

MATTHEW BURNS

A Burning

High dusk in the high desert: hills
oxidized, the sun fights to burn
through the quintillion motes of smoke
 carried on the imperceptible wind
 from a whole family of wildfires

that appeared in one long, dry night
like so many wanton visitors
 and their ashy baggage.
 We all look up at this ruby—

no, this candy orb—no,
this: full-crystalline bauble blown
 of nameless minerals. Just heat
 and color and light sent: a gift

of unwrapped blades. We can hardly see
or cough. We can hardly think to do anything
 but stare, unsure, and look away
 so the scalding ghost of the sun

can burn still in the backs of our eyes.
The smoke is so thick that, love,
 I can feel every mote
 of your frightened breath

tumble like dry waves against my ear.



ABOUT MATTHEW BURNS

Matthew Burns received a PhD in creative writing from Binghamton University and is an assistant professor of liberal studies at SUNY Cobleskill. His poems have appeared in *North American Review*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Quiddity*, *ellipsis...*, and *Memoir (and)*. He lives in upstate New York.

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