

Newly fallen

snow covers his face,
body facing grey sky
he can't see
one arm outstretched to the right
as if reaching out
when he was shot

Kharkiv under siege
everything grey
another cold war
in the photograph
nearby troop carrier
a caterpillar
blackened burned
tread blown off
nobody alive shown

a mother and father
will get the news
death doesn't take sides
all decay and return to soil
traffic light
street lamp
burned building
all dark
snow
newly fallen

Cold War

19 soldiers
ponchos flapping in wind,
perhaps they're at Chosin Reservoir
perhaps on Heartbreak Ridge
winter war Korea so cold
they slog on through ice and snow
each clutching his weapon
19 soldiers frozen in time
Frank Gaylord's sculptures
neither alive nor dead
frozen in time
like war that never ended
birds fly over the border now
trees where they nest
quiet in the DMZ,
so many dead there
some left behind
a mere dimming
divide between life and death
as sunlight fades and night grows cold
war
19 soldiers frozen in time

Only One Casualty Today

*Not one of all the purple Host
Who took the Flag today
Can tell the definition
So clear of victory*

*As he defeated – dying –
On whose forbidden ear
The distant strains of triumph
Burst agonized and clear!*

Emily Dickinson

My brother wades in cool water,
a scrawny kid in a red and blue swimsuit.

On the dock he poses with a pickerel,
New Hampshire—15 years left of his life.

Another summer—hours in the back seat,
smell of warm crayons in afternoon heat.

We pass an oil well—fragrance of raw crude,
Kansas, our grandmother's house, cars on brick streets

Only one casualty, the newscaster explained,
good news, —things are improving.

My brother the single casualty that day
not even battle, just a parachute plunge from a plane.

A good way to die if you have to, perhaps,
falling through clear sky.

Perhaps the smell of soil and lawn coming
fast, closer and closer—so long ago.

And there's no way to ask him how he felt
about being the only one that day.

Only one son, only one brother
only one casualty today.

Stamp Collection

I flew a four engine China Clipper
straight off a twenty cent U.S. airmail stamp,
up over deep, forested valleys of Montenegro,
high over megalithic temples of Malta,
across the Mediterranean to the Rock of Gibraltar.
In San Marino I climbed high onto the ramparts of ancient
castles with panoramas across Italy to the Adriatic Sea.

I glided swiftly across the savanna
with Angola's postage stamp giraffes.
How could I have known at ten,
that kids died before they got to be my age?
Portugal would kill every last Angolan
before giving up their colony.
They killed rhinos for horns to make fake aphrodisiacs,
slaughtered elephants for tusks
to make ivory cameos and piano keys,
then issued stamps with colorful pictures of wildlife.

I arranged my stamps and daydreamed of zebras,
my sister practiced piano.
while the USSR and USA fought the cold war on their postage—
Yuri Gagarin and Cosmonauts, Telstar,
Oklahoma—*Arrows to Atoms, Atoms for Peace*,
Marx, Lenin, Stalin, Jefferson, Lincoln, Roosevelt.
What did I know of dying empires,
revolution, independence, liberation?
I was a kid collecting stamps.
So, I flew my China Clipper
as high as I could—
above it all.

Still Life

Sheep in Snow
Joseph Farquharson (1846-1935)

It's still as sun sets,
light snow in the pasture,
we look west into orange sunset,
scattered clouds in shades of pink,
still enough light for long shadows
from trees on a small rise,
shades of orange in the snow.

Sheep graze for what grass they can find,
nine of them waiting for sun to fall,
when they'll return to whatever shelter
lies outside the frame.
Though it's brown and grey winter,
their pasture is full of color,
and peaceful as winter sun sets.

Do the sheep worry like we do,
about what will come
when night grows cold?
Though shadows reach across the pasture,
there's still color left,
still life to a waning day.
What more could we ask?