

# IMMOLATION

**WESLEY  
ROTHMAN**

That damn eagle snaps out Prometheus's liver for thieving fire every day. When I wake I place a hand on my own for receiving fire.

The tattoo parlor down on the corner is charred; everyone saw smoke as they drove to work. Though oil burns blackest, you never see the fire.

I'm working four jobs just to get a career. Some say *reputation*, others *who you know*. Some praise *luck*. After thirty years Dad's been fired.

Why is self-immolation defined by euphemism? *Voluntary sacrifice or denial*. No

mention of tongues. Malachi Ritscher lights up rush hour, even his fingers seethe fire.

Running the dark shore, agave thins us as we kick up sand curtains, consuming each other in Mexico as the border hills breathe fire.

Discover how to strike the flint just right. Sparks grow stronger: contractions as mother startles her child into life, matchfire.

The cold night of nature is a school of its own—moonlit desert shrubs, the hollow forest clearing—where I learned the word *bitchin'* and love songs by the campfire.

Memory gurgles like a pot of boiling water, founders like the phoenix, becoming fiction. It is itself and entirely not. It is called familiar fire.

Night fog weighs down the coast: thick wetness, into sand, asphalt, beading the glass of gaslamps, then searing for the lush liquid fire.

Closed casket, funerary urn, crypt, and catacomb: death has become a privacy.

How glorious to go down at the screaming sword tip, to rise bigly from the honest pyre.

From one Sunday to the next the old man's world grew stranger, more foreign, like the journey eastward, its architecture and languages—sharper and more fiery.

Invent a flaming metaphor. Not the sacred heart, renewal, or sex, but virus, thought, the wild attempts to articulate fear.