

Blowing Up While Fading Out

by Anthony Van Hart

As a kid,
we blew up a fish.

We shoved a bottle rocket into its respiring mouth and lit it.
When it didn't die,
awestruck,
one of us flicked it back into its habitat
while it slowly descended,

its wiggles fading -

we watched it naturally bury itself.

Later that day I set off M80s and more bottle rockets with a lit
Newport
while secretly hoping I'd blow my fingers off for the fish.

But I only got grounded.
And told there must be a black cloud hanging over me.

It was the last night of summer.

The breeze danced through the screen and past the shade in my
room,
calming the guilt in my heart
while kids reveled, laughed, and "made time" with the
neighborhood girls on that final night of freedom.

No one would talk to those girls again until next year.
Or winter break.

They were summer specific.

Mostly.

I can still smell the cool night air and hear the conversations that lived vibrantly without me while the moon rose and my eyes flickered until it faded away.

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