

Area 54, Tonopah Test Range, Nevada, 2008

Brandy R Williams

Peyton lied. Military exercises
aren't flawless. "Nothing ever happens," she said.
"It'll be like camping, a vacation."

What the fuck does she know, sitting
behind her desk, uniform pressed tight, boots
scuff free? She's never even been deployed,

let alone been to the field.
I remember thick black smoke as we arrived
on scene, the pilot strapped

in his seat so ravaged by flames it was hard
to find his body. His arm—flesh melting
from bone—waved unceremoniously

in the boiling heat, the hand seemingly
saying, see ya soon motherfucker. I wanted
to retch. We heard they went

into a flat spin at two-thousand feet, tried
to save the plane, & ejected too late.
Co-pilot survived.

Found him two-hundred feet away, parachute flapping
in the wind. He stood motionless, staring
at the flames & asked, "Have y'all found my

brother yet?" even though death's perfume soaked
into our pores, our hair, our clothes. Truth is a
merciless bitch. It's cold black flesh at the end

of burning cinders, bone-chilling
nights doused in putrescence, paralyzed
by burning lungs & thick black smoke.