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The Resurrection of the Body and the Ruin of the World

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THE RESURRECTION OF THE BODY
AND THE RUIN OF THE WORLD

Kissed for the first time, I was cornered
behind a tree at recess by Heather Wilson.
Until I stung she pressed me into the bark,
until my shirt was sap-specked, hung.
I wrenched from her, the clumsy pop
between us, my nervous word, echoing
as I ran, dizzy scared, cotton mouthed.
On show-and-tell day our courtship ended:
Heather was to perform for class
a baton twirling routine. Desks were moved,
a turn table set up, she changed
into spangles for that lumen hour.
Her emergent shimmer she dedicated
to Kent Goodwin, skewering me
clean through as the record needle
dropped onto the hazy groove of
Eddie Rabbit's "I Love A Rainy Night,"
a 45 I sometimes find in jukeboxes
or on dying AM radio stations no one knows
how to hear anymore. Tonight's damp
quiet falls from the roof like bits of soap
or snow—
at night Chicago radio is clear.
Sometimes Toronto if it is cold,
the sky scrubbed raw. I say names out loud
because the air's a poor listener,
the best forgiver. Questionable behavior,
I know, that leads me to the questionable science
of those who believe
the voice's energy is undiminished
by time, its thin diatoms furl forever
through air, as if the sky were a giant chalk conch
spiraled from the dirt up
and away from us, returning

not a siren's empty set, white noise,
not the ocean's licking whisper,
but the muddle of all lapsed talk,
that, for example, we might reclaim
Lincoln reading the Emancipation Proclamation
from the ionosphere. That we might flicker once more
the first words of love that from our mouths were
lit candles falling through napalm.
That the shortest distance is not
one, but zero.
Here come the lost
spears I threw from a flashlight into the night sky—
and there they go. So simple and straight
there could never be anything curved
or crooked, not smiles, not teeth, lips, voices or lives.
And yet I snapped my spine in two places
like a charred wick when I was twelve.
Kent Goodwin died
a year before from an undiagnosed brain tumor.
The dead in Christ shall rise again,
shall bring to my father's mouth the hush
that comes at odd times
when he quotes the book of Job to me:
When he hath tried me, I shall come forth as gold.
It's then that tears might be unworkable—
the body only a house-fire,
a hard, bloody cough into the fist
that leaves each eye a pincushion of embers.
There they go. Dusk fireflies, sparklers, a silver baton,
world without end. Inside, the radio is haze
through the dark as I hold my breath,
as my lover asks before taking me into her mouth.
All the gods of love die once more.
I watch her hair fall forward
along the lines of her face, draping
over my hips. It blurs into
the question she'll ask later, if it's mussed.

No, I'll say, but now I imagine nerve endings
that wire through each strand
on her head as I touch the heel of my palm
to her and shudder. She seems to drift through me
slowly, and yet stays.
Into the dark I go more than I come
and on my way I give my mind
to voices that speak beyond ideas of gravity,
that do not rise or fall, or bloom
as we imagine the humid lives of lilacs.
I'm hardly there; but here—
small and distant
as a star whose light quickened long before
tonight. The voice
of a lost friend places its mouth on mine
and all I can think of is stopping
his words that lurch even after weeks,
that Heather's now a lesbian grocery cashier
in a town miles removed.
Despite insistence I don't care, he winks, saying,
c'mon, you know you drove her to it, you'd pay to watch.