

My Great-Grandmother at the Fire

Last night, I dreamt about the fire
that burned down my great-
Yaya's house right before the civil war in Spain.

This first heartbreak pressed like a cracked rib
into an alveolus, so that it seemed
as though time was stilled for such a little thing.

Before the compounded achings of all her losses and lovings,
we both stood, in our ghostly ways, watching.

I, wondering when she would run into the fire,
just like the story I had heard my whole life.
She, I can imagine, was wondering when the fire
would run out of oxygen.

Once, I watched the train pass by as I lay in a tree.
Later, I watched Dani pick up the pizza boxes
when Tyler's family came to visit
and considered the time in between both these small moments—
what it meant to change in between them.

All of my stories start this way.
Let's take the night and cut away the dream;
let's take the poet and cut out the story
where he stands outside a room and watches.

I was in love and then it was over.
How many names disappear like this?

Last night, I also dreamt that I was back home
and you were not there, but I felt your absence nevertheless.
Maybe the dream was about home and not about you.
I came to believe they were the same.

I knew a psychic who told me that maybe
my dreams were about my detachment from history—
my tendency to believe my motions are flashes in a pan.

The point is, I watched my father's Yaya, the vision of her pulsing red
like the very heart of the fire she was,
and understood there was nothing in that house to save.