

How To Be A Child

by Fran Duffield

It was just that I was unsuited,
I could tell,
to being a child: alone,
inhaling the dusty scent of books,
spineless, singed brown with age,
peering at the decorated capitals
in the half-light
creeping through chenille curtains

my only nearby friend
exiled by his mother
to healthy play with lads outside:
I watched, teeth chattering,
from unheated upstairs,
uninvited to their bonfire,
their distant ring of faces glowing

briefly in the swaying fire,
shrieks at the fizzing sparklers
echoing from the terraced walls

I already knew I hadn't passed
the test of being in a crowd,
playing in the team:
poring over my miser's hoard of paper
was my comfort in my premature
old age, wanting to believe
my pen would be mightier
than the sword of separation