
Remains

Janet R. Kirchheimer

Dusk, a rain-slicked tarmac, a coffin
draped in a blue and white flag, not
how we imagined your homecoming.

The crew photographed the tops of thousands
of thunderstorms rumbling through
the atmosphere each hour, recorded the first

images of a doughnut-shaped electric glow
above a thunderstorm, an elf, lasting less
than a millisecond, sent back clear pictures

of sprites, cloud to space lightning, gathering data
on plumes of dust and other particles blown
from the Sahara by storms before being carried off

by high winds. Over California, the radio transmissions
went dead, no blips on the radar screen, a streaking
light appeared in the atmosphere, then lights, each in a different

direction, broke off, as you came hurtling back to earth.
The Torah hidden in Bergen Belsen, the drawing
by a boy in Theresienstadt of what the earth

would look like from the moon, all ash.

And you, ash, bits of charred jaw bone, your air force flag
with the Star of David in the middle, are found.

Without your consent you are born, without your consent you die.
God hides his face.

Janet R. Kirchheimer's poetry has appeared most recently in Lilit, Poetry NZ, HEArt and Cross Currents. She works for CLAL and is a contributor to their online review eCLAL.