

SUSANNA BROUGHAM

A Finnish Lake

The prow of the boat cuts forward. The man pulls
the oars against glass—surely it's glass—can water
hold so hard. His white clean shirtsleeves bleed
sunlight reflected.

The lake moves, blue to blue. Runnels, droplets
oar-lifted slap dull chimes against gunwales.

The blue dress and white kerchief are a young woman
crossing what she can't escape. She forces
a calm, makes
a quiet pool of herself.

The boat is long and steady.

The older woman holds a black hymnal. Her ponderings:
sticks and bubbles, light streaks and leaf bits.

At the heart of the boat, a small coffin. Terrible
vessel, little hymnal shut tight,
music folded away.

The lake grows wider. Slivers of islands cling to the distance.

On the young woman's lap, a packet of bread bound in a striped cloth.
Surface ripples urge their shadows on her.
She has folded her hands against thought.

Far back from the boat's wake,
farmstead buildings slip behind forest.
Birches go sour in evergreen dark.
No one looks back.

Pine sprigs crown the coffin. Where lid meets box, an edging of pressed lace.

The oarsman picks up speed to outrun
sun-bite, cold, the lake itself. Up from the horizon,
clouds fold glare into gray, rising, roughening with wind,
reminiscing higher. This is the past.