

WANDA FRAZIER

In the Zone

Spotted

Sleepyhead nods beneath camo kevlar.
Sandy eyelids rise and fall
 rise and fall, like the tide of the salt marshes of his youth.
Sweat washes a clean streak under his helmet,
 sprouting high and tight since the Dawn.
Looks up from the underground barracks.

Spring has arrived in The Tropic of Cancer.
Migrating birds have been interrogated
 tagged and sent on their way.
Binoculars cradle between his bruised knees
 coated thick with olive oil.

Oleander shrub blooms passion pink.
She smells as sweet as his wife.
Cinnamon stick fingers caress her hair. Turn it grubby crude.
Picks off the petals and eats them, nectar and all.
A Mantis rocks, kneeling on a mat of leaves.
Checks his watch for the next prayer time.

What's left of the staircase no longer crumbles when he leans against it.
Grass grows between the mud steps, where he stores dates
 and bread he dug from the arid ground.

Vest opens half unbuttoned.
He pats his chest pocket

warning a recluse. He tucks in and
pulls a cigarette from an opened pack.

Lights the tobacco end on the fuming dune.
He inhales. Leftover smoke disintegrates into speckles of dreams.

Wailing and sirens lift his head.
Screwworms now fly overhead,
 honing in on his face. Mines primed to dig in and eat their way out.
All mouths open.
Sleepyhead shoos them away,
 swatting the life out of them.

More black flies. Thousands harmonize in a capella.
Growing fat. Almost bursting. Circling, then dive-bombing the pit.

He told them to go. To go back to their crumbling houses. Do not fly over. Do not land.
Not on this staircase.
Waving his signal arm in front of his shining face,
 the flies and his hand go around and around.

Cocked

Night vision turns on a pin.
Crossbars scope below the rooftop lookout.
Jaundiced eyeballs roll along concrete outlines and parked Pajeros.
Under the moon and the star, all he sees is green.
Walls speckled with blowout peepholes.
Crumbling roofs and collapsing staircases.
Dust and sand.

A sling dangles across his chest.
The barrel of his weapon rests in an arc of sand bags.
He crouches on a sandal, more ready than prone.
Identity wrapped in a sweat soaked balaclava.
The black flag of his recruitment raised over the Tropic of Cancer.

Beside him an unrolled mosaic rug.
Desert flat.
Lead dunes.
His chest rig, every pocket with magazines.
A brown Russian.
A black German.
A box of rations with a red label written in French.
A dull butcher's knife coated with olive oil.
Loose head of a godless dog.
Tongue hangs through a spider's web.
It's that time of year.

Night vision eats with the screw worms,
grinds the remains of potted meat.
FIGS would taste as sweet
as his wife
committed to drying beside him
bundled in white shrouds.
His right index finger salutes her spirit
then smooths the single hair trigger.

A date palm obscures his view, leans far to the left.
Orange fruit exposed.
In the daylight, he will pluck it. Clean off.
Tear it with The Biter. Whip it till it bleeds.

Coyote calls grab his barrel
tweaking aim.
Intimidation travels from the beaches.
The bustards are running.
Dust cloud destiny rolls across the desert.

Before it pulls him,
before he rises,
a phantom rises
in front of his scope.
A puff of smoke
waving black flies
around and around.

Wanda Frazier designs greeting cards, bookmarks, postcards, and broadsides under the name, *Wanda Writes*. She won the 2014 poetry prize for the Stuart, Florida False Key Anthology. In 2012 Wanda was awarded Honorable Mention in the Bethesda, Maryland Poetry Contest. She lives in Port Saint Lucie, Florida.