

# what's left of lake erie

by sam deleo

the steel girders of a burned down mill protrude skyward,  
then curl away from the sun, wilted as if from drought,  
frayed from the particularly intense heat of the blaze.  
they say the accelerators used signal an inside job,  
ex-worker, failed executive, maybe a laid-off janitor,  
though this fury spoken in twisted angles of repose  
is all that remains of the arsonist's statement.

twenty years ago, I sensed a homecoming like this  
might be necessary to release what's gone unsaid.  
in the meanwhile, I have forgotten exactly  
what it was we had been saving to say.  
memories can never bloom again,  
and so slowly spiral inward.

the lake seems calmer now, a swirling murkiness  
lidded by a metallic sheen roiling its skin.  
the hammerings from the foundaries,  
continual dronings of the generators,  
the ghost dance of locomotives  
muffled in velvet,  
in wet air.

no one is left.  
or their places have been  
filled, or they have left to fill  
the places of others elsewhere.  
it seems to me only you remain,  
still remembering my childhood. I can  
still see the cold creme trapping the tears,  
your flannel nightgown and hair in curlers,  
and father and I leaving you in the night to wonder how  
it was the other woman felt better, what words she spoke.

the city's faded brick and mists from the lake  
appear only slightly more muted in the faces of the people,  
until everything, person, sky, water share a monochromatic bond,  
and hope dissipates as quietly as if it were a consequence of geography:  
what great distances get swallowed up while we grasp for the simplest joys.

I wanted to remember just to relive the forgetting again.  
the arsonist gains resolve from an intimacy with his targets.  
my enemy is wider than the lake that keeps the town in shadows,  
and time has washed all the familiar features from its countenance.  
a whole lake dies to be reborn, and with it, all the old selves who peopled its  
clouds.