Silos

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Silos

Abstract
ground zero we believed
we were ground zero
north dakota, 1964...

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Silos
Debra Marquart

from “Small Buried Things”

ground zero we believed
we were ground zero
north dakota, 1964
minute men sleeping
in silos by the thousands
ICBMs pockmark the landscape
encased in concrete silos six stories deep
buried in pastures
surrounded by cyclone wire
where holsteins muzzled through
for ungrazed grass
silos bordering wheatfields
where farmers passed close
with plows seeders combines
watched by soldiers
year round in uniform rifles in hand

the great mirror underworld
grain silos above silos below

some liked the men the silos brought to town
some felt safer
some said it helped the local economy

and the launch command centers
disguised as family ranch houses
sprinkled around the countryside
    the basketball hoop above the garage door
    the army jeep parked in the drive
    the chain-link fence
    the radio towers on the roof
and below the deep concrete bunkers
where launch sequences
were memorized
by the buried few
the survivors who would avenge us
at the ready to launch
drilling codes and protocol for decades
for the clusters of ten
missiles each at their command

we knew we couldn’t say we didn’t know
but look around minot air force base
to the west grand forks air force base
to the east

how many air bases does one state need?
only the best get stationed up north the airmen said
to each other what else could they say
about drawing the short straw
the assignment in siberia surely
they’d offended someone powerful as stalin
to be shipped here

strategically located we were told
we were strategic russia
not as far away as it seems
one quick arc over the ice cap
the shortest line between two points
the small converging world
of the arctic circle

north dakota to moscow
ground zero years later we learned
we were the third largest nuclear power
in the world if we’d seceded from the union

we didn’t