

# New Poetry from Scott Janssen: “Bottle Tree”



VIETNAM DID I / *image by Amalie Flynn*

On my first visit I asked  
A stock question about  
Whether you'd been in the military.

Marines, nineteen sixty-six, you said,  
A hint of menace in your eyes.  
I never talk about it.

On my way out the door

I asked your wife about a  
Tree in the front yard,

Its branches capped with  
Blue and green and pink  
Bottles made of glass.

It's a bottle tree, she said.  
Pointing at a cobalt blue bottle  
Glinting with sunlight,

She told me it had  
Special power to lure in  
Ghosts and lurking spirits.

They get trapped in there, she said.  
Then sunlight burns them up  
So they can't haunt us anymore.

Eight months later  
You could no longer walk.  
I rolled your wheelchair

Onto the warbled porch  
Where we sat and talked  
About how rough life is.

I never told you about  
Vietnam, did I? You whispered.  
I shook my head.

As you spoke,  
Your eyes averted,  
I looked at that cobalt blue bottle

And imagined it slowly filling  
With blood and shrieks  
And grief and the sound of

Rotor blades and the smell

Of burning flesh and the  
Taste of splattered gore

And the sensation of  
Adrenaline pulsing and  
Memories of home and

Buddies who were killed  
And of fear and rage and  
betrayal and weeping

That lodge in your throat  
Before you swallow  
It all down

Into your belly.  
Don't ever tell anyone  
About this, you said,

Your hands trembling,  
Jaw shivering.  
I asked if there was

Anything else.  
You started to say something  
But stopped yourself.

No, you said.