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Lyn Lifshin

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Wintergreen

by Lyn Lifshin

always there in my mother's pocket book
wedged between eye glasses, a broken
watch, coupons, lipsticks, keys she was
always sure she lost. In her last days, she
insisted the lifesavers be on the night stand
near the bed, there to keep her from coughing
or throwing up pills. Like Joy perfume and
Jolie Madam, a whiff of wintergreen is
a smell of my mother, the color in her last
years she always chose as she longed
for emeralds, for green to move into late
Vermont winter snow. When I see a field of
it, smell the minty scent, I want to scoop
it up and bring it to her. She already started
seeming lost and scared, was terrified if
she called and I didn't pick up the phone.
Peppermint or spearmint wouldn't do. It was
wintergreen in silver foil, clean and fresh as
a night the stars are silver fish, the moon a
silver apple. I wonder why I didn't make a tea
of it for her, if anything else growing smells
as fresh. When we drove in Murray's car
thru Silver Moon Diners and cranberry bogs
my mother always asked if I'd like one, gave me
the roll, smelling of her lilac scented lipstick
and for years, faintly of Mariboros and
Tareytons, the sweetness melting as the city
did behind us, comforted like air the first day of
snow when nothing is stained or walked on.
In the last pocket book she used, wintergreen
still scents the lining longer than the bitter smell
of Compazine and Librium, Demerol, Lanoxin,
pills for nausea, pain, anxiety, fear

