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shelter

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shelter

by

Laura Marsee

when very young, i watched my father build a bomb shelter
in the hillside behind our house. returning ragged from the office
each day, he dug deep into the evening, brow slick, burrowing through
thick red earth, manipulating that hillside to accommodate
the four of us in the event of the unthinkable. he hauled in timber
to erect a sturdy frame, poured the concrete floor and dumped
tons of earth to shield his amateur fortress against the onslaught
of radiation we'd been warned was sure to come. the last thing
he did was construct a trellis, paint it white
and plant a row of red climbing roses, once seed grass invaded
demolished sod, and wildflowers took root once more.
every spring, the black bunker in the hill exploded
in a fiery barrage of color. i played in secret in its cool
musty recess, always mindful of its primary function.

years passed, i grew to adulthood, and still the sky remained
free of invisible death; the long-prophesied apocalypse
had not come. i marched off to college, sold my levi's
to the russkies and began hearing "socialism" whispered
a little louder among my long-haired friends.
i can catch the moscow evening news on c-span, order
red army medals by mail (no CODs) if i want.
my father will be fifty-seven next year, a weary veteran
of the cold war. his shelter still stands, now cluttered with
assorted tools and junk: garden rakes, old paint cans, a rusted
wheelbarrow, and of course his faithful spade and shovel.
his labor was not wasted— it has proven useful during tornadoes.
it seems more of a comfort to me now in this capacity;
a shelter from god's wrath instead of our own.

