Whatever You Say, Wherever You Are

Rick Robbins

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Birch and maple bow, giving themselves back to the ground this autumn, and every walk through leaves begins the clatter of all that lies detached. Something from a river in that noise: the voice calls, coming at you in water bending speech around the rock.

I hear you tonight in the scuff of heels. Whatever you say, I risk believing: the room you sit in now, the gold decor and light, children, a young wife, anything. Whatever you say follows like a bell ringing itself. Bell of autumn walking,

bell of incense and our First Communion, bells of longing—the bell these fourteen years. I sit down at the bank and your words catch current in the stream. My feet stalled, I wonder at my trust of shoes, their ever-walking toward, a dream of meeting you some Sunday at the store. You’d buy your smokes, turn, walk out, and there we would be, agape: longest gone of friends. But all the leaves are fire now, candles burning low and rising as our voices rise. The prayer of priests here drowns out whispers in the fresco, breath

of saints. This Mass they celebrate for children lost at night, carried with the fish to sea.