

SUBURBAN NUMB

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Carl bought a peace flag and hung it from his porch. He talked to us across the fence when we gardened and listened to Dylan. Carl liked to sing “Blowin’ in the Wind.” He hated Viet Nam, said it was worse than cancer. He was afraid it would happen again. We sang with Carl. We bought a peace flag. We hung it from our front porch. Another neighbor bought one and then there were three. Soon the flags lined our street. At night we lit candles and placed them in windows and prayed that it wouldn’t happen again. The war came anyway. A futile silence grew over the neighborhood. One day I saw Carl take his flag down. Others did the same. Carl didn’t visit our garden, not even when we played Dylan. Time passed. My daughter felt the new baby kick through my maternity dress. One day Carl picked a bunch of violets from his garden and gave them to her, told me the cancer came back. Carl died in May. I lost the baby in June. We stopped singing in the garden. We breathed the silence that swept through the neighborhood. I won’t say much about the others: Foreclosed neighbors drove away. Others stay and watch the grass grow wild around empty houses. The city built a cell tower in the park across the street. It stands five-stories above the jungle-gym and sandbox. Now the children don’t play. The war continues. If you stop by, you’ll see the last peace flag wave from our front porch. See its faded canvass, frayed lines. If you walk around back, you can lie in our hammock. Let this book fall from your lap. Listen to the evening garage doors open and close. Let them lull you. After dusk, you might become the silence. If you stay long enough, you may forget to hear yourself breathe.