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Failure

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Failure

Mary Dengler

I watched as Afghans by the hundreds fled
In terror, pressing toward the U.S. Air Force
Jet before it closed its doors. I looked in
Disbelief at humans clinging to its wings
As it ascended to the sky, then falling toward
The earth like Icarus, whose cry was heard
By none. At least he'd felt the joy of having
Traveled near the sun. What kind of terror
Motivated such a stunt? Is death by falling
Better than becoming objects of a hunt
By terrorists and facing loss of life or body
Parts? In retrospect, they didn't fail. They chose
Their terms of death and shamed those tasked
To rescue them. The others failed—they didn't
Counter suffering with a ride to death. I've never
Failed a course, although I have failed tests
Of courage to endure, but never been
Abandoned by the ones I served, and humans
Learn dependence when subjected to another's
Rule. They really can't be blamed. Abandonment
By us assured they'd face cruel enemies
Alone. As thousands waited stupefied
For night, I turned from my computer screen
To view my peaceful yard of sun-swept trees
And felt ashamed and wept. Our rescue missions
Ended all too soon—our youthful military
Lie among the dead as citizens and allies
Hide or plea for help or die. From what we've done
Or left undone, I see no peaceful years ahead,
Especially if our fear—of God and all his laws—
Is dead.