

## Histories

We share in the appetite of flames  
as stalks of grass cinder, chasing the fire  
which speeds like ants across the field.  
Black smoke curdles when it touches  
the air, its lunged shape pouring out  
behind in enraged Scyllian tails.  
Ryan's father and grandfather behind us  
barking orders, where to point the hose,  
while they calmly lure and break the blaze  
with shovels and rakes, their flannel shirts  
nicked with embers. They say the grass  
will grow back greener, taking root in the wake  
of struggle. Ryan jokes about tradition,  
how it can lodge in the most unlikely places,  
its traction dragging like a frayed belt across  
the appliance of our lives years after  
we have forgotten its caliber and use.  
A seditious cog in people's tolerance.  
You'd heard it before, all Doukhobors  
were pyromaniacs, Sons of Freedom  
and all that. But it was the other things,  
the schools where they hit you  
for speaking Russian, the years in jail,  
that bolt down hinges on the door  
where our custom for remembering will stop  
to remove its shoes before it enters.  
In his over-sized gumboots Ryan races ahead  
to stomp out a rebel flame trembling  
toward a clump of knapweed gone to seed.  
Behind him the older men hard under  
the fury, three generations carrying fire  
like a censured injury, ironing their pounded  
smiles, their grass hearts kindled as if  
all their histories began with fire.

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