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Sometimes Lightning

Sometimes lightning misfires.
Instead of disappearing into open sky
it flings itself against the earth,

strikes the ground in a concussion of elements
that melts sand and rock as it courses downward,
vitrifies the soil and cleaves a path

tunneled in tubes of glass.
Fulgurites, the form of lightning captured
into what you can hold, energy seared and palpable

encrusted with unfused sand. Once my father
sat alone in a barn, a small boy
with his lantern, enclosed by night

and the company of horses. He told me this
when I myself was small, how the barn's
ancient timbers lifted the darkness above him

and the lantern's flame spilled light
through the glass chimney, shaping shadows
and an awareness he suddenly knew

he would remember, complete,
for the rest of his life, as if an instant
were an object he could handle and admire.

And hand to me so many years later,
child to child. No one knows
why a moment, a bolt of lightning, leaps

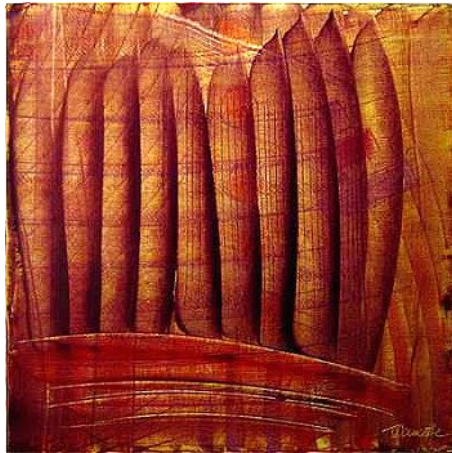
from its destined course toward forgottenness
and encases itself, a memory we carry
our whole life, while others perhaps as remarkable

disappear in the blank sky of history without
notice. My father was a man changed.
No, it was nothing distinct,

nothing that anyone could recognize,
but inside him, like the hollow
hardness in the fulgurite, a place

he could find, the rapture of a moment
retained. The world is on fire all around us.
Sometimes we glimpse it. My father is dead,

the barn torn down, but I remember
his eyes alight, witness to when fire
enters secret places, brands us for its own.



Glass Darkly

On the simplest of days when you ride in silence
with a friend in his car along the coastal route
where the landscape passes beyond your window,
gray bands of brush, field, sea, fog, and a sudden
flock of birds leaps as one body into the air,
crosses the road, swerves into another direction
a flash of light across countless winged bodies
then veers in shades again, what makes the spirit
soar to meet them, an interval of freedom
from the body's bounds, and though you ride on
retain for some brief time the loftiness of wings?
There must remain in us a remembrance
of former things that like a sparrow at a window,
sees his image, flies to the glass again and again.

Sally Ashton

Sally Ashton, MFA student at Bennington College, has had previous work published in *Reed Magazine*.