

One night a moth flew into the candle; was
 caught, burnt dry, and held. I must have been
 staring at the candle, or maybe I looked up when
 a shadow crossed my page; at any rate, I saw it
 all. A golden female moth, a biggish one with a
 two-inch wingspan, flapped into the fire,
 dropped her abdomen into the wet wax, stuck,
 flamed, frazzled and fried in a second. Her mov-
 ing wings ignited like tissue paper, enlarging the
 circle of light in the clearing and creating out of
 the darkness the sudden blue sleeves of my
 sweater, the green leaves of jewelweed by my
 side, the ragged red trunk of a pine. At once the
 light contracted again and the moth's wings van-
 ished in a fine, foul smoke. At the same time her
 six legs clawed, curled, blackened, and ceased,
 disappearing utterly. And her head jerked in
 spasms, making a spattering noise; her antennae
 crisped and burned away and her heaving mouth
 parts crackled like pistol fire. When it was all
 over, her head was, so far as I could determine,
 gone, gone the long way of her wings and legs.
 Had she been new, or old? Had she mated and
 laid her eggs, had she done her work? All that
 was left was the glowing horn shell of her abdo-
 men and thorax—a fraying, partially collapsed
 gold tube jammed upright in the candle's round
 pool.

And then this moth-essence, this spectacular
 skeleton, began to act as a wick. She kept burn-
 ing. The wax rose in the moth's body from her
 soaking abdomen to her thorax to the jagged
 hole where her head should be, and widened
 into flame, a saffron-yellow flame that robbed her
 to the ground like any immolating monk. That
 candle had two wicks, two flames of identical
 height, side by side. The moth's head was fire.
 She burned for two hours, until I blew her out.
 She burned for two hours without changing,
 without bending or leaning—only
 glowing within, like a building fire glimpsed through sil-
 houetted walls, like a hollow saint, like a flame-
 faced virgin gone to God, while I read by her
 light, kindled, while Rimbaud in Paris burnt out
 his brains in a thousand poems, while night
 pooled wetly at my feet.