

For the Dead

Carol Bachofner, Poet Laureate, for Memorial Day 2015

I dreamed you in your chair in front of the TV, watching the ballgame.
I dreamed you at the table over hot dogs and beans
I dreamed you throwing shoes out back with Uncle Joe
I dreamed you dancing with a beautiful woman to music on the radio.

I wondered about what soldiers dream
after all the smoke and fire is done.

I wanted to save you from yourself — from the dreams
you had that exploded every night like the shrapnel in your leg.
Instead I watched you grow old, dreaming places
I will never visit, hellish places you kept from me.

You say don't think about such things.
You say let me dream this for you, let me
suffer for you. All night long water goes
rushing downhill to the sea, the same sea
you crossed for me, for all
the men's daughters, wives, mothers.

Long after the guns stopped, long after the fire you saw,
you just want to go to bed and dream of ballgames won,
dinners that don't come from ration packs, eggs right out of the shell,
or of Uncle Joe with both legs, his sure-fire toss of the shoe.

But you cannot leave anything behind: the shelling, the burning,
burnt-down places filled with ash and bodies more extreme,
more curious in their dying than you wish they were, you sitting up in bed
long after midnight, shivering from what's in your dreams.

I dreamed I called you,
but you, parts of you
still in your foxhole,
could not answer.

Not even on days like this one.