

# Trailer Park Psalm

Bless us, Lord of corrugated tin,  
of crooked windows held against the wind

with mold-dark duct tape, of roofs repaired  
in rain that would not let up.

Bless us, Lord of all that patches, holds,  
is good enough—plywood, foil, fast-dry foam,

my grandma's hands that worked  
our wood stove chimney back to shape.

Bless us, Lord of the mildewed scent  
my grandma raised me in—

of carpets singed by cigarettes,  
ashtrays made from Folgers tins,

Hamburger Helper and discount meat  
in cedar-shadowed kitchens.

Bless us, Lord, as we were back then:  
a pack of knobby boys on bikes,

girls with creosote-lined eyes  
and smiles slick with gloss.

Bless our uncooked Northwest skins,  
ghost white except for Ian's,

who called out, *How, white man*  
and punched whoever laughed.

Bless Jake, his red hair lighting the street  
on the night his trailer burned—

he fled with his bike, a bag of CDs,  
his stepdad's .44. Bless Jorie

whose twin sisters died  
and came back as raccoons.

Bless John, who chewed dry cat food  
as he swaggered up the gravel strip.

Bless blackberries fat with summer rain,  
dark as blood from thumbs we pricked.

Bless bracken, birch, Douglas fir,  
the nettle's electric ache.

Bless the sword fern's dusty seeds  
that ease a nettle's sting. Bless the cedars

we climbed at dusk until our trailers  
looked like toys. Bless Rick in the woods

with his butterfly knife, slicing only rain,  
unfolding his blade with flourishes

he gave religious names—*Heaven's Sword,*  
*Angel's Teeth, Handshake with God.*

Bless the possums who spoke in tongues  
at night in the neighbor's trash.

Bless Dick, eyes emptied by a war  
we were too young to know,

who guarded the mail, cigarette unlit,  
always on patrol. Bless the dark

of Northshore Road, where Jake hid  
as his trailer burned, where his mother

had crashed their pickup truck  
in snow the year before.

Bless the firs that tried to stop her.  
Bless Jake, Lord, he went to war.

Bless Jorie, who left for Mexico  
and Ian, who said she was heading west  
though we lived as west as you could go.

# A Secret

If a boy's palm curls to cup the whisper  
of flame, if he stands passing a butane lighter  
back and forth with his friend,  
it is to learn how beauty burns the fingers,  
how the forbidden holds inside it the holy—

the lighter's hiss and click a spell, an incantation  
among young pines where Whatcom Creek runs  
below the hush of wind in cedars.

Now his friend, who has carried in secret  
a tattered sack from the Lummi Reservation,  
lifts a fountain firework, lights it  
and summons a shower of sparks  
into the dry, white heat of June.

How could they know, standing just feet from the creek's edge,  
that the water itself would burn—  
sparks blossom on the current into a crest of flame,  
a rill of widening fire,  
their clothes effervescing, then their breaths,  
the needles of the pines incandescent—

