

S A N D R A   S O L I

---

## Birmingham Etudes, 1943

### I. Next Door

The unlucky did not always burn or bleed.  
A blast sucked air right out of a body.  
Some families were found around the table  
supper still warm, cat on the hearth rug,  
mannequins all. Sensible folk tucked in early,  
filled kitchen pots with water, betting the mains  
would break before morning. Grief deep as black horses.

### II. Hoping for a Foggy Night

A thousand nights aflame. Another night  
inside the shelter, sleepy-eyed and nervous.  
A child can feel each spider in the dark.

Next morning, climbing out to find two fish  
without their eyes, bombs dangling from our tree  
like Christmas earrings, in ripped and tangled silk.

When planes were weathered in, we slept secure  
in bed, our folded cotton handkerchiefs  
their ordinary selves, inside our pockets.

III. Jerry

You stand straight in your blondness.  
Saluting, your arm blocks the sun.  
In the newsreel, a crowd is shouting  
but your eyes bruise my heart. I heard  
they are blue. I am your enemy,  
though on another day I could show you  
how light pools on the rock wall in the back  
garden, broken stones where we could sit  
to stroke each other and whisper.  
This is war, they say. You are dangerous.  
And what good are horses then,  
or lavender rising next to the gate,  
its spiky knives?

---

**SANDRA SOLI**, former teaching artist and poetry columnist, received an Oklahoma Book Award, LSU's Eyster Prize in Poetry, and two nominations for the Pushcart Prize. Poems, flash fiction, and photographs have appeared in *Ruminant*, *Parody*, *New York Quarterly*, *Southern Poetry Review*, *Ellipsis*, *SLAB*, *Sugar Mule*, and elsewhere; and anthologized most recently in *Ain't Nobody That Can Sing Like Me: New Oklahoma Writing*; *Shifting Balance Sheets: Immigration and Cultural Attachment*; and *Broken Circles*, benefiting food pantries. Her article on prose poems appeared in the 2009 Poet's Market. A survivor of WWII (UK), she is at work on a new book, *Swans and Other Violence*. War and the outsider experience are recurring themes in her work.