

||| EMILY MATTHEWS

When my grandfather was a young boy,
his mother's dress caught fire while she,
bent over,
tied his shoes for church.

She,
afraid of catching the house on fire,
ran outside
and tried to roll the flames out.

She,
afraid of what her son might see,
begged,
stay inside.

My great-grandmother burned to death
on that Sunday morning,
her son still by the fireplace,
his eyes tightly shut.

When my grandfather was a young man,
he volunteered at the local fire station
and fought flames
for many years.

I wonder
if he ever closed his eyes
when smoke hit the back of his throat
just right.