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"Mrs. Grossheim's, 1955," "Never Again"

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Two Poems
RONALD WALLACE

Mrs. Grossheim’s, 1955

It was on fire — Mrs. Grossheim’s store, with its beat-up wooden tables and wooden floor cluttered with wonders. But we were only twelve, so when we saw the smoke, could we believe our eyes? And wouldn’t Mrs. Grossheim have it all under control? Her weathered hands and grizzled brow and musical commands — Hey you! Sweet things! Come on into my store!

Did she die? Did she lose everything? Did we think that world immune to time and chance? Could we have saved her? There’s a Walgreen’s on the corner now, slick magazines our substitutes for what was once romance. Did she count on us to save her? Did she?
Never Again

How many times in the history of regret have we heard that phrase: never again!
Given the mishap, the scandal, the disaster, the unthinkable coming to pass (and how could it have happened?) we shake our collective heads.
We grow solemn. We’re outraged, we’re incredulous. We trot our poor sympathies out. And then

we set up our panels and commissions, commence our investigations, issue statements and advisories and reports.
We note mistakes were made.
We remove the bad apples from the bin.
We put into place procedures, institute new rules and regulations, provide watchdogs and fail-safes, backups and redundant systems.

We’ve all learned a painful lesson. Next time we’ll leave nothing to chance.
We’ll get to the bottom of it. It will never happen again.
And again. And again.