The State

Ken Poyner
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You get the windows. I'm driving
Nails through the door casing, pushing your prize
Antique chest against the porch door.
Our son is under his bed, reading
With his flashlight. Up the street
The crowd is arguing with a man
Who leans out of his second story window
And soon they'll be pulling up his garden.
Regardless the worth of their rhetoric
A truck has pulled to the man's stoop
And quick-eyed youths are loading onto it
The man's patio furniture. Washerwomen
Armed with stones stand in the road,
Weigh angle and arc. Janitors
With mops and brooms have caught
A young housewife outdoors and I'm afraid
The political polemic has come down to tatters
Of the woman's clothing caught on our fence.
I understand it's all about education,
Summer camps, the Skinnerian way our children
Are raised. I heard one woman screaming
How many children will be square roots,
How many decimals, how many quadratics,
As she had a young middle-class girl by the hair,
Dragging her through rosebush after rosebush.
I share their concern. Our son under his bed
Laughs every time a rock hits the house.
Several people in this block worry the problem, worry to lose
The individual opportunity to turn to different mineral.
Support for them is so high that no one has called
The police. Different circumstances and we might
Be out with the mass, promoting our own
Rational alternative. A group angrily tugging
Their children from school I hear
Broke into a television repair shop, beat the owner
Half to death, ran off with forty-two
Television sets. The shutters shut, I sit
In my own chair, hand dangerously close
To the French phone. Outside day laborers
Pull the brass numbers from our mailbox,
Yell that our house is better than any two
Owned by the workers they know, yell
That all they want is their children's future.
I sit quietly with all that I have,
Wait for them to get into the liquor store three blocks down,
Grow frenzied a little while more, then subside.