

2008

The Flame

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Recommended Citation

Ray, David. "The Flame." *The Iowa Review* 38.2 (2008): 138-138. Web.
Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.6512>

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DAVID RAY

The Flame

for Etheridge

I once wandered into a second hand bookshop
and came across a slim volume of my poems,
then took it into a bar and sat over a beer.

Some of the poems were not so bad, although
I would rewrite a few if I could reclaim magical
or not so magical moments that inspired them.

But I was hardly my ideal reader—not like the one
my friend Etheridge Knight encountered one night
in Kansas City. He and I wandered into a tavern

called The Flame, and in the dim rosy light sat
next to a young woman who was reading a book.
After a few minutes Etheridge asked her what she

was reading, and she held up a copy of *Belly Song*,
and he informed her that he happened to be its author.
“Perfect,” he told me later. “Now I can die happy.”