Richard Zabransky

ZEROES

They came out of the east, you said, where the clouds turnip on the horizon and the sun is a welder’s flare.

At first you thought it was the hangover from trying to forget the wahini, or a formation too geometric for gulls.

Then you heard the sound of grasshoppers caught in a paper bag, the mantra of an empire.

With a ladder, you could have climbed to see your reflection on the shadowless faces of the boys,

But, instead, the world turned upside down as your head rotated back in the afterdraft of their wake.

You told me about them the night of the draft lottery, the night they picked us for Vietnam;

funny, I thought, how much zeroes mean, the kind that hold count in a line of figures,

or the kind buried in the pupils of eyes that are never seen yet which foreshadow our lifetimes.

From where you stood, you could see the smoke from Pearl blossoming like a hybrid of cuttlefish and midnight.

You mashed out your Lucky and headed for base.

Today, we invaded Panama and received accounts of acceptable losses.

Deemed Operation Just Cause by Rather, Brokow and Jennings, we watched together, zapping channels.

A young marine threw the same grenade three times —— you said he’d have a great fastball,

and I imagined a perfect game, another string of zeroes placed in the record books.

The Cape Rock