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# The Laughter of Boys

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I chewed a toothpick while the dog squatted reflexively  
and let out a stream of piss over a skeletal windowframe,  
a stained glass of Christ with the halo still intact.  
Two blocks down, the Civil Guard, Franco's peace keepers,  
whistled down alleys and tested storefront locks as the sun  
flecked off their black patent leather caps, their spit-shined  
knee-high boots, the blue gun metal of their sub-machine guns.  
The street, otherwise abandoned, was even without cars  
and the lugubrious Spanish pop songs on radios duelling  
window to window. As the two Civil Guard neared the church—  
they must not have seen me across the way—I watched them  
almost pass but heard two metallic clicks—their safety locks  
switched off—and standing, I saw them aim their guns  
toward the church, squint through sights, and shoot  
such an interminable round of fire that it effaced  
the dog, obliterated it except for a black tuft  
of its hair which floated horribly up and away  
even in that seemingly windless day. The Civil Guard  
laughed together, looking at that single tuft of hair  
until they heard me say *Jesus Christ*, and eyed me keenly,  
brushed by their guns, and laughed again, walking off  
in unison, smoke rising neatly behind their shoulders.

### THE LAUGHTER OF BOYS

The laughter of boys lights up after school  
on the black asphalt parking lot  
near my apartment picture window.  
It is the cackle of a bonfire, but a fire  
that crackles over a stack of green logs,  
a sound that comes from so far in  
I can't remember when it left.  
And when I watch the boys  
flick lit matches at each other  
and dodge the bites of the yellow-blue flames  
that hiss out on the ground like innocence,

I think of my life as burning toward an end.  
But it is their laughter vibrating the glass  
which I want to take back inside me.  
It is the restlessness of being young.  
If I could laugh in the company of myself  
and not feel that other person inside me  
holding his breath, saying *Be careful,*  
*don't embarrass yourself,* then I might turn away  
from the fatherly whistle that splits up the boys  
like sparks and not watch them cup matchlight  
under their chins, each a ghostly mask  
bobbing home, dimming out as boys do.