

AGAIN AT THE DRILL

A strained orderly descent into dancing dust
and shadow, into a catacomb of glazed
cinder block. There we stand, side-by-side,
like riddles. Silent for the test that went
and came, went and came. Short bursts
bunched mean "test" but remember always
"the real thing" will go "on and on."
Lucky then to reach a basement, better here
than under little brittle desks and chairs. Glass,
they say, will be hot and kniving everywhere.
We wait for giggles wishing someone would.

Mary tempts with her blonde pigtail, ornately
plaited, ribbon candy shiny--no one makes
a move. James, of cartwheels, studies
his shoes. George has that nervous thing that
jumps his arm. Gerry, Peg (of fatty heart),
Mike and Sandy, that "dirty-fightin'-raggy
girl," stay close to Mrs. Halberstam (she has
a famous son), near enough to hear her breathing
bulge her throat, as the burst-burst-burst
snaps through the basement of our school, the
burst-burst-burst that never went and came.