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An Explanation

by Albert Goldbarth

They say this really happened, in the Church of Eternal Light:
a penitent dropped to the floor wearing nothing but sweat, she
spasmed like some snake on an electrified wire, she uttered
angel eldestspeech, and then she disappeared—they mean
totally, and at once. First the entire tarpaper room gave a shudder,
and then she disappeared—at once, and totally.
Nobody understands it. Well,
maybe I understand it. Once, in 8th grade, Denton Nashbell
had an epileptic seizure. Mrs. Modderhock squatted
above where he flapped like something half a person
half a pennant, she was pressing a filthy spoon to his tongue.
I've remembered him 25 years now. And—that woman? she
was the universe's tongue the universe
swallowed. That's as good an explanation as any.
Once, in sleep, you started a dream soliloquy,
the grammar of which is snow on fire, the words are
neuron-scrawl, are words the elements sing to their molecules . . .
—I threw myself across you.
It wasn't sex this time. I just wanted to keep you
beside me, in this world.

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from *Heaven and Earth* (the University of Georgia Press)

