

The Burnt Child · *W.S. Merwin*

Matches among other things that were not allowed  
never would be  
lying high in a cool blue box  
that opened in other hands and there they all were  
bodies clean and smooth blue heads white crowns  
white sandpaper on the sides of the box scoring  
fire after fire gone before

I could hear the scratch and flare  
when they were over  
and catch the smell of the striking  
I knew what the match would feel like  
lighting  
when I was very young

a fire engine came and parked  
in the shadow of the big poplar tree  
on Fourth Street one night  
keeping its engine running  
pumping oxygen to the old woman  
in the basement  
when she died the red lights went on burning  
everything was said  
to be alright