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National Anthem, and: Homecoming

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National Anthem

If, then, a country could be saved, may we
all be its pulse & schematics. May our flags
kneel for us. May nothing reign. May *one day*
mean Tuesday, & may our planes on alert
over Khost & Riyadh whisper love songs
to the canyons beneath them. May weddings
go on for months. May guns gather bullets
back into themselves like fishing line. If
a country could be saved, could wave lagoons
too be a part of it? Could slot machines?
Could a country be lifted like a god?
If Modesto comes back, could Saturday night
we drive T-Birds to the Wolfman? May
dawn's early light lacquer our faces. May
Huck & Jim— May group text— Let every
coal seam spit back its dead. Let the many
of us be one, the one be numerous
& mongrel. Imagine *spangled*— & may
each of our stadiums smolder. May marching
bands dazzle & thrall us, *their drums like war*
no one will remark, their winds & brasses
forming the tightest of scripts. The seamstress,
we know—age 13—who dyed the cotton
& cut the starlight in the flag Francis Scott
hailed was a servant girl, Grace Wisher. May
we, in the poem of our country, be such
exquisite stitchwork. May *synecdoche*
mean “fruited plain.” “Beautiful river.” In
that country, nuke silos swallow missiles
down like hot dogs. In that country, cop cars
flip Snapples to day laborers. May stars
blaze. May landfills flower & hum. May one
by one we gather, then, in the swollen fields
of our republic, above us the rockets’



red glare growing faint, some praise-song
swept upon us utterly, like a wind. May *we*
we will say—which will, one day, become us.

Homecoming

Gettysburg Area High School

Here though a faith
the nation could be salvaged with—
pick & roll
drills at pregame, layup lines. Here skyhooks
hanging like ornaments.
In America
our monarchs sit courtside, queen
shining in her cheap tiara,
texting, the men
of the king's cortege letting Milk Duds
arc cleanly to each other's mouths. How
coolly they reign, as if
at last, after history, this were
in fact our home. Here
ghost tours & pup tents.
Cycloramas. Here bronze artillerists
studding the tended lanes
of our battlefields.
For irony—after
the amputations, after
the lice & gut rot, the war
came home, at Appomattox,
to a living room. Here Lee
slack in a caned loveseat. With company
in the anteroom,
Edmund Ruffin, wrapped
in Confederate flags, fitting a rifle
to his mouth
for forever. Isn't there



always, afterward, a touch
of domesticity? A marriage feast,
Luke calls heaven, a home
of many dwelling places.
Perfumes. Sun decks.

Of redemption,
though, I know
no finer form
than the wheel route the Warriors' star freshman
runs from the free-throw line,
the forward cutting, guard
passing to a spot the stretch four
has not yet arrived at.

Here emancipated
slave families lifting the roof beams
of the future. Couldn't you
believe that history
were a husk merely?

Here,
in the small country of the gym, jump shots
rain like mercy. Men
press their bodies together, the pep band's
saxes glittering, our queen
with her retinue bending,
now, to accept their sashes.

Afterward
there will be dancing. Bounce houses. Here,
the chips & bunting. The ball
made of plastic scattering one light
in a thousand directions at once.