
Trench Welfare

We are stationed on garages and in trees, feet on two leaving slopes, ground from a copper-heavy bird. Leave me what the bird leaked from its pillow chest and I'll spread it so thin blue will let the light.

We make holes with dirt and a shovel behind a garage with a yellow light bulb, burn rust from the blade standing barefoot on the lip to pack down the berm. Bomb shelters are dark, trenches shadowed and long. Roots grown through are hacked to the white and trees do not seem to notice. Shallow bedrock means we can only dig ourselves in so far, leave our watermelons dangling above ground, so we crawl and sometimes lie and watch the rocket flight of birds cut the erasure marks of jets.

Damp earth takes the ah out of August while we drain the canals of irrigation water to make puddles in the thirsty dirt. It feels like a race and the strategy for winning is to consider my toes while hair covers my ears. We think to sprinkle dry dirt over the water surface because that is what you do to hide a depression.

Two fences away and our mothers do not get quieter; distance takes even a strange face and calls it brother. You have to be about a hundred and three to know that divisions are no good, that one man is the next and so on until the bullet reaches for the back of your head. You must know beyond the headlight.

Water stands the soft hair in our ears, with heads back so just our faces float paper-plate thin. This memory will come to visit with a bucket of chicken and a drunk volleyball, but I still look for his feet in the water and must listen for him in photographs. Stan Miller's wall-size painting of the Columbia I thought I would drown looking at and find lost Indians underneath, living on smoke. And then the lines melt against each other like tire marks in a soft gravel alley behind my house where I poured everything good into a coffee can, dropped a match, and ran.