

Anthony Lee



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When my fifth grad teacher yelled, "Drop!"
we were supposed to dive under the tables
and crunch into a ball,
arms over our heads
and feet crossed
to protect one leg,

because when the bomb went off,
the glass from the windows
would fly into the classroom
and cut any naughty children—
the ones who didn't drop—
into a bloody mess.
That was the game.

I wondered how my teacher
would know when to scream "Drop!"
Would she see the planes
with Russian marks
before the bombs fell?
or the mushroom cloud in the sky?

I asked her once in class:
"How will you know?"

She cleared her throat
and turned a little red,
then explained in her schoolteacher voice,
eyes darting,
that she would see a bright flash,
and she would know
that was the bomb.
Then she would say "Drop!"
That's why we had to be fast
and do it right.
We wouldn't have much time.

I knew then
it would be too late.
The bomb would go off
before she saw the light.

We could never
get under the tables fast enough
or cross our legs fast enough,
or cover our heads fast enough.
We would die in the glass,
or the bright light would kill us
before we could move.

The good little boys would die,
and the bad ones.
The good girls would die
like the others.
The teacher,
the janitor,
even the principal,
would be dead soon.

It didn't bother me much though.
The class went on.
We did math and reading.
Science experiments.
We learned the dances of South America.

I tried to be a good boy,
even though now it didn't matter,
and every day I would
look over at the window
and wonder when the light would flash,
when the glass would break,
when the bomb would end our game.



Drop dead