The Flame

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Recommended Citation
Available at: https://doi.org/10.17077/0021-065X.6512
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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.”