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The Laughter of Boys

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I chewed a toothpick while the dog squatted reflexively and let out a stream of piss over a skeletal windowframe, a stained glass of Christ with the halo still intact. Two blocks down, the Civil Guard, Franco’s peace keepers, whistled down alleys and tested storefront locks as the sun flecked off their black patent leather caps, their spit-shined knee-high boots, the blue gun metal of their sub-machine guns. The street, otherwise abandoned, was even without cars and the lugubrious Spanish pop songs on radios duelling window to window. As the two Civil Guard neared the church—they must not have seen me across the way—I watched them almost pass but heard two metallic clicks—their safety locks switched off—and standing, I saw them aim their guns toward the church, squint through sights, and shoot such an interminable round of fire that it effaced the dog, obliterated it except for a black tuft of its hair which floated horribly up and away even in that seemingly windless day. The Civil Guard laughed together, looking at that single tuft of hair until they heard me say Jesus Christ, and eyed me keenly, brushed by their guns, and laughed again, walking off in unison, smoke rising neatly behind their shoulders.

**THE LAUGHTER OF BOYS**

The laughter of boys lights up after school on the black asphalt parking lot near my apartment picture window. It is the cackle of a bonfire, but a fire that crackles over a stack of green logs, a sound that comes from so far in I can’t remember when it left. And when I watch the boys flick lit matches at each other and dodge the bites of the yellow-blue flames that hiss out on the ground like innocence,
I think of my life as burning toward an end. But it is their laughter vibrating the glass which I want to take back inside me. It is the restlessness of being young. If I could laugh in the company of myself and not feel that other person inside me holding his breath, saying Be careful, don’t embarrass yourself, then I might turn away from the fatherly whistle that splits up the boys like sparks and not watch them cup matchlight under their chins, each a ghostly mask bobbing home, dimming out as boys do.