

Burning Trash

by Elizabeth Hazen

Boys start fires all the time— it's a rite
of passage— so when your father gives you the task
of setting fire to the family's trash,
you don't mind, and when the flames ignite

inside the old dishwasher he heaved
into the woods behind the house, you smoke
a cigarette, glancing up the path, and stoke
the flames with a stick. Above you sneaky leaves

let through a glimpse of tomorrow, but today
is still consumed with the past: yesterday's news,
junk mail, cardboard boxes, empty bottles. The fumes
of crackling plastic make you sick, but you stay

until the week reduces itself to ash.
You're a little let down that the fire doesn't last,
doesn't leap from the dishwasher, spreading past
the forest's edge; all that burns is trash.

My love, be patient — you who are so taken
by the promise of destruction, so watchful
for what lies beyond your father's woods: the pull
of future like a girl waiting, naked

and certain. Soon enough you will learn
that not all fires can be contained, not all traces
of the things we throw away can be erased
with a single match, and even as you yearn

for new fire to burn a path away from here,
the old flames smolder, and the steely walls

buckle, and from the distance your father calls:
his voice grows louder with each passing year.

