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.