The Children Of Saigon

Always at night I found them
climbing the piles of junk burning
on the base. Around a flat track

I ran for miles, tight muscles
jogging past bleachers
where French soldiers

in parades for years
passed out in the sun. Children
climbing those bulldozed heaps

for food, for clothes, for trash
piled up to blaze. I saw them
crawling the last flare of the sun

spangled on garbage, the dump
blazing in the sweat and blink
of my eyes, children and old men

ragged and golden, clawing
through flames long after sundown,
no matter how many nights

I went without supper,
how many leftovers I begged
and carried in darkness

out past the tarmac and bleachers,
passing it all to children
who grabbed it and backed away.

— Walter McDonald