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World War I

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World War I
Sarah "Sadie"
Dalla Costa

I stand at the battle grounds
Seventy men shot down
One my brother
Three my friend
Their bodies spilling color
Vivid against dirt land, the bland grounds

I leave the bodies to rot
And load my weapon
Eighteen minutes, says the general
Eighteen minutes until scrambling
Out of the trenches
The general's watch ticks but my time stiffens

I inspect my feet
Puss and cuts
Curse the rats;
Curse the lice
Hatching against my skin
A life of one can end another's

I watch smoke fill the sky
A missile slams into an ally's trench
The goners,
The poor troopers
No, there's no pity in war
So lift your head towards heaven as the world darkens

Ten minutes, says the general
I vomit in the trench
Seven minutes
My knees shake
Three minutes
A prayer for my mother
Tears for my sister
One minute
A breath for the world
Now!
Time unfreezes and speeds
Everlasting time as I dangle over death