The Old Mattress

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Cover Page Footnote

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Before it was burned to dust
the old mattress lay in a coyote grave
back behind the trees.
They had it taken from
a rusty red dumpster
filled with must and maggots
perched on the concrete
like a sick bird.
They dragged the dead bed back behind the park.

They wanted to pretend
it was a great white castle
and he could be the prince and she could be the maiden.
He was seven and she was six
And they were draped in innocence.

The mattress sat exhausted.
Left in the damp air to rot
skin turning a rotten banana yellow
stinking of mildew and mold.

Morning.
The smell of rain in the air
the sky dyed blue.
They found broken beer bottles and cigarette butts
all around their castle
and they asked each other,
“What strange things we have missed?”

Night.
They went out together
found some older kids – drinking
two of each sex
splattered across their castle like wet mud
stripping down to the bare backbone
bodies twisting and turning
and pumping and smacking and clapping
the girls on their backs –tout a vous–
while the men slithered and coiled inside.
And they watched.

The children never spoke
about what they'd seen
because it was their white castle
under attack
and all of the good and the clean
were beheaded and burned.
And when they would touch
or kiss
they would always see their desire
as a dirty old mattress
sitting out in the rain.

DANNY UEBBING