

Canned Food Drive

by Kathleen Lynch

We lived in the lucky world—
not the far place where flies

sipped at eye corners
of children too weak to cry.

A camera showed that world to us
on posters. But we were children.

We wanted most to not be those
others, with their terrible bones.

We spoke of them wide-eyed, with
what we thought was tenderness.

But our words came in a different register,
as if to speak of such betrayal

by the grown world could bring
a harm of great immensity

upon us too. We got to choose
from the cupboard. We gave

what we hated—beets, peas,
mushrooms. Our dreams

were not of rice. The moon
laid light on our bicycles propped

against the porch. Sycamores
became our giants standing guard;

the overgrown shrub, our fort. We thought
we understood what was required.

Even crouched beneath our desks
during drill, we said one prayer

for the fear, one for recess.
McClellan Air Force Base

sent forth big-bellied planes
that rattled the windows

of our houses. Evenings, we took
to the streets shrieking

with joy, rode madly fast
around the block. We collapsed

on the lawn breathless, the earth
cool beneath us & pounding hard,

as if it had one great heart.
As if it was ours.