

While the Light Lasts

by Joani Reese

I.

Pockets stuffed with extra ammo, rifled men deconstruct bodies clinging to steel cables. The trapped link arms on truss ledges: black, brown, white sail into air, leaving red Pollack arcs shooting behind.

II.

Lovers whimper between clenched teeth, then jump, as bullets whiz by overhead. Church women crouch in the uptown direction to bat at passing souls, desperate to save a few, but spirits slip like yellow silk through their fingers and the wind from their leaving floats over the cantilevered arch spanning the blazing river.

III.

Smoke from bodies aflame tongues the strung moon; ashes flake their wings as cardinals litter the sky like liquid roses, their trajectory a drunkards' scribble across the fire-haloed clouds.

IV.

The thump of a falling body startles a cur that scares under the spandrel. Nosing the air, he yips from his hinged jaw, smells his own dog denouement in the gathering atoms of night.

V.

The water's breast is lumpy with meat; painted waves flicker an oily rainbow of expanding heat.

VI.

The fearless dead lie coffined beneath earthen slabs of clay while beyond the water, fires wink out, one by one by one, the light fails, and midnight capes fresh corpses sprouting metal petals from their breasts.

VII.

A neon billboard's words flash a riddle over Times Square no tongue will ever solve. A *New York Times* front page from yesterday tumbles and folds itself around a trembling lamppost.

VIII.

In a hot green room across the river, a red-headed girl flips the pages of a photo album perched atop her nine month belly, a frown on her face. She gazes at photographs collected by those whom she does not yet know have joined the dead. She raises her head and asks the quickening air, *where do people go when they don't come back no more?*

