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:
we were back then:
a pack of knobby boys on bikes,
girls with creosote-lined eyes
and smiles slick with gloss.

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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—
while, not far from the office of the company
    whose pipeline had leaked,
I look up from my homework,
    the windows of my grandmother’s trailer shuddering
    in their crooked sills.

Two boys, whose initials notched two desks at school,
    had discovered the secret leaking toward town—
    had saved us all, the mayor said—

boys my own age, whose names stand on plaques in Whatcom Park,
    whose stories parents whisper like a warning:

    Stephen Tsiorvas, Wade King,
    they who called a secret forth into flame,
    who found a burning world inside our water.