

Christopher Buckley

Eclipse

This was predictable, a science
of heavenly bodies, and Sister Stella Marie
told us how Columbus, knowing
his charts and stars, astonished
the inhabitants of the New World
and saved himself and his men
saying — as the sky went black as metal
for five full minutes — he would not
return the sun. . . .

And so at half past
9:00 we were marched out of Arithmetic
and 1956 — fraction and flash cards swimming
across our desks — and onto the playground.
Each of us had one eye closed and one brown
negative our mothers packed us off with
pressed to our other eye as the sun slid
like a dark half dollar into the greying
envelope of the sky, an ink blot
bleeding through.

The morning turned
the color of tea and poured around our
outstretched arms; I saw the yellow moon
of the tether ball turn pale as skim milk
and the shadow of the flag pole dissolve
into the asphalt. The sun burned fully black
and Sister admonished us not to look
directly at it or the fringed light of creation
would burn our eye blind.

The softened
smoky air, the ghostly figures on the negatives —
a bleached tree, the first house I could remember,

my father with hair whiter than a star,
foreshadowing the ash he would become,
that we all were, there on the other side
of light —

 revolved in the dim and unfamiliar
daylight like a constellation of dust,
like talc shaken off the shoulders of an old coat
over the grey sea.

 I watched the cold blossom
of time dissolve while the soot of light lifted
and turned finally back into high blue gauze,
the red edges of our fingers pulling
the sun back to us above the bright horizon line —
all of us there below it, shining again
for a short while, adding up like clock work,
before the common denominator of the dark.