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# Fireworks

William Olsen

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## Two Poems · *William Olsen*

### FIREWORKS

My neighbor follows his phone cord  
out across his porch to the plush voice of his easy chair.  
Downstreet, barechested athletes aim skyrockets into a sugar maple  
and are desolate voices again.  
Out on the street that buried the town fathers  
some voice walking to work left his canvas glove  
reaching out from the tarmac without a body to pull free.  
Soon the firehazard voices of the bars will be  
boarded up to keep the darkness in.  
Like an extinct people, the emptiness of the streets  
brought about one great going home,  
the dead cars resurrected

in a roar of transcended place.  
My neighbor with a mouthpiece to another world  
is perishing in my thoughts and it doesn't even hurt.

\*

They're absolutely harmless this evening,  
about as apocalyptic as a sparkler in a child's hand,  
these exclamations of longing  
that used to be water and light and a little dirt.  
My neighbor to the north jabs a Roman Candle  
into his lawn, and how like smoke he is.  
His kids scream narcs and pushers and Martians and Zarconians,  
stand shirtless as in a frieze under Vesuvius,  
as if they had been born and bathed clean

and named inside a hospital of fire.  
They stare at the flames waiting for something  
meteoric like the beginning to begin,  
for a burning door to appear.

\*

But here in this millennium my neighbor  
whose voice spends its evenings uttering its citizen away,  
out loud, so every interested party  
can hear how many friends afloat in calamitous seas  
grasp for dear life to the frayed rope of his advice

pulls up in a Vega, steps out from  
his car of the first magnitude,  
mounts his porch, cradles a ringing telephone  
and stands there talking while he holds his ears—

\*

What good can our small talk do  
all our neighbors homeless in their feelings  
behind snapshot windows the street lines up,  
the newlyweds two houses down who scream  
pots and pans and dishes as long as  
one last joy remains intact?  
They must sound even stranger  
when in the blue snow of a television  
they mouth each other's  
shipyards and estuaries,  
collapse to the tame  
wilderness of the bed.  
Excuse my American lust  
for endings, for  
each stadium of earth

lost under a hoarse din of light  
released by flames that never would be flames again.

\*

I drift downstreet and take in the fireworks,  
sidewalks gray with squibs and the spindrift of Black Cat scraps,  
each star the punk-lit tip of a fuse.  
The skinniest shirtless kid in the universe runs across  
the street to hug my leg, a balsa Cessna  
with a broken propeller in his hand.  
The simple cure for everything

is to blow it up and let each ash  
that used to be part of an airplane  
break into many ashes saying  
forgive us for becoming less than fire.

\*

Here in the stalled heart of the country  
the stores close down, in the antique shop window  
the bridal gowns hold out their lace sleeves  
to the stilettos of the willows.  
Maybe seeing is a kind of copulation  
from which issues  
the nothingness of a night.  
Maybe your eyes groped through  
jail cells of fire,  
and you could touch what you  
saw and not destroy it thank  
God or godlessness for that thank  
the least leaves creeping out,

a strange gunpowder breath on your face,  
embers like eyesight falling through the trees.

\*

Each match flares up  
its very own holocaust on this street,  
illuminating kids who came from some place further  
even than the dark houses where nothing has changed for years.  
And any sulfurous alien who wants to  
is free as a burning witch to look off at a sky  
given over to the Everlasting Yea of Aerials,  
to dandelion fusillades in the gloom,  
ribcages unlocking incendiary hearts.  
So light the Frightened Birds,

The Howlers, the Flowering Plums,  
the Tanks with their blue clouds of death smoke.  
All prior attempts at happiness have failed.  
These are no scared children  
half naked on the naked lawn of ashes  
who walk armed into the vast oven of night.