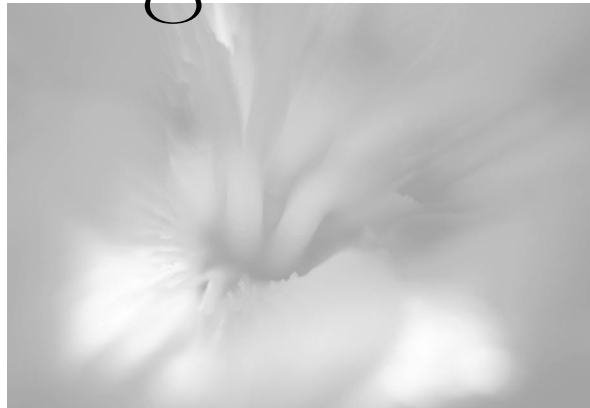


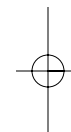
# Things That Burn



JACQUELINE BERGER



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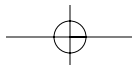
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## THE FLOOR

All week we carry  
the old dog outside to pee  
and bathe him on the deck  
in the sun when we are too late.  
My beloved brings a bucket of warm water  
from the sink, dips the cloth and lathers the dog.  
Belief is beside the point.  
If the universe is full of meaning  
or empty, what difference?  
The dog is wobbly, suffering  
from what the vet called *geriatric vestibula*.  
Vestibule  
of the inner ear  
that welcomes the world into the body  
as a winter traveler, leaving the chilly station,  
briefly warms herself in the entrance  
before sliding open the door,  
finding her seat on the train.  
An infection or a small stroke,  
and the calm sea of balance  
sloshes over. We steady  
the dog until the floor is level  
and the room stops spinning.  
Once I loved a man with no furniture.  
A year after his divorce he was still living

out of boxes. We ate on the bed,  
using an atlas as a table.  
There is a map to everywhere,  
only a matter of finding it,  
and he was determined  
to survey his life,  
every landscape cleared,  
the honeycombed heart cleaned out.  
But to sit quietly with suffering  
as beside a creek one has walked a long way  
to reach, to lie back on a rock in the sun  
and to breathe the sweet, green water,  
to feel how grief given enough room  
softens, this I learned later  
when my heart was more than broken,  
was powdered, coarse sand  
the body gone through fire  
turns into.  
Every day now  
we are on the floor with the dog.  
I like it here where it's cool  
and where the crumbs of our meals have fallen,  
and hair and fur,  
what is usually far below us,  
once only the bottoms of my feet  
but now my whole body  
a citizen of this other world  
of what is dropped and lost.