Anna's tiny ankles feel as if they might snap, as careful as I am. I take the hook and slip it through the eyes, again and again. There are eight buttons on each small shoe. The leather is stiff. For a moment, I wonder that she does not fret with me, for I had to twist her foot opposite its natural lie to better leverage the last two. But no. She was so proud of these little Edwardian boots the weekend we bought them.

I have prepared her to walk to St. Joseph often enough. She knows my gentle strength, my tempers. And this, the last time I shall button her into her shoes, she is more compliant than is usual.

I don't blame Anna's mother. Six years ago, I left her behind, with Anna's grandmother and grandfather, to enlist, like many others. I was enraged by the sinking of the Lusitania. When President Wilson finally called for war, I answered.

In Richmond, with all the newly signed men and boys, Anna's mother pressed against me. Anna, then barely one, made only the mildest protest between us. Her mother kissed me. She kissed as though we were alone in the universe for all eternity, not clinging to one last embrace in the bustle of a train station.

Ahead of us on the platform the engine huffed. With building pressure in its belly, this juggernaut of time harried us. An explosive, plaintive whistle erupted. Hot breath from within the beast rose against a blue, spring sky, and swirled around the station clocktower beneath its domed roof. A feather of engineered cloud caressed the clock's two hands raised in prayer at noon, then dissipated with the striking of the hour.

A platoon sergeant and a conductor of the line shouted all the louder. Volunteers against the Kaiser's tyranny clambered aboard. As I stepped out of her mother's embrace, Anna's little fist tugged at the point of my collar. Her fragile hand pulled free, taking my heart with it. Her mother circled that small hand in her own and raised her

face to watch me step up into the car. It was the last I would see them for four long years.

That kiss on the platform played over in my memory. Not immediately. Not as we bivouacked along the Mississippi learning the martial art of trench making. Or at Camp Shelby, breaking down the Enfield, loading and firing. Long after I gathered the rudiments of slamming a trench knife into another man's body within narrow-walled confines, the upward stroke, violent and penetrating, to carve the heart away inside the man, only then did Anna's mother's kiss awaken me, beckon me home.

***

I remember going over the top, ordered to reconnoiter and report. Morgan followed. We each had a flag and were instructed to show it above the enemy ramparts at intervals to show locations cleared. I heard him run off to my left, the last sound I would hear in that ear, very nearly. We made the enemy trench line and spilled over the edge finding it deeper than we had imagined. Their position was hardened with rough, unfinished concrete. A rifle fire ledge, four feet down caught our fall. We then hopped to the lower, reload position, now fully ten feet from the top. Initially, Morgan scrambled back up to show his pennant.

We stepped cautiously, making our turns with the aid of the sun's position, knowing our compass might be fouled in a labyrinth of shrapnel, casings, earthwork, and corpses, constantly aware the Hun often booby-trapped forward positions in their lines as they made retreat. Yet further in, we met with no resistance or defenses.

I may have been the first, in jest, to catch up an Austrian prize, an abandoned steel helmet without the brim ubiquitous on our battle bowlers. Morgan quickly followed. We became like madmen let out I suppose. Tugging at ordinance pouches,

epaulettes, an abandoned Mauser. Like our compass, we lost ourselves, two drifting needlepoints following the retreating army. Forgotten in our advance was the duty to the flag. Neither of us raised our signal pennant above the plane of the trench. The slant of shadow made it perhaps two hours since we began our free, frenzied westward progress.

Too late, we came back to ourselves hearing shells pass near, over our heads. Rounds fired from our own lines. The whistling ended in concussion after concussion. Morgan scrambled into his mask, the charcoal canister firmly in place on his munitions belt, the hose like an elephant's trunk, an umbilical, easily identified, tethered him to the Allied forces. My own mask had torn free some time earlier. I quickly liberated a mask off a dead Jerry and strapped on the brutish contraption without regard to cooties or the carbonized snout which made the Hun look like upright hogs.

I attempted to follow Morgan but lost him. Then realized too late, the right ocular on Jerry's mask was cracked, bleeding mustard into my eye. I tumbled to the muddy trench floor and banked the earth around my head in desperation. I could feel the blisters forming across my eyelid. Near nightfall I was found, stripped of contaminated clothes, and left outside a field hospital. The gas burned in my throat and lungs, seared, my right eye and blinded my left. I could not speak. I saw only dim shapes. I felt about my neck for my tag but found none. A medic came long enough to wash my eye and wipe me down with soapy water. Though it was August, the night temperatures left me shivering in damp clothes.

The next morning, the infirmary commander stopped at my cot. He spoke, I think in German, starting in a mild tone. I could not hear him clearly, the detonations around the trenches made my right ear squeal and buzz, my left carried no sound at all. I gave no more than a blank look to the officer. His voice raised higher and higher, until flecks

of spittle arched from his mouth. No help. Though I could now hear his voice clearly, I spoke no German. I feared I had been captured by the enemy.

***

It is a dream. Perhaps it is a dream. It is early morning, I know. There are church bells ringing in St. Joseph' belltower. I heard a firm, insistent knock at my apartment door, two modest rooms off the landing midway up the stairs.

The house is a large Victorian, owned by Widow Roberts, Mrs. Roberts, she prefers. She allows me to stay at a reduced rate because I am handy with her boiler and don't mind watching over the collier when he guides his mule and wagon through the narrow drive to drop coal down the shoot. I shovel what scatters into the bin and in the winter, keep the boiler stoked and banked.

Mrs. Roberts is as old as Anna's grandmother would have been, had she survived influenza. She gets to church before the bells, bustling down the road as quickly as her girth allows. She cooks well, and has taken pity on my slight, wiry frame. Since war, I have not been able to eat too much without cramps catching me. I could smell the browning meat of a Sunday roast at daybreak. I thought I might be sick.

In the dream, a knocking on the door mingles with St. Joseph bells. Anna should have been up and ready an hour earlier. Perhaps it is a friend seeking her company on the walk to church. When I go to the door, a man in spats, and a dark plaid three-piece suit with a watch chain stretched across the middle pushes in.

'Anna is asleep,' I say. 'She's taken a nap waiting for you. See for yourself,' I say.

This man goes into the next room. I hear him at the edge of the narrow bed. I hear the springs as he shakes her gently. He shakes more vigorously. All the while he

says, and I find this peculiar, ‘Anna. Anna darling. Daddy is her to walk you to church… Anna?’

His footfall marks him crossing the room. He is furious that I’ve let her sleep. “What have you done?” he asks.

In answer, I meet him in the narrow confines of the doorway. I feel his weight on the hilt of my knife and guide him back into the room where my daughter sleeps. We circle like dancers and he slumps against the wall beside the door. The life light fades in his eyes so quickly, I doubt he had a sensation of pain. I have seen this before. I consider it a mercy.

***

The French held me with the Austrian prisoners. You may imagine I would have tried any number of times to gesture, to write, to communicate with someone concerning the error made. I am Allied.

You would be wrong to imagine even once. I did not make a single attempt until the war had been over two years. We were clearing a field, working under guard. It was miserable, sometimes dangerous work. So late after the war, and even then, a man might pull down with a grubbing hoe and lose an arm or a life to ordinance. Concertina wire held innumerable risks of lockjaw, and infection.

On that day I walked nearest the road, at the end of a line of men moving across a field, clearing whatever was in our path. In the road I saw a Madonna and child walking. The mother barefooted, with a scarf of pale blue. Her dress was course cloth, dingy with use. She held a child in her arms, upright against her hip. The child gazed out at me. Her bow-like mouth pursed as though in a kiss. The mother looked to the field opposite our own. As they came closer, the child’s hand opened and closed in a timid wave. Then, the

mother reached and took the child's hand into her own to still it. She glanced in my direction. As she did, my heart returned within me. The kiss from Anna's mother reborn on my lips. I shouted, 'Anna!'

***

Anna is quiet on the small bed. She sleeps so peacefully. Her roseate cheeks might be rouged, though her lips are drained of color. The church bells have stopped, and yet her mother has not come to collect her. I've closed the door to the inner room where she lies and sit at the table clacking away on this Remington. Each key a Bakelite tag within a metal ring clearly denoting 'A' or 'Z', numbers one through nine, shift, and a host of punctuations.

I see Dr. Russell twice weekly at the American Legion, arriving shortly after lunch. From my small apartment, the trip entails a trolly transfer in front of the Library of Virginia. I've lingered in the stacks and researched Russell's mentor, Dr. Carl Jung. Perhaps Dr. Russell is onto something. As I type, my mind opens. Each keystroke sets in motion an arc, a letter from within the trench where it had hidden, nestled in an orderly fan of type. The letter explodes against the page pinned against the platen. Each tiny explosion indents and impresses itself, seeking some form, some meaning.

I bring these pages with me each time I travel to the American Legion. Dr. Russell assures me the process goes along nicely. Friday, I showed him the paragraphs I've managed concerning my return to these United States.

> *Anna's mother is right to have done it. I know. How could she hold off creditors, or maintain and provide for our child? I had no way of knowing her parents had died. They owned precious little.*

She took work with a successful photographer, booking his subjects, typing, filing. Her figure so petit a corset was not needed.

I was missing. The war ended. I did not return. Uncle Sam counted me not merely missing but dead. I cannot in conscience be angry with the photographer for falling in love with a widow and her child. Anna's mother acted sensibly to marry the man.

Dr. Russell seemed pleased. Since Friday, I have clacked out these additional pages you read here.

***

Anna's mother was leery of me when I first returned, but Dr. Russell met with her and convinced her I could never hurt my dear daughter. Since then, Anna has spent the afternoons on Saturday and on occasion, she stays the night and sleeps in my bed. I make a pallet on the floor beside her, to be close in case she should startle. Anna's mother takes her from me down to St. Joseph's on Sunday morning as though she needs an exorcism.

Anna quickly learned to speak to my right ear and which eye has better sight. She tenderly touches my scarred flesh, asking over and over, how it could have happened.

Last night, I showed her the mask. One of the fellows at the American Legion Hall gave it to me from his own collection of war trinkets. It was a simple task, replacing the cartridge filter with cotton batting. The batting absorbed the bottle of chloroform I keep on my nightstand to aid my sleep.

Anna laughs at her insect-like image in the mirror. I pull the strap tightly, so she won't lose it as I picked her up. Soon enough, she goes limp with sleep. I dress her to be ready for church when her mother comes.

Dr. Russell will be glad of these new pages.

***

Seeing that child along the road brought me back to myself. Returning to camp, I came before the officer in charge. I told him, "I am an American soldier." I told him, "I was lost in the battle lines near Ariens." My English was broken from lack of use. I labored for words. The officer sent papers. Time dragged, but now I had a reason to live. I wanted desperately to be back in the arms of Anna's mother and feel her lips linger on mine.

Imagine my shock, will you. Anna's mother pregnant to bursting with another man's child. Two years after the war's end. One year married to this other man. I was enraged. Two officers from Camp Lee restrained me while the pair told me how it all had happened. Anna's mother sat across from me. I wept. Perhaps she wept too. Yes, I'm sure she wept.

***

She is always careful around me, speaking softly. Cautious not to place a hand on my arm, though it is her habit to touch whomever she speaks to. I meet her at the door, for she's finally come to collect Anna.

'She's napping,' I say, and point to the closed inner door. The boy in her arms is no older than Anna when I left for war. It is the man's boy. It has no part of me.

She shifts the child to her left hip so she can swing open the inner door with her right hand. Before she can scream, I have her in an embrace. The child in her arms

struggles between us and drops to the floor. I pull her face tight to my left cheek. I cannot hear the pop her long, slender neck makes, but I feel the bones separate. I lay her beside our daughter. I arrange her hands across Anna's breast.

Now as I type, I feel the laudanum. I will sleep once more with my wife and child. Peace, a final, quiet sleep.

I will go to the inner room and shut the door. This child in the outer room will lead Widow Roberts with his incessant wail. She will come and knock to call me to lunch shortly after the noon bells ring.

I will pull on the animal mask and sink into the dream that chases me since France. It's taken a full year's planning to regain direction. My compass rose is complete. The points settled. I will dream with family.

Mrs. Roberts will know what to do. The dead are not unknown to her.