THE SOLDIER

GARY FOSHEE
Issaquah, Washington

The setting sun, a battle won,
Our men have held their ground.
But with downcast eye they pass me by,
Struck by a sniper's round.

A turning head, words left unsaid
And the medic walks away
To save his skill for those uphill
That might see another day.

Dark shadows creep, and now I sleep
As sun and life grow dim.
All hope now past, I come at last
To the shores of home again.

No celestial light or hellfire bright,
No judgment seat I see,
But vast and timeless, in perfect silence,
An eerie world of land and sea.

Now fit and trim with healed limb,
Yet soldier still in a foreign field.
By whose command in this limbo land
Will my destiny be revealed?

As if in reply, from the shore nearby
A presence appears in the dew.
Unearthly in nature but human in stature
A lone figure comes into view.

With a cadenced pace and unseen face
It nears most stealthily.
Now the face I see. No – it cannot be
It is a soldier, but – the enemy!

In hatred schooled, by reflex ruled
Blade drawn to take his life,
Standing toe to toe I face my foe
How I'm eager for the strife.

With upraised palm and a serene calm
In a voice both low and somber
With quiet ease his words are these:
"Fear not. I am your brother."
I’m taken aback, my arms are slack
My weapons fall hardby
For my reason knows his words are those
Of one who cannot lie.

“It was I you killed and your bloodlust filled
   in a battle long since fought.
The years have passed, and now at last
To this world we two are brought.

“A soldier’s place, where face to face
   Slain and slayer meet.
Foes no more on this ageless shore,
Hallowed ground beneath our feet.

“So it has been with dying men
   From every battlefield.
War upon war, beyond times before,
To Man’s first sword and shield.”

In a blinding light that sears my sight
He’s gone, his last duty done.
And in silence anew this world of two
Is again a world of one.

Not sun or moon, or morn or noon
Nor evening’s starry sky
Or tide of sea are here for me
To mark the years gone by.

Now the wait is past, he comes at last,
From this world I take my leave.
This silent shore is home no more
As my destiny nears its eve.

He’s before me now, tall and proud
His eyes are steeled and cool.
Polished and clean, his rifle’s sheen
Reveal a sniper’s deadly tool.

With palm upraised and a steady gaze
One soldier to another
I proffer now the ancient vow:
“Fear not. I am your brother.”

Gary L Foshee 2008