

Poetry by Stephen Mead

Buddy

I remember everything:

The curve of your palms, the shoulders

Expanse, the compass of my chin

Tracing custom army soap scents

Amid duffel bag wool...

Lights on, a scuffling...

I leapt, scared rabbit, white tail

Through loose window of rain...

Nobody saw whom, not even the sergeant,

A cinder block over...

For this you got Hard Labor, 15 months,

Shame to the family name, a dishonorable

brand. They figured you'd name names, break

Under pressure, your temperament, nervous,

Not a soldier, but a *fairy*...

“Son, have a cigarette. Make it easy on yourself.”

Easy. Son. Across the seas Nazis gassed Jews & we

Bombed Japs. From prison you wrote, said the fellas

Were nice. I pictured knuckles, submission,
Then gentleness covert. You were of use, a pro
In the jungle of Good Behavior, its one rule unwritten...

Today, on the radio, some Vet telling of his near-death
Experience: shell fire, blacking out, his astral soul hovering...
Next: flowers, a tunnel, & kind, intelligent light encompassing
Pain at the end...

Here, in the kitchen, Beethoven's Last Symphony.
Outside, a snake-stretching cat, humidity, a sponge
On asphalt, blazing, our neighbor's new sprinkler
Watering their patch of green, its multi-spout streams
Suggesting the shell Venus rode . . .

What The Good Soldier Was Told Not To Recall

Down in the dirt, mud oozing, miles of inches, bodies,
khaki-coated but flesh, close, emitting steam, open wounds
Over which some surgeon warms hands ...

Rains, bullets, hit swamp basin silt, limbs
Grapple, grope guns, spill pell mell ...
Fingers ripple, black reflections, come across

Dog tag, wedding ring, thumb...

Above copters whoop-----

If photographed, stumbled upon, this would be a document

The saner world salvaged. But

People forget war means taking sustenance, leaving

It orphaned, shell shocked.

Witness it, buddy, give breath

Here in these trenches...

In a minute, leap, jolted

Frog trembling, falling, choking

Unconscious on alien American-stained land.

Afterwards, weeds flower, flourish, the voices

Of souls silenced in asylums homegrown