

the blaze with a forked
madrone branch. Soon there
is fire between us
again and more heat
than we can bear.
Our shadowy pattern
flickers on the peeling
wall. My body fills
with warmth where it is
touched by the glowing
of your fires.

BEHIND GERSHWIN'S EYES

*Nobody else smelled burning garbage because
Gershwin's olfactory sensation came from a
slow-growing tumor on the right temporal
lobe of his brain.*

—Joan Peyser, *The Memory of All That*

They did not believe him.
They told him the smell
of burning garbage was all
in his head. Some mornings
it was all he could do
to lift his head from
the pillow. Some nights
his brain was on fire,
songs he thought would take
a hundred years to write
suddenly aflame behind
his bulging eyes.

Dizzy in the barber's
chair, dizzy before
the chorus, dizzy
on the tennis court.

They did not believe him
even when he was adrift
in the first movement
of his Concerto in F.
He felt darkness beyond
the footlights seep
into his soul, nothing
but a sea of dream
everywhere, and heard
the echo of unplucked
strings, a quiver
of timpani dying out
quickly as one long
note from an oboe
wafted heavenward.
Then he found himself
back in Los Angeles,
familiar body still
upright on the piano stool,
Smallens with his baton
frozen at the shoulder,
only to blunder again
in the andante and they
told him nothing was wrong.

Dizzy in the Brown
Derby, dizzy before
the surf, dizzy
in the swimming pool.

They believed he was
not happy in Hollywood.
*There is nothing wrong
with Gershwin that a song
hit wouldn't cure.*
It was in his head, he was
lovelorn or he was riddled

with guilt, he was balding
and drooling, muddle-headed
by noon, listless underneath
the stars. They believed
him sapped by motion picture
making and longing for New
York City. Those hands
once a blur on the keyboard
could only move slow as flowers
toward the sun yet nothing
was wrong. In the spring
those sandaled feet
that could only shuffle
in the summer garden
had been quick as flame
to his own new music
yet nothing was wrong.

A blade of light
where the drawn shades
meet. Roses without odor,
icewater leaping from its cut
glass goblet, eyes leached
of luster in the shadowy
mirror of his brother's eyes.
He spread chocolates melted
in the oven of his palm
up his arms like an ointment,
and soon he was gone.