

An aerial photograph of a cemetery, showing rows of rectangular graves. Many graves are adorned with colorful flowers, including red and purple blooms. The perspective is from a high angle, looking down on the rows of graves which recede into the distance.

warstories



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VIETNAMESE CHILD, AIR LIFTED 1972

I grew up in a suburb of
Chicago, braces, cheerleading.
My adoptive parents sent me
to private camps. My real parents
I remembered as lips and eyes
in a dream

After my own baby was born
I tried to imagine never
seeing her and knew I had
to find my parents.
Two years then luck.

I remembered my sister
being bigger than me.
Now she was small in my
arms and we didn't
speak the same language
but we held each other,
cried and cried

The drive to my parents
thru elephant grass and shrub
trees seemed endless.
I learned my father
searched daily in the jungle
for three years
for our bodies,
then tried to kill himself
he felt so guilty.
There were three of us
pulled from street rubble,
babies nearly. Who knows
why we were saved,
weren't working in the
fields.

All my family are skinny,
their teeth crumbling.
I had braces, a good school.

I bought an old tape of me
when I was five
singing in Vietnamese.
As I look in their eyes,
I want to re-learn it

WAR

the woman is
amazed not
that the watch
store is
open but that
anyone cards
about the time
or knows it.
Every part of
her an aide, a
scout sent
out to listen
to bring back
news to empty
rooms where
people who
hoped it would
be over are
no longer

THERE WERE ALWAYS STARS

at night, loud,
exploding the
closeness of wrinkled silk.
I remember the
smell of my
mother's hair
holding me
curled into her
coolness of
marble and the
hard lines
of a chair
shading us, the
wood becoming
a tree again.
Blue of sky.
Trees in the
bottom of a
tea cup. Even
when the one
wall was ash
mother scrubbed
and kept lace
squares on half

the couch, lit
candles. One Friday
bed posts flared
wilder than wax
in silver. It was
all we knew, blue
berry jam blue
veins breaking, the
blue of violets.
Nana's blue sweater
one arm sorter,
unraveling.
Shapes dissolve
like margarine
high noon on the
Sahara. Blue the last
color. David's eyes as
the train door shut.
Blue tattoo, blue
flame I'd only
touch once. Every
thing transformed the
way a scalp stuns,
shaved of hair

IT WAS LIKE WINTERGREEN

a camouflage
over the babies'
graves. Even as
the Americans
marched in, 2000
were killed. While
the Germans were
surrendering, they
put ivy over the
earth where arms
and legs were
still sticking up.
The Americans
made them rebury
the dead. But the
Germans didn't
put flowers of
memorials over
the prisoners of
war. just left
winter green. It
doesn't need light,
it doesn't need
care. You don't have
to think about it

SHE SAID THE GEESE

when she heard them
squabbling over a
crust she starts
shivering. But in
the light she felt
the shadows, how
on their knees, in
the camps the young
and old battered wildly
in mud. for the dry
bread. A mouthful
thrown for hundreds,
the smallest,
the frail trampled.
She said the corn
slid thru her
hands. She couldn't
move, toss a crumb.
They weren't geese,
only men and women,
someone dressed in her
sister's clothes
clawing and scratching
blood and dust



TREBLINKA

like the sound
of giraffe
necks shattering,
trembling.
Crystal bullets,
I was wrapped
in a blue so
torn and old
it was almost
colorless, blue
of David's eyes
and the light
we could see from
trains. I had
enough of moon
light, hiding
crawling between
barns. Under the
hay my heart was
pounding. Maybe
when they shave
my hair it will

go for a mattress
in Berlin, for
that man I'd
love to spit
at who dreams
of goose fat
sputtering as
he washes his
coarse beard
with soap made
of a sister
you won't know.
If Treblinka was
a color it would
be a hard icy
almost white
blue the color
of flames
they shoved
cribs into. What
shatters becomes
its own blade

HE'S MOVED EVERYTHING HE NEEDS INTO ONE ROOM

walls of books on
the Holocaust, revolutions
and Nam blocking the
light. Paper from
D-Day, divorce
papers with stains of cups
all over. The velvet
zip bag of medals, part
of the moat around the
mattress he's
curled on under
a brushed cotton quilt:
you couldn't call any
thing in this room
a comforter. Crumbs
from the last three
weeks, machete
in a top drawer, machine
guns, a .44. Librium
crumbled near ashes,
punching bag, the
insides spill out
of like entrails
in the jungle he said,
I took the man's
intestines, washed them
off in rain water,
stuffed them back into
the slit like
squeezing bread
crumbs into a turkey

IN THE VA HOSPITAL

You wouldn't believe
the jokes, we were
all glad to get
there and not in a
body bag, at least we
could sing and ogle
blondes, those of us
with eyes still and
lips that could move.
I'd have been out
sooner than 12 months
if it wasn't for the
skin grafts. No one
felt funny because
nobody had everything
they'd been born with.
Even the quadriplegics
would go on about girls.
Even in the copters
with blood filling the
cockpit, matting
hair, the first thing
those who could talk
whimpered or moaned
was, "Hey, mate, do I
still have my balls?"

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