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Target Practice, Requa, California

I was the skinny blue jeans and thin shirt of fourteen
in that decade of youth when revolt was possible.
My history of bruises and welts had recently faded,
but the threads of scars were visible in certain light.

As I dreamt for another family to claim me, most days
in that house were either dead silence or screaming—
all of my days bursting with waiting. I don't remember
the specifics of the gun, but it was a military rifle

with a clip of fifteen rounds, gold casings.
The fatigued man in that barracked house
lived for guns and pulled me from my books
to practice shooting rats at the Requa dump.

I remember the downhill road into redwoods,
weaving into isolation away from houses
to refuse, the local garbage piling under an open sky.
I remember the rifle in my hands, the one in his.

Told how to sight down the grey barrel. Told
to lead ahead of movement, the quick, brown scurry
through the bags, the rats twitching from one
pocket of trash to one odor of trash. I stood to the man's

right side, a step back, flinching from the blast.
As I also fired into movement, my splinter of thought
said just to swing the barrel to the left, just an inch
for one second, catch him in the side of his head

and be free to run for help, free to be blameless.
He shouldered. I tilted the gunmetal
and squeezed the trigger, how many shots
going off, a nearby rat squealing away.