

Lessons

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At 0230 I awake. It's mortars again. There's no alarm, no warning, only quick, hollow impacts.

I imagine men, as old as me or younger, lying anxiously in open fields. I imagine their hot tubes as the only source of heat, steaming against the wet farmland they hide in. And I imagine a small pile of bombs lying next to these men.

They wait, I imagine, for an answer.

I lie as well, in a cot hundreds of meters away. I count seven – all too hollow to be close – before deciding to piss. *Shooting stars*, I tell myself, *shooting stars*.

Eight.

As I walk to the pit, I look to the horizon, to the wire separating worlds. Nine. I look up, hoping to spot one scratching through the clear desert night. *Where is faith, before me or behind?*

Ten.

Between the poundings, only the moon seems to move. Then, a flare is struck, its light bleeding through the darkness, scarring those not seen from the guard towers. *There's your answer*, I think, *this fucking desert*.

Eleven.

A second later the twelfth mortar hits far off and to my left.

It's all right here, it echoes, *to tear the body, and teach the soul*.

After fifteen I'm asleep again.

In the morning, I remember the dream.

I was back at school, in a building with no windows, and rooms – separate and small – like bunkers. Each of us was on our knees, bent at the waist and with a book spread open on our heads. We were trying to learn words we couldn't read. We shouted gibberish and called out for those we loved. Through all of this, the professor stood – hunched beneath the low ceiling – and read Thomas aloud. And every time he spoke the word *rage* his voice became hollow, his tongue moving quick.

In the morning, I also learn there were two soldiers killed

and eight more wounded. I know none of them – neither the killer nor the dead. So I find a bunker to pray in, to ask God for lessons we might understand.