

RITA FEINSTEIN

Self-Portrait as Upstate New York

I am dinner on the table at six.
I am not a salad.
I am the family Bible that survived the flood,
onionskin ephemera wedged between testaments.
I am a wildflower wedding bouquet swarming with ticks.
I am the lamppost in a flowerbed, lit when the electric fence is hot.
I am the seven chickens inside the electric fence, but mostly I am the rooster.
I am waking you up at dawn.
I'm the moon through the maples, buttering the lawn.
I'm enough great northern beans to last twenty years.
I'm a can of fully cooked turkey, just heat and serve.
I'm marshmallows roasting on a stalk of stripped goldenrod.
Dog ashes scattered from a coffee can.
Sheep guts strewn in rotten augury on the snow.
I am the prediction of a long winter, nuclear or otherwise.
I am the olive oil, the tinned tomatoes.
I'm family, family is everything.
I'm a Tupperware of rhubarb pudding.
I'm the last quilt grandma made before she died.
I'm advice first, questions never.
I don't think you're strong enough.
You can't even pick red currants without getting hurt.
I will never understand you.
At times you'll almost hate me, but remember who caught you
when you fell sobbing off the scale.
If nothing else, I know how to grow.
I'll put the meat back on your bones.
The emergency turkey. The emergency beans.
Anything but the emergency room.
You're safe here.
When your own world collapses, lace up the hiking boots you didn't ask for and find your way
back to me.
You'll know me by the basil and rosemary on the windowsill, the shot practice Coke cans
on the picnic bench.
You'll know me by the walnut trees that never produced, the hazelnut trees that produce
more than you can carry.
So I'll help you carry it. Set the basket there, on the cast-iron stove. Heft the metal nutcracker
in your uncalloused palm.