

POETRY

WHEN WE MISS OUR NAMES

When I miss my name in the dark,
drive right past, turn off on a dead-end
road that ends by the trailer park at the slow river
where someone has hauled the TV outside
on a long cord and gnats swarm around the image
(a woman wearing white mink and heels), and
offers me a Schlitz and a torn lawnchair,
then my name rocks a little in the wind.

It can't believe it, can't even call out
(which would be against the law, and the dark
old laws of the names do not bend). The dust
boils up in my wake and curls around
the place where the name was waiting,
standing, and settles on the shoulders
of the second-hand uniform it's been obliged
to wear, dogging me through this world.

It thought for sure this time.
It thought I had learned, thought the past
year meant something, that a turning
had arrived. Now it must decide whether to hitch
with the couple from DeMoines, or wait just
in case I return, or sit in the ditch and cry.
Should it give up roads altogether, set off
through the scrub toward the bayou where

over time the suit would tear and shred,
fall away, and the walking shoes it wore
only for me, to keep up with my insatiable need
to keep moving: kicked off, left. It could soften
then, blow open, be gone. Back where it came from.
There is a place, it remembers, pitch-bright,
quiet, and it thinks it was happy there, before
someone (was it me?) called it to be.

Nancy White