One Nil

by Adam Strong

Each step you take on the pitch

Each mile driven down

Each closed exit of highway

Blocked avenues of importance

Boarded up

Hammered

Nailed shut

People and places and things

You can't get to anymore

The knife and the needle

The black and the bilious

Run down the field

You and the ball

The only counter attack

Open goal

Goalkeeper rushing forward

Pull back for a shot.

Think twelve

Think 10

Think ten tears on ten math tests

Self hatred is a bitter taste in your mouth

Think wedding ring that won't come off because you don't want it to

The folds on your knuckle that keep it on

The ring

The thing that grounds you

Holds you and keeps you from

Driving through closed off highway exits

From certain people

From certain places

Where the person you destroyed is larger than the person you've

built up

The legend lives on

But here on the pitch

A chance to right the ship

Turn a sinking season around

Your laces on new boots

A ball with smears of Oregon Clay

That ring on your finger

The cold weight to it

28 degrees and the steam out of your mouth

That ball and all the things that came before

A chipper they call it

Ball floats up

The pelota in Spanish

2nd place in Spanish spelling bee

This is what self hatred tastes like

Caracas, 1990

Standing there with a Polar in your hand

A girl from Spain

She's right there

She's that open goal

On a pitch

12 or 40

It's never too late

To volley that bastard up

Out of the muck it came from

Let it shake the asses off the goal

Shake the ground

Down into the pit of your twelve year old

Nervous stomach

You who cried

For all the failures

Because you tried too hard

The past is a breathing thing

Capillaries and lungs

Flesh and blood

21 grams of ash

All of life measured All of it lives in the gut Breathe a breath Collapse and fall Failure and retribution One nil