

Grand Theft Auto

after Fatimah Asghar

It was the season we tossed in cleats for first jobs,
seven months before any of us would receive our
driver permits in the mail. A cool summer, probably
only weeks before we'd learn to hijinks a keychain,

swiftly lifted off the kitchen table in anticipation. Back
when we were honest. Fake smooth. Too young to reach
the gas. Before we'd stallion the swollen roads in the ill
of winter, we were a faithful crew at the alter of imagined

violence, congregating around the basement television's
static glow. Clenched knuckles, eager to fasten erratically
around plastic buttons, to practice the exact timing of
a tossed grenade, the patience behind a sniper's aim.

Massacre to massacre; Turnstile of bloodlust and
incessant riot. We'd take turns heaving tanks on fire
from building tops, mow down a whole sidewalk's
ecosystem with a Hummer's grill. Bludgeon cop cars

with each furious pixel pinned beneath the tyrannical
rule of our thumbs. How little we knew of the world
and its boundless, unfortunate truths. Before our proved
bruises, when we'd watch the air left between quotations

stuff itself into a pine box. Years before M was found
comatose, a stampeding ribbon from his sleeve; Before
C's head combusted around a willow tree that split
the road. For us, death was reboot. A change of hands.

A question of who died with more fanfare or a banner
of stars. Us, patriots. No alliance but to the galloping joy
of fiction, whether we the dead or death dealer. Enamored
by the game's inchoate spectacle. Some nights to oblivion.

Played faithfully until our palms caved, wrists stiffened.
Before the merchant of cruel desires would eventually
find a monster of the week that we liked better dead.
Before we'd find new toys we could turn to slaughter.