Cypresses

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Pulled by the roots from a hot Southern town where we unfolded like geraniums, grafted to the icy bayside of a Northern wilderness—fast cars, fast girls, fast tongues!—we fasted till your asthma kicked up and the very air slid through the bellows of your lungs.

At knife point once you gave up your allowance. I dyed my hair and applied lipstick with a vengeance and let the boys come, I didn’t care. You were summer’s fair-haired boy.

You would rather be funny than smart. All night at your blond violin, playing the same tune over again, getting it right: the ode to joy you understood at fourteen, and finally got right, all of us yelling at you to shut up. At seventeen you went under, went into the trees in your new Triumph. I’ve gone back South once or twice, though you never will.

The last time I sat at Cafe du Monde I watched the pigeons swirl like a cape around Jackson’s horse, in Jackson’s square, sky gilded like a rococo sky, a place like any other to tell the truth—perhaps more pink. I went to Pierre Park and the labyrinthine channels of water, now empty of significance. Near Audubon where the silted river slides to the sea with its cargo or Northern sorrows, I saw cypresses hanging their hair in the park’s charred light.

Now you come to me in dreams and tell me, it’s too cold, though the long roots of the trees wrap you round and wind blows warm from the Gulf.