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The Man Who Burned His Poems

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THE MAN WHO BURNED HIS POEMS

It was that easy, to light page
after page after he'd finished the manuscript.
His hundreds of poems were tinder, their images so vivid
they turned to tongues of orange and red.
Poems about lakes and rivers and streams quickly
threw up their arms
in flames. They were that ready to

lift themselves from his back yard.
It was his ceremony, after years of
in a closed room, writing those verses no one else read.
He watched his lines, his stanzas, his endings
igniting as the flickering rushed
from the corners of the page toward the middle.

It wasn't enough to just write the words, words
about mountains and lost friends and bleeding pens.
It wasn't enough to just write about the sheen
of the sky in the morning, or the heavy wool curtain of
night, or the bright red cry of a child. He needed to
make his poems burn, needed to give them the gift
of fire.

He knows that when the cinders finally sift from the thermals
and fall back down from the heavens,
the earth will be sprinkled with something
so rich that anything could grow in it.

But for now, he just strikes another match and watches
his words, his love
float upward in swirling ash
and fly toward the sun, each poem perfect, finally
as the wings of a fragile, black bird.

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