MANUSCRIPTS

THE SURRENDER

Diane Hale

Light revolves
patterning grey age faces
in flashing momentary brilliance—
exposing shadow dreams
of victorious kingdoms
built in bottle caps
the shrapnel of hope’s treachery—
to be swept away with
debris of belief
Laughter ricochets against worn plastic battlefields—
benches belching the seat-formed slogans
of dispossessed compatriots
united in common cause.

Sullenly one sings the songs no one heard
Sways in rhythm to promises
no one granted
Crys to his hands for the wisdom
no one heeded
Action displaced by words
“Another beer, old man?”
cap flipping toward the ground in a smooth uniform arc,
destiny lost beneath the roar of combat—
eye to eye
Seventy years extends its hand
reaching for more than,
less than,
accepting defeat with the nothing sought and paid for
The nightmare carousel dances over terror-stricken victims,
stabbing with effigy reflections of failure
questioning command

Trails of smoke push through thickened lips
that speak of tarnished medals
flaunted to the no one filling the next stool—
heard by the no one and smiled away
Morose tales forfeited to evanescent radiance
until energy is depleted,
conquered by the intimate enemy awareness
The commander’s drawl
proclaiming surrender inevitable
Moving forward defiantly in single file—
laughter strained—
heels riveting concrete
in final drum-rolls of despair
“Hey, general, the war’s over.”
Seventy years retreat into a wrinkled mask
inspecting the soiled apron of the younger
with fatigued eyes
“Excuse me, commander?”
“Pop, ya gotta go home now.”
The body heaves into stance
and limps coldly toward the street
turning in one last attempt
“Could I ask...” the aged fingers raised,
questioning the intensity of knowing,
falling against the worn flesh of stomach
“Yea, pop?”
“I don’t know anymore. It went away,
they all went away...”
The door slams savagely—
isolating the lone survivor
left in the wake of yesterday’s heroes
He lifts a chair
shoving anger against the pock-marked counter,
watching the shredded cushion,
with the intensity of knowing
bitter with seventy years he’ll
never understand
“God, I hate a sullen drunk.”
Music looms in a deserted room
Reminding the no one’s listening
of days surrendered to forever.