

THE BOMB CHRONICLERS

Tom Daley

The column of smoke in the desert has soaked through the film
The terrible sunlight percolates its own time, reverses the morning
Rehearses the brightness of the small dawn
Which invents its own gleam, bandaging the radiused hoods of jeeps
And the filmmakers are serrated silhouettes, birds at first light
One shifts his hips—a coquette at a cakewalk
peering into his camera with a viewfinder set at the level of his clavicles
The smoke from the bomb is like a children's drawing of a tree
A ruffled, patchy sphere piled on top of a woolly trunk
The smoke is an ecstasy derived from secret ingredients in cough medicine
the cameramen poured on their pillowcases and sniffed all night as croupy boys
The smoke is out of focus, it is laden with sand and radium
The smoke will someday be painted on the dials of watches for
 young girls at a quinceañera
There are three tripods for the cameras
assisting in the oversight of strontium's warming the bones of the baby boom
The cameramen are fit, and young, their hair is close-cropped
When not filming tests in the desert they film themselves without pants
sitting on a stool and grinning
The cameramen are votives of secrecy, they remember
 the smell of the Rosenbergs
One of them leans into his viewfinder as if he were a boy
 inspecting a handful of pennies
looking for a date and an initial indicating the Denver Mint
Denver is hundreds of miles away,
but the birds have veered off course as they steered there this morning
The men are mindful of the white kimonos of Nagasaki
the black chrysanthemums branded into the women's skin,
They are mindful of their latent stumbles in the cancer wards
the record of the flash and the smoke breaking free like September bluefish
breaking into their blood vessels, schooling in malodorous tumors

Their private images will not populate poetic reels that can be
unspooled in public
the private sensation of sand from so far away blown into their eyes and lenses
the queer and private notion that out of this tumult will come the kind of calm
one earns by straightening a refrigerator, by shading one's eyes
against the glow of a stack more terrible than
that biblical scrap heap of foreskins.