

Gone Too Soon

NANCY LEE CRAVEN

(For Robert Lee Craven)

You left, I think, under the burden of heavy judgment,
Or grief too difficult to bear. I do not know, but I would like to,
Why you left so soon.

Jaunty, a cap on your head,
Jib line pulled taught, with your hand on the tiller,
Creases at your squinting eyes, and your voice aboom.
There, I would best remember you, sailing
On Canandaigua Lake, in the wooden Lightning
You polished with a sweetheart's devotion,
Every Spring, sanding and varnishing away whatever
Devils drove you, on the floorboards that, when you finished
Always shone.

You are, Where? now. I like to think it's
In your boat, or stopping on a snowy trail to watch
The sun spin diamonds off the snow topped pines at
The top of a slope—a rest, before the schussing down
Serendipity or Onondaga Sal—
You know I cannot quite remember the pet name
Dubbed from a slope we skied together, but that you tagged me,
and that without a single doubt, I was your daughter, and your friend,
Then, and now, even when

We are fellow spirits—you long gone, and I remaining,
Honoring your heart, and love of child's fun. Thanks
For that pause at the top of the Hill, to share one moment of snow
and light.

Here I would remember how you always said, "Be a Gentlewoman"
Before you lunged forward, stuck your poles like pitons in the crusty ice,
Then, knees bent, neatly lofted the ski backs skyward,
'Til they slapped like a sportsman's war whoop and—
Me following—the swoop of racing down like twin dragonflies that
Float in iridescent trance, an invisible line between us,
Making the tracks we left behind us switch and cross, and slice

The frozen hills until the snows have melted, mentoring the mind's
Fond memories into one last hurrah and a long and peaceful
Sailing, but not racing, home.