

Lapse Americana

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AGINCOURT

My neighbor's son is jumping
from a helicopter into a field of poppies

that might explode. The father, proud
and worried, tells me about it one morning

as I water the wilting flowers
in front of our house and he stands

with a newspaper bag and a cup of coffee.
The elderly lady across the street comes out in her bathrobe

to smoke a cigarette and clip her roses, and I
ask myself if I could die to save her right to stand there

with her paper-white legs out-paling the morning
sun. In church they ask the soldiers to stand, and the pews

become a time-lapse forest around me, redwoods
straight up on all sides while I sit low as a rotted fern.

I don't know what I believe about this war,
and I hear Branagh's King Henry declare that I

will hold my manhood cheap. My manhood is middle
aged and nearsighted and has read far too many books.

The national guard convoys rattle the windows
of our little house when they roll down Main Street.

What can I say to those others, no different from me, really,
filing off into Afghanistan, like letters mailed to God?

GOING FAR

We were not doomed
enough to be beautiful.
So they sentenced us
to ride around in cars,

abandoned satellites falling
through an endless orbit,
maple keys twisting
in a circular wind.

From blue to infinite
blue runs the main
street of our little town,

atop the hill, a seven
block stretch of 66.

The bored teenage years,
on long, thin Saturday afternoons,
we would drive the highway
as far as half our gas money
would take us and stare
down the line of road

until the distant sky
appeared a lake, the bank of cloud
like mountains beyond
rising to a higher sky.

Those nights, folded in the thick
arms of sleep we would
dream the dreams of birds
heading north again,
taking their wings and an outbound
wind to ride.

There was a fire
in my chest back then:

the burn is gone,
but the light remains.

ODIN

My friend is forgetting
me, his mind a tree blooming
with bagworm, the gloss slipping
from once green leaves.

I visit his study
at home, books piled
in ruins around us. His wife
brings us coffee (to grow
cold in its ceramic walls),
while he searches my face
like an engine straining to turn.

She tells me later
how she found him
in the breakfast cereal
aisle, transfixed before
hundreds of cartoon eyes,
and how she locks the door
at night to keep him from looking
for some ghostly home.

Thought and Memory are two
crows. Each dawn Odin
lets them loose to search
the earth for what is there,
black wings painting
frost in long strokes
of shadow.

The old man waits
in the cold throne room.
The crows will come again
never.