

Tia Ballantine

A State of Grace in Another War Zone

These are the photographs no one ever takes.

Mornings rising from the pavement
a stench of trash-and oil fume.

She has a collection of Coke cans
piled in puddles, protected from behind.

Flames leaking from a second story window
before firemen chop a channel and it rains.

Quick muffled flashes on the night
repeating nothing, going nowhere.

One figure, thinner than last week
shouldered on a sudden winter sky.

It sometimes plays against burnt toast.

Someone else's coffee, steaming
on someone else's heat scarred formica
in someone else's kitchen with plastic curtains
catching debts of sunshine
on walls that hide the wind.

There is shadow, green with cold.

The first howls of impatience
and the slow of an early commute
drained outside the tunnel,
this liquid escape of January.

Staying close to traffic,
only steps away.

Trying to remember other years
when spring came early
and it didn't matter.

We had a fire and curtains, warm socks,
a toilet, a doorbell, and a rug.