at how far their sleek, speckled tuxedo bodies could travel under water before coming up for air. Sometimes we just sat, perfectly still, hardly daring to breathe, watching as the doe with twin fawns dipped her brown velvet nose to drink in the pond's shallowest area. Her babies balanced on stilt-like legs beside her, their backs awash with spots like storms of small white blossoms. The entire family was mirrored in the pond; it seemed the deer drank their own reflections.

At night, the pond was another world, a dark blue mirror reflecting the sky above so perfectly that, whether in the boat or swimming, one lost perspective between where earth left off and the sky began, the firmament suddenly liquid, too, streaked gold with meteor showers in August. Keats's line "Bright star, were I steadfast as thou art" ran through my thoughts, though I felt too embarrassed to say it aloud. A few years later, reading Anne Sexton's poem about "a bowl with all its cracked stars shining," I thought again of the nights at South Pond. Getting out of the canoe, Grace and I lounged on the sloping hill, where the skinny dippers (former campers, fellow college students, or local hippies, none of whom we ever chased out) came by day, staring into the sky as if our futures hung suspended there. More pragmatic than I, Grace (engaged to be married to her high school sweetheart at the end of the summer and destined to become a pediatrician) grounded me in important ways. But something in my romantic sensibility must have appealed to her, too. We complemented one other, as friends who are very different

sometimes do, the pond a wide blue net that held us gently balanced. We lay there in the fragrant grass, talking and trading secrets, our faces lit faintly by that circle of bright water drizzled with starlight and reflecting the moon.

By daylight, the water, while not transparent, was wonderfully clear, darkening to the color of deep tea as one went deeper and deeper. I loved the way my body seemed to merge with it, fluid as the element I moved through. I never swam as much or as consistently as I did that summer, sliding into the water's cool arms every day after work. A few strokes out from the skinny dippers' cove, past the ghostly drowned piano, which someone had dragged into the pond many years before, and I was over my head and alone. Turning over, I floated on my back, lifting my face to the sun like one of the yellow water lotuses that dotted the pond, my hair streaming out around me.

I wasn't an especially strong or confident swimmer, particularly when compared to Grace, who cut through the water like a dolphin in her blue-striped Speedo and that summer saved two people from drowning. But as I swam out further each day, working my way up to crossing the pond, my fear dissolved, and I grew stronger and surer of myself. Like many necessary skills, swimming lessons had ended with my mother's death when I was a child. By July, stroking my way through South Pond on a daily basis, I retrieved something of the girl I had been, discovering I possessed a capability I had not realized. In those moments I felt as if I belonged to the pond, as much a part of it as the deer, beavers, loons, or cedar waxwings that passed through, thrilling me with their red-tipped feathers. I floated there, utterly alone in that small, shining circle of silence, my body weightless, while the pond worked its magic, its silver hands holding me up as my mother's once had.

Although I loved the long evenings, when the light lingered till nearly nine, my favorite time of day at the pond was early morning. If it had been a cool night, the pond steamed gently, filled with mist, as if the water itself was dreaming, reflecting back a muted, blurry picture. Other, warmer days it lay perfectly still, polished to a sheen that mirrored everything so vibrantly that the reflected trees seemed more real than the actual trees themselves. As I knelt at my morning ablutions, dipping my hands into the water to wash my face, I was sometimes startled by my own reflection, staring up at me, as if my soul dwelled there, just beneath the surface. We had only an old mirror in the cabin, its foxed silver mostly gone, and combed our hair by feel. I got out of the habit of looking at myself and found it curiously refreshing. Not worrying about what I looked like, I moved more naturally and freely, with greater self-possession. On-going delight at how much there was to notice every day at the pond—the song of the hermit thrush, a glimpse of white turtlehead or cardinal flower, the pattern of the constellation Cygnus in the sky at night—filled me. My sadness seemed to fade.

Each morning at the pond felt like the beginning of the world. Although there were two other rustic cabins at the far end, there was no sign of human life as I paddled my way across the water to work. The water was so still it reflected the image of the pond with its wreath of green trees and their reflection as perfectly as if they were two halves of the same world, a summer snow globe of sky and water. Dipping my paddle as silently as I could, so as not to disturb the stillness, I felt as if I had been granted access to a secret world. I breathed with the pond, part of its tranquil surface, without thinking consciously about the value of solitude and silence the pond provided. I was too young and confused about life to be able to reflect on those qualities with anything resembling larger understanding. I knew only I loved those mornings alone, the silver pod of the canoe skimming over the silver water. When I thought to look down, I saw a young

woman who resembled me, dipping the paddle, sailing through her own image that broke into ripples behind her.

Most of my memories of that summer are tranquil, still shots in which the pond seems to float, a perfect silver medallion at the center of our world. But we did have an extended rainy patch in August, when the pond seemed to merge with the sky, and Grace and I were cooped up, miserable in the damp and mildew-saturated cabin, where nothing dried out, and even our sleeping bags were damp and clammy. During that time I had one of my only scary experiences at the pond. After going straight from work to a party one night, I found myself hiking in after midnight to retrieve my canoe and head home across the pond. It was raining so hard I had to tip water from the canoe, which should have given me pause. Focused only on getting back to the cabin, soaked to the skin from my hike through the woods, I slithered in and pushed off through what felt like a curtain of falling black water, torn open periodically by seams of lightning.

As I maneuvered the canoe away from shore, the sky split open above me. Did aluminum attract lightning? I wasn't sure. But I knew it wasn't a good idea to be out in the middle of the pond, my body the tallest visible target. While I dithered for a moment, deciding what to do, lightning slashed the sky open several more times. Each yellow blast filled the air with the scent of ozone, illuminating the familiar landscape of the pond in sharp relief, turning it into a ghost picture, everything brilliantly white for an instant before being plunged again into the curtain of rain that fell like darkness falling into darkness. The water pelted down, thrumming my skin so insistently my entire body felt like a drum. My hair and clothes plastered against me. It was difficult to tell where I left off and the world around me began. Everything was water.

Although it would take longer to get home, I decided it was safest to hug the shore. Guessing at the direction, the canoe rocking, my path erratically illuminated by lightning, I somehow clung to shore and began navigating my way around the perimeter of the pond. Keeping my head low to avoid tree branches, I was vaguely aware of shivering and being cold, even as I was also exhilarated. Flash after flash lit up the pond and then vanished, leaving the afterimages printed on my eyelids. Once or twice I could swear lightning struck the water, fizzing out like enormous, burning brands plunged into darkness. But I couldn't be sure, seeing things as I did in brief, hallucinatory glimpses.

Finally, having reached the marshy shallows at the far side of our lobe of the pond, I had to make a decision. I could shoot straight across and be home. Or I could continue to feel my way carefully around the pond, clinging to its edge, fitting myself up against it like a piece from a jigsaw puzzle. In hindsight, it seems clear what I should have done. But I was young and impatient and reckless. I might have watched my mother die of cancer when I was nine, but my own life had never been tested. I chose the easiest route—straight across. Paddling as fast as I could, I shot through the darkness. The rain streamed over me as I paddled right, left, right. My shoulders burned. My breath sawed back and forth in my chest. I felt as if the canoe were an extension of my body as we plunged together through the water.

A few minutes passed, and I felt the prow of the canoe bump softly against land. The first lightning since I'd darted revealed the huge fallen birch where I always hid the canoe. Staggering out of the boat, I hauled it out of the water and stowed it behind the tree's thick trunk. I sat down on the tree for a moment, panting. The rain continued to pound down. I was freezing and could feel my pulse throbbing where my thighs pressed against the tree's sodden bark. I ought to have offered a prayer of thanks for my deliverance and dashed to the cabin. But I didn't. I lifted my

face to the rain, exultant and smiling, and sat there for a long moment, drenched with the plentitude of summer.

Grace's fiancé came down from Maine to visit a few times. But our time at South Pond centered mostly on the rhythms she and I created together. We rose early, cooked simply, read or wrote letters at night, the incandescent glow of the Coleman lantern casting everything into sharp relief. Grace's maiden name was Miele, which means "honey" in Italian. Sometimes, glancing up at her, I'd be struck by her beauty and earnestness as she bent over her book, her long, brown, sun-streaked hair falling around her in veil. Remember this, some voice inside me whispered. This time won't come again.

By the end of the summer, I felt myself on more equal footing with Grace. Simple things, like mastering the art of the canoe, having to walk everywhere, and losing my fear of the dark as I stood at the edge of the pond in my nightgown, gazing across the water through the pines, had connected me to myself in ways I hadn't experienced before. Brown and muscular, I thought nothing of walking five miles if I had to. But I wasn't aware that I moved with more confidence and fluidity, as one of my friends pointed out. Living close to elemental rhythms, I felt able to do things and trusted myself in ways I hadn't before. Without even realizing it, I became more self-sufficient and my sadness vanished like something from another life.

As the end of summer approached, the days growing shorter and the pond misty more mornings than not, I found myself wishing our days beside it would never end, though all such interludes do. But Grace's marriage floated ahead of us, the final rest in a small piece of music written for our two voices, the implicit end of our South Pond idyll, and I started a relationship as well.

Stopping with friends one late August afternoon at Gibbsie's store, the only place to shop or get gas if one didn't want to go twelve, steep miles down Route 9 to Brattleboro, I'd flirted with my friend PK, who was working as a roofer that summer. We'd been buddies our first semester in college, before we drifted off into romances with others. Like me, he'd had his heart broken, and then he transferred to another school, where he could pursue engineering. As he stood on the roof at Gibbsie's that day, bare to the waist and shining with sweat, his skin glazed warm nut-brown, his dark curls glossy, I suddenly saw him differently. Impulsively, I handed him some grapes I had just bought. "Where are you living?" he called.

"At South Pond," I called back. "Come out and see me some time."

He came, bringing with him a little Sunfish sailboat on which we skimmed round the pond. I showed him the pond's mysteries, from the beaver dam to the place where the deer drank to the yellow water lilies that were still here and there in the water and impossible to pick. At some point, as we balanced on the boat's narrow hull in our shorts and tee shirts, both of us spangled with water, our thighs brushed together. It was a Saturday and Grace was lifeguarding across the pond. I took PK back to the cabin.

"Pretty underpants," he said as he removed the scrap of silky red fabric printed with flowers, and we moved toward one another, both of us shy and hesitant, afraid of being hurt again.

Afterwards, filled with the brash satisfaction of a twenty-year-old male who had just had sex, PK wanted to go swimming.

"C'mon, Abby," he said, the only college friend ever to call me by my family nickname. "Let's go." He grabbed me by the hand and we ran, nude, toward the water. Letting go of me, he charged ahead and dove in—only to emerge instantly, grimacing, clutching his shoulder. Over-

estimating the depth of the pond, he had hit bottom, dislocating his shoulder.

I prevailed upon one of the skinny dippers to dress and drive us to the Brattleboro Memorial Hospital emergency room in PK's car. A gruff doctor wrenched PK's shoulder back into place and bound it against his body. I took him back to the pond, where he spent a week recuperating. He and I took up temporary residence in another cabin, where we slept on the floor in a nest of sleeping bags. It was a sweet time, heightened by the fact that summer was ending, but we both knew it was something that wouldn't last.

When PK departed, I moved back into the cabin I'd shared with Grace for a few weeks. But something in the rhythm of our days had shifted. She was understandably focused on the big event, and her fiancé was due to arrive shortly. Our days at the pond drew to a close, as quickly as the water striders on the pond danced over their flower-like shadows. Grace married in the Marlboro Meeting House at the end of August, after a party at the pond the night before. After their one-night honeymoon, she spent a few more days at the pond with me while her husband went back to Maine to finish his summer job. She was moving to Maine, too, sending installments of her thesis to her advisor by mail.

Before we departed (I was not officially living at the pond and had to leave when Grace did), while Grace was packing, I swam alone for the last time, savoring the blue darkness as it washed around my body. Floating on my back, I studied the sky, watching as an occasional meteor shimmered through the sky in a silver-gold streak. Knowing that I was leaving, it was as if something in my on-going communion with the pond had been, not cut off exactly, but interrupted. I felt lonely in a way I hadn't at the pond before. I'd begun the process of removing myself from the experience. But I couldn't bear the fact that I was going, departing from that scent of pine and water Grace and I wished we could bottle and keep.

I don't remember the day we actually left South Pond, locking the flimsy door on our cabin, walking up the pine needle path toward the loaded car, which had finally been repaired. But I do remember how difficult the transition was. I lived with the college nurse for several weeks before school started, caring for her daughter. I couldn't get used to being inside all the time. There was never any privacy, and everything seemed too bright, too loud, and too easy. I caught myself thinking I had to boil water before drinking it or pump the recalcitrant Coleman stove to do so. Like a time traveler from another era, I was shocked by how easy it was to flick a switch or turn on a tap. At the pond, I'd felt close to the natural world even when I was inside the cabin, wind blowing through chinks in the wall, moonlight reflected on the pond's bright surface, and always the water itself, just feet away. Some essential simplicity and goodness seemed missing in the world I now inhabited.

I was homesick for the pond for months after leaving it. I missed the silence and the stillness, nothing but the sound of owls calling at night and wind in the pines. I missed my meditative forays, alone in the canoe. I missed the sight of Grace, reading across the room. But more than anything else, I missed who I was at the pond. Or rather, I missed the way that I forgot myself in its presence. Returning to the normal world and resuming my studies was a letdown after living as elementally as I had. As time passed, I would slowly understand that, without intending to, we had in fact lived more deliberately at the pond than I realized.

But I could not articulate it that way then. All I knew was that I went to the pond unhappy and returned with a larger sense of myself, my spirit opened by the invisible presence of wildness and solitude that I'd sensed the day we arrived. It wasn't until many years later that I understood how transformative that summer had been, a defining moment in my life. Perhaps one is only permitted experiences like that once or twice in a lifetime, at times when one is least

prepared for their impact and thus most in need, as I was then, vulnerable to the pond's green and silver instruction. The cabin I lived in that summer is long gone, torn down as a fire hazard. But I still have the key to its door in a carved sandalwood box where I keep special things. What I experienced there is still alive within me, its click familiar in memory's lock, the pond spread before me in a blaze of light as I stand at the open cabin door.