

KATE HARDING

Hot for Teacher

Can't help asking, What's new? What's happening?
He looks at me like I'm on glue.

“Could be 1987 for all I know.”

Which I knew, didn't care to believe, because
this was the man I would rewrite my adolescence for,
place squarely at the action of a deliberately false memory,
wherein we loved for more than minds, or words,
for more than one second at a time.

The reality: him too skinny, old, married.
Me too illegal if nothing else.
Neither of us interested, 'cept theoretically.

But in the version I meant to whisper at grandchildren,
once senility's dissolved responsibility to the truth,
there were tongues involved, to say the least.

Then he had to go and tell me nothing's changed.

I'm like, couldn't you pretend?
Give me credit for some scar or burn or
one of the two poems you published last year?
Earn your keep in my damn story?

He reached into the depth of a file drawer,
produced a paper I'd written, all dot matrix
and perforated trim, said he still uses it to
show his students what an essay can be.

A model, a learning aid—

a trophy. I know damn well why he kept it.
Same reason I quickly blocked out
the ugly uncle sweater,
the 1987 comment,

chose instead to focus on the
timid embrace, the

“Come back soon.”