

Anna Nickerson

Sixteen Forty-Five

Untimely winds in sixteen forty-five
Blow through the windows, wake the paper rose.
This is Sweet Briar, the Tudor seal, it binds
One kingdom with another, fire with fire.
Its five red petals breed six warring tongues
That in the silence spell our hexagram.

War means supplication: the hexagram—
Once print, now prayer—in sixteen forty-five
Fends between adversaries. Old tongues,
Grown grave, recite the Prayer Book and the Rose.
This is the trial of fire and fire, for fire
Alone holds fast that which hell's fire unbinds.

But now our cropped, uncivil Samson binds
Five foxes, brush to brush, a hexagram
Of blazing damage. Kinship, threat, and fire
Contend for right in sixteen forty-five—
Until the Lord of Liberty arose
And drew the temple down on English tongues.

Huntsman, lord of a thousand blooded tongues
Master of the hollow forest, who binds
The aged with their heart's desire, the rose
With senseless fear: your ancient hexagram
Is riven oak, for sixteen forty-five
Has purged the kingdom, and its men, with fire.

Come with your houndsmen to the household fire:
Here is Herbert, Tyndale, Eliot—rare tongues
Who in the fires of sixteen forty-five
Found prophesy fulfilled. Their writing binds
Past with present: a poet's hexagram
Of ever-living fire and unseen rose.

This is our hexagram: the Tudor rose
Of sixteen forty-five unfolds its fire-
Tongued text: this warfare is the strife that binds.