

being someone who's never experienced it

Deborah Dickinson

my sister and I cartwheeling
through the veteran's cemetery climbing
trees shouting squealing

I think about war way more than I should

I think about death way more than I should

I think about dying way more than I should

being someone who's never experienced it.

ninety-eight days of steel rain mountain faces blown away government issued grenades
mass suicides in the caves filial piety dictating who kills to remain to kill themselves

weaving through headstones
bare feet dancing across grassy thruways
careful not to step on the graves
the dead slumber

Mom wonders
should we stop?

Dad says, "Let them play."

"Let them be happy here."

I think about war way more war

I think about death way more death too much

death too many dying I think about dying way more than

I should way more too much

war and death and dying

Loss and grief are familiar funerals weighted in the intimacy of rigor mortis—

stiffening skin lock

jaw trigger finger eyes

wide / mouth open / shut /

Break.

time frozen

in place

“Let them be happy here.” Dad says, “My mom

would love this. They would love this.”

I think about too much.

I should I think

I think about should I?

scraps of flesh and bone sprout from soil rolling white hills maggot
swarmed corpses floating bodies tangled in river grass the water runs red with blood
distant temple burns holy shroud of flames

vacuum breath sucked away
frightful (dis)similarity
unsettling stillness

the world rearranges itself:
garish kaleidoscope
tilted reality

you learn to walk with a slant

what should war think

about about

war?

dying?
being someone

who's never experienced it.

at sea the ship was hit

taking on water

an order to seal the doors they were ordered to seal the doors they had to seal the doors
to save the ship to save themselves they sealed the doors drowning friends clawing like rats
screaming until they stopped fermenting in brine for days
taking on water taking on liquid weight

four men needed
to carry one of their dead

Should I make meaning:

graves as shrines
place as relationship
as in place for me to care for
as in the dead need care for

as in peace for me becomes peace for them becomes freeing me becomes freeing them

Only, what should I
know

bodies appear smaller
when the people inside
drown, dry, wither go