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Flambeaux

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Flambeaux

“Sing your songs, Rupert the Rine,
but I’ll not listen, though they tell me
you’ve a sweet voice.”—Jean Rhys, *Wide Sargasso Sea*

Because the woman was in paradise first,
the paradise of her body: a hybrid, Creole gift
of white skin, eyes dark as a marmoset’s,
and the paradise of frangipani, even of humidity
which bathes the thing and washes it,
and slows the passing of time, like a clock
thrown in a river, winding down . . . her auntie’s
cotton stockings, cotton drawers, cotton slips,
all washed fresh and ironed on a hot day
when the work girls come laughing home from church.
The first thing that burns is the sun doused in the ocean,
and the same burning in Our Lady of Immaculate Conception,
framed in the parlor over the armoire,
(her heart with its sword on fire),
and the burning of the boys’ flambeaux
at carnival, because the black boys carry their flames
out of the heart of the island, on all of the islands.

Because the woman was in paradise first
there was no where else she could go
but down, over under, through and into,
the sound of carnival carried into the trees,
the wild, frangible girls in their feathers and gold,
and like the cypresses that drink up the sound of the river
she drinks up the sounds of the carnival, though her auntie
put cotton in her ears and into her own ears. . .
Now they have lit their torches and begun their dances
and the woman, watching from her safe veranda,
is infected with those flames
just as her mother’s house married the fire

as she would one day marry the fire
rushing headlong into the caesura
burning up her days in a cold place in a red dress,
the only thing that burns and consumes
in her purgatory of snow, in distant England.
Sing your songs, Rupert the Rine,
all these islands is burning now.