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ARSON OF OLD YEAR

Bourbon opens like a lotus on your tongue in December
and sets up a smokehouse in your mouth. Remember those fortunes
you tied to the iron gates? Break the strip of paper, and they release
like Luna moths, fluttering slivers of lime. Nowadays, you don't mean
prayer the way serfs used to. Nowadays, prayer is a stalled motor and you
light your smokes in gasoline. Red ignites the fog but you are only
a signal flare away from the river's wet belly. The flame, an umbilicus
twitch, the air's worm. You walk over bridges. You walk from gate to gate

smelling the air for stale blood. A near-dead raccoon
shudders to life and then can't stop bleating. How many small animals
pray by way of half-eaten flower, of half-drunk river? We
can't sleep with the gray light in our eyes. Never let your feet face the east
lest they burn up dancing on the sun. Always drain the lighter fluid
in the last minutes of the old year before fireworks bust up the sky.



BLUES FOR THE HEROINE'S FIRST DAY OF SCHOOL

Under their robes, students flinch when I approach them.
Beaten, they speak only to their shadows. I kick up sparks
with my metal heels and they shudder, ignorant of the love affair
between flint and tinder.

I feed them pear slivers from my hands. Some things only ripen
when you soak them in a different sun. See here, the purple flesh,
see the purse-locked mouths. When I desire power, when I hem and
haw,

I cloak myself in the thing least likely to give me up. Run it

into the swampland. I dig and all that comes up is water. My greatest
fear: no one touches me, but I bruise at the sight of hands. I yellow at the
sight of nightfall. In bed, I curl and uncurl like a weak-hearted flower.

Lose

the wafers in my bones. Lose the coconut phone calls, the un-echoing cries
from swallows who fly before bats. One flits, the other flickers. Drone

that wasp song. It's our song. Stitch that veil, hurl that cloak, clone
he shadows into darker than dark, where the moon wags her tongue.