

Summer 1992

Independence Day

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Independence Day

Drunk on the blaze of my personal arson
and good Tennessee whiskey, I staggered
backwards twenty snaking yards
from my trailer to an oak with a view
of Kiwanis fireworks. Never mind the drought
Southern Illinois was in the middle of—lighter fluid arced
half a halo in front of me sending undergrowth
crackling and hissing in ashes to heaven.
The blurred outline of my friends through the wall of flame
spurred me on. They were the wicked, quenching
my prophet's fire with an earthly garden hose,
mortal buckets and tea kettles of unholy water.
It was vision I was after, miles of it,
punctuated by pink and green screaming meemies
and Roman candles. The bottle rockets we'd shot
at each other merely tickled and I wanted to scrape the sky
to yell at the Almighty. I scrambled up the tree
in time for the hollow finale, a giant dandelion
of Sousa flashes that sent me disappointed down
into the gentle arms of a blackout.
I woke unable to articulate
“hangover,” the wet-ash smell of war thick as ink,
the charred path behind my trailer still smoking,
beer cans and the pitiful skins of firecrackers

dotting the yard. I stayed in the shower forever grateful
for fire that burned so far and no farther,
but I could not cool the sting of vision limited
by recklessness so easily halted: the blank slate
of acres on acres of hardwood forest burned
uselessly might have rendered more wisdom
than my crooked destruction, meager
in scope, unnamed ivies already rooting again.