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The Day the Air Was on Fire

Reg Saner

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Corn in conflagration!
The great retreats of the Civil War!
Marriage in conflagration!

Years—An empty canvas.
She scrawls across radiant space

E . . . I . . . SON! I made this, the date,
name within name.

The Day the Air Was on Fire / Reg Saner

All afternoon neither of us said
“This air’s on fire,” though both felt it
and felt in sunlight like that, death
was impossible, or if possible, overrated,
even trivial. The sky kept showing off
in all colors, each of them blue
and we trekked that enormous plateau
whose tundra darkened or flared in one broad
autumnal crackle of burnt orange, then gold,
drifting under islands of cumulus
as if somebody’d laid out the pelt
from a sunset. Towards the nearest of two
schist cairns studding the highest stretches
we knelt and touched late gentian corollas,
still half bud. “How long till first snow?”
Days, not weeks. But with outcrops insisting
the last word should be stone, then flaking
and falling away from that, we noticed
how each tuft put them to use
improvising soil from palmfuls of grit,
saying “If not this season, the next—
perhaps the one after,” and coming on
very small, coming on uphill,
against everything.