

# Soft Collision

Before the order to evacuate,  
Bogdan heard the report, the warning klaxon,  
that reactor 4 is critical;

he saw the plume of radiation & gas  
from an observation window  
in reactor 2 where he was eating lunch.

The plume rising from the breach  
in reactor 4's roof seemed so innocent  
that he imagines another just like it  
reverently moving up the shaft  
of the elevator as he descends:

quick death waiting for their soft collision.

But he knows that is not how it works;  
death can be slow and lingering  
like the elevator ride to the ground floor—

a man named Tsutomu Yamaguchi  
survived the atomic bombings  
of both Nagasaki & Hiroshima  
and lived another sixty-five years  
before the cancer finally got him.

It has been so long since religion  
was open in the Ukraine, so long  
since prayers were uttered out loud  
that Bogdan can hardly remember  
what they sound like;

he tries to rekindle the hope of prayer  
currying favor with the fates, if not the gods,  
“let me be like Yamaguchi,  
let me see my grandchildren born.”

—Scott E. Green & Herb Kauderer

