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Neighbor

Nathan Furr

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Nathan Furr

Neighbor

When the wind becomes bitter
and the snow stings my eyes
I think of you Hejtman—
Salzburg, March 1939, Getriedegasse—
carrying your sacks of books to burn.

I think of the excitement in your face,
more than a child's, and the vision of flames
that crosses in your thick glasses like the clouds
of many sunsets passing at once.

I would laugh at this image of you,
because it seems so typical,
so much like the adventure movies now
where you would be
a black-hearted Nazi, a mad dog.
You would stumble
over the words on your tongue.

This would be the easy way,
except that you chewed slowly,
you stepped off the sidewalk for people passing,
appreciated pastry and good music. If I could shock
then I might have something to claim,

but you were only a man I knew,
a friend of my neighbor on Hanuschplatz.
Remember the Christmas party? I told the joke
about the three dogs and you laughed the hardest.

Three months later, going to burn books
with the rest of the town,
I bumped into you
knocking your glasses awry on your face.
For a moment the still of your blue eyes
met the silence of mine,
until I recognized you.
Then we ran together
like brothers to the fire.