

Fireflies

By Rebecca Gerdes

Behind tall talking trees
that are only silent when you can't hear them anyway,
down an angle of masked road
right off Highway 51

a child, Tammy,
prays to bursts of light
then pulls illuminated stomachs from spindly legs,
and wears the glowing ring,
glad it is only almost alive.

And when Daddy mows the driveway
that's when pebbles dance,
sand and stone and Tammy's chubby finger
joined in dusky faintness,
gleaming like the twinkle of a distant star.

And the child,
grasping a shovel
worn to sickly orange,
like a triumphant banner of plastic pageantry,
reaches up till hand meets sky,
and grins.

Till Momma thinks of chameleons
against the backdrop of night
and Daddy hefting up, hauling up, holding up
up beyond the sky his little daughter,
thinks of a corkboard in his office
pinned up and lined
with negatives of rooms full of mouths and mouths full of teeth
so big and white and holy
that virgins couldn't do better.

Across his eyes, almost too quickly,
settled on his shoulders
(the shoulders of a giant, she thinks)
Tammy flourishes her baton
so far above the earth
she almost forgets the firefly...

till, practical, Momma calls,
and the family goes into dinner,
leaving only

a shovel on the porch.

lightning on the ring finger.

and fireflies, spotted and illusory, above the grass.