

Lionel Kearns / ONE TIME

You know the story. The matches
are forbidden, so the little boy
takes the matches secretly
out of the house one afternoon
and does what he has dreamed of doing.
Secluded, where no one can see him,
he carefully selects a match, strikes it
touching some grass which smokes then
goes out. The second time
there is a thin bright flame
under the wisp of smoke, the flame
running down a stalk of dry grass
jumping to another, burning brighter
jumping again, spreading to other
dried stalks. It smells like
dry grass burning. The boy
pulls together some more grass
and puts a few little twigs on top
to feed it. The ecstasy of success.
It is burning. His own fire. He watches
it. You know the story: soon
the whole hillside is on fire
and delight is turning to terror
that lasts for thirty years and finally
turns into a poem. And what
is this to you and what is it
to me and why do I say it is
about time? Because

I knew the boy
I know the man
I read the poem
I saw the fire