

JESSE NISSIM
FIRST PLACE

Fire

*Darker than snow on paving stones...
The poem was called, "I forgot"...*
There is no relation...

—Michael Palmer

The poem was called snow. It was a poem about seasons and climate change. The poem was called there is no relation. The poem wasn't called and it wasn't calling; she hadn't written it yet. The poem was called dry leaves fall from overhead or how to grip your keys correctly—and later, it was called tendonitis, then cookies and cravings, and finally recycling bin. The poem was about dry tree cuttings. The poem was called fire, about a man jailed for inadvertently starting a fire while mowing his front lawn. The poem had numbness at its center and tingling into its extremities. The poem had poor circulation, or it was waiting by the library's circulation desk to be read. Or, the poem took its form from the concept of the card catalogue. The poem contained a strong argument against technology. Its images depicted a beautiful woman or man carefully attending to a filing cabinet. The beautiful person's care towards the cards and the file drawers' metal handles and the small type of the text on the cards could be understood as love. The poem was retitled *Love*, or *Library Love*. The poem began to be about why humans need neutral spaces like libraries. The poem was about the poet's need for a neutral space, a place to go when she felt disorganized. Everyone agreed it was a giveaway title (the kind that ruins the piece by saving nothing for the terse internal lines). It was this new thing in poetry they called a title takeover. It supposedly stopped you from thinking freely about anything.

It stopped the poem's power and could become dangerous to humans as well. The poem was called *The end of poetry* or

The end of poetry about poetry, and then everyone had to choose a place to stand. Everybody had to choose whether to stand on the one side or on the other side of this red line drawn between the title and the poem. It wasn't clear who put the line there or how they got it to stick, but someone shouted out rudely, "Has this become a Beckett play, because if so, I'm leaving." And there was laughter or a whole wave of laughter because although it was once cool to be into Beckett, it was not avant-garde enough anymore. All the people standing on the title-side of the red line seemed to be laughing and the people who stood on the poem-side cried, "Beck-ett, Beck-ett," and stomped their boots. It was getting hostile, the air changed pitch and someone (we're not sure which side they were standing on) threw a hard object at the overhead light, breaking the bulb casing and sending a spark across the ceiling. The poem was about mayhem. It was about how lack of language leads to war.