

Wilderness House Literary Review 8/3

Joseph Farley
Earl

he's sixty six.
a retired corrections officer.
church going man.
big in the masons.
works with children now.

used to be put a beer in his hand
and he'd talk about Nam.
crawling out in the bush
with a sniper rifle.
picking off men as if they were deer
from a blind in a tree.

give him a second beer
and he'd tell you
about all the fights he'd been in.
how he won them all
and can still kick ass
over street thugs.

midway through the third beer
he'd start to speak
of prison riots.
batons and gunfire.
choke holds and jujitsu moves.
kicks to the ribs.
punches to the throat.
stomps to the head.

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but if you got him really drunk
he'd go back to Nam.
tell about the villages
surrounded by jungle and mountains.
how they could not tell
who fired at them
so they killed them all.
then he'd tell you of the trophy skull
he smuggled back stateside
and the photographs
of him standing
with other souvenirs
"over there."
if you were really lucky
he might show you
a picture or two.

he must have talked too much
to too many people.
the VA and FBI
had him in for a chat.
"heard you did a lot of things
back in the day.
saw a lot too.
you know anything about war crimes?
atrocities?"

Earl started feeling his age real quick.
"that was a long time ago,"
he told them.
"and my memory ain't what
it used to be."

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that was the end of that
but it was enough.
when he got home
Earl pulled out his old army
footlocker.
he threw the skull and the photos
in a pillow case
and drove out to a state forest.
he walked deep into the woods
and buried those memories
and many more
he won't talk about now.

Alone

We live alone
inside our heads
looking out on the world
through glass eyes.

A parade of illusions
passes by,
vibrations of light
and heavy footsteps
rattling skull walls.

We close the blinds
and stop our ears
to end the distraction,
sink into solitude,
neurons humming mantras
liberating meat and bone.

Beating a dead horse

The whips are at the ready
to flay the moving flesh.
A heap of blood, bones, and skin
lays in the cobbled street
rotting in the summer sun.

The blows rain down on the carcass,
teamsters angered by the theft
by death of their property
and of the pleasure sought
by causing the living to suffer,

so they beat the dead
to punish death for its vile
robbery,
until another victim appears.