

Burnt Edges

By Samantha Russell

The gasoline's scent clung to the air,
a familiar moment twisted in an instant-
flames in the shape of memory,
hungry, devouring the quiet before us
Your hands blistered from the heat,
tore open the truck's metal mouth,
lifting us from the inferno,
your breath ragged, lungs filled with smoke,
yet still, you pulled us from the fire,
your voice steady through the chaos

But now, as I stand in the cool shadows
of the years that have since hardened,
I wonder how that same voice grew so silent,
the grip that once knew no release
loosened with time, letting go without a fight
It is not the fire that haunts me now-
not the searing of skin, the crackling sound-
but the smoldering quiet that followed,
the slow burn of absence,
how you, who once defied death,
now defy the living

Now, I see only the ash of what we were,
a father whose instincts kicked in,
who once chose to sprint into the blaze,
but now chooses to stay away,
as if distance could douse
the inferno that memory became

You were the man who saved us-
this I cannot forget
But how does a child reconcile
the hero with the ghost,
the grip that saved with the hand that withdrew
The flames licked at our edges that day,
and though we escaped,

they left marks, invisible, unspoken,
burnt into the space where you should be