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Matisse

Edward Hirsch

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Matisse · *Edward Hirsch*

To begin with a light as vivid and warm
As the strong brown hands of my mother
Braiding my grandmother's hair
For a Saturday night dance in the country.
All over the house there are preparations:
In the basement my grandfather is soaping
His gray beard in a thick mist rising
From the water in a steamy iron tub;
Upstairs my sister is trying on her pink shoes
And red slip, and her red shoes and
Pink slip, and her orange dress. Outside
I am watching my peasant friend Talosha
Trying to teach my eldest brother Claude
A real Polish polka. Father says it is
As hopeless as trying to teach a French pear
Sapling to grow Moroccan apples. Everyone laughs.
Everyone. I'd like to begin with a light
As warm and vivid as that laughter.

And I'd like to end with the red interior
Of an enormous country house blazing with lights
For the dance. My grandfather is wearing
A string tie someone sent him from America,
My grandmother is drinking real peach brandy
In a coffee cup. My mother is dressed
In a dress the color of crushed strawberries
And my sister has decided on a navy skirt
With a red sash and a bright red scarf tied
Around her neck. Even my brother can't take
His eyes off her. And me? Well, I'm drunk.
I am whirling around and around the dance floor
With Talosha until the bright peasant blouses
Become a steady blur circling on the walls,
A dizzy whirling of lights and stars. And then
My father carries me upstairs and puts me
In an enormous double bed with satin sheets.
And then nothing else but sleep. And this:

All night I hear the music in my head;
All my life I dream of dancers whirling
Through the trees like colorful wild beasts.