

# Light Your Fire

Phillip Louie

Go on, then. Light your fire.

You offer me water, bread and a cell.

You call this life. What know you of life?

Look. Look at these hands you cast in chains.

My callus shows through the palm of my glove,

where blisters burst beneath my horse's reins;

the leather darkens red. I spur her side;

between the hoofbeats I'm lifted—weightless—

dawn meets me above the trees, frost-lit grass

flashes silver, the larks spring up and scatter.

Then saddle, spine and earth collide. Again.

What know you of steam rising from her neck,

of white breath flaring in the morning cold,

of warmth that finds me first before the field,

of larks so near their wings beat at your ear?

I climb the spiral stair and meet the sun

again, with fewer rays each turn, before

the light departs the summit of Orléans.

I lift the banner; sudden gusts wrench free

blood-darkened folds from my palms. One handprint

remains upon the cloth. It snaps alive,

louder than cannon-blast below the walls.  
The wind bears what my blood has won.  
What know you of outrunning the sunset,  
of wind going cold upon sweat-drenched skin,  
of hoisting blood and flag over Orléans?

I set the bells of Rheims alive; their peal  
still quivers through me, my breath a bowed string.  
I lift the crown upon my fingertips;  
my dirt-lined calluses now bless the gold.  
What know you of the gold flakes mixed with earth,  
where both lie earned inside my callused palm?

Light your fire.  
But your hands are soft—give me the brand,  
I'll light it myself.

It's not these hands, nor what they've borne, you fear—  
but what in me they serve. Unarmed, I bear  
my only weapon: my own certainty—  
unshared, unborrowed—mine. An upright spine:  
this is what I carry. I do not bow.  
I stake my life on my judgment—I think,  
I know, I judge. What know you of this?

Light your fire.  
Set it high. What lives in me will not catch.

You've written out my guilt; I tear the page.  
I see the foam around your mouths; you want  
more than my death, more than my corpse and ash:  
I must be made to kneel, be made to loathe  
my mind. Burn me now. I will never bow.

Light your fire.

