NANCY KNOWLES

Sixth-Grade Homework

The towers saturated with dawn stand
1,368 feet high. Divide the height
by a pink eraser and average two airplanes
to determine the angle of descent.
In the lengthening shadow of declivity,
how many lives will collapse?

       We're arguing here
       and it's ticking.

Calculate the rate at which young people seek
the paths of glory belonging to their fathers
and grandfathers. Violence implicates
us all, fragile bodies similarly subject
to the law to kill people against whom
we have no complaint.

       This permanent war
       eats us alive.

On the adult male cheek, stubble grows
at the speed of 1 mm per day. Assuming
a gas mask requires smooth skin, how
often will Joe need a shave? How much

will the Pentagon have to pay? The next problem
will include cupcakes.

       Disaster does not improve
       with collegiality.

We take the bait. Humpty Dumpty always
falls while the left hand lights the conflagration.
How soon will children wishbone each other
to reach the precipice of adulthood? Mosul Dam.
A second fence around the White House. They read
the news and edit out their parents' shame.

       We cannot deserve
       this life.

The summer quickens. Currents shift. Ice
melts. This table. This tongue. The shiver
of warm rain. How long is the sliver in a finger
that's also a bolt of lightning lodged
in a tree? What is the ratio of revolution
to word?

       Sign here for
       contraband.

The payload fraction exceeds naptime
with an additional 10 cents for milk.
Compute the cost of the dust that settles
in north-south avenues and east-west streets.
Dust that was once manila folders
and the slide rules and hands.

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NANCY KNOWLES is Professor of English/Writing at Eastern Oregon University. She has published poetry previously in *Torches n' Pitchforks*, *Eastern Oregon Anthology: A Sense of Place*, and *Toyon*. In 2014, she was invited to the conference on Literature, Memory, and the First World War at the United States Military Academy to present on pacifism in Virginia Woolf's fiction.