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Fishermen's Wake

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Fishermen's Wake

Stonington, Maine

The summer nights are short,
yet before first light
the lobster boats roar out
one by one from the inner cove—
each engine lugging
to its own rhythm, a thumping
bass amplified by fog. Steering
straight for Channel Rock,
bold water in a dark bay
of hidden boulders, they drive
so close to our anchored sailboat
they leave it pitching wildly.

We've just settled back to sleep
when the next one pours out,
a racehorse from the gate,
and sliding from the bunk
I brace my legs against the roll
and open the hatch. Our masthead
lantern still glows high.
The harbor fish plants cast a weird
orange light on the passing boat—
it's close enough to touch, but
the crewmen don't look up, moving
slowly along the deck weighed down
by foul-weather gear and heads
blurry from last night's party.
To them I'm a cartoon sailor
inconvenienced by their commute
to daily work—

but I've been on that deck
at 4 a.m., sodden with sleep
in waterproofs damp from the night,
I've watched the skipper lean out
from the cuddy to curl cigarette smoke
into fog-laden air. He squints ahead,
jerks the throttle to accelerate
the weariness out of his system
and the cranky diesel. We're heading
for that first pull, the mind-clearing
rhythm of engine and pot-hauler,
the work of hoist, bend and clear,
bait and heave and steer for the next trap.

Pot buoys lean and settle
in our wake, color-dipped tops
glowing in the red hint
of fog-eating sun to the east.