D.F. Brown
from *Assuming Blue*

The First Law of Landscaping/May 30, 1990

Imagine, men on their knees trimming around stone
A sprinkler system at sunset
Drift of light from the west through water
Through beads of water
Like it was a book of poems
Paddies squared copper
A bunch of fully armed teenagers
The dream of dry socks

I mean really, we didn't know how to act

The war we were raised for and
Something going on they didn't tell us
Imagine the lawn it takes to keep that green
Then every two weeks the mower

Let's say people you know are here

Steps

Think elephant, big snakes
and lots of water. More water.
Imagine swimming.
The motions it takes to stay.
The stars involved.

Sometimes, when you're fighting
for your life, any life
you can walk through,
you have to stand
and fire into the leaves
at people you can't see.

You put your kisses there.

It gets that close. You rock
in the pivot. Find wings
don't work. All that ache
towards lift is pretend.

20 lines

You walk into a butcher shop, draw a number.

Everybody gets two wives,
a taste of hard drugs,
some time in the slammer.
You want to add it up—
the O.D.s, the "one cars"
guys who sucked off a 12 gauge.
By the time you figure out,
half your friends are dead
and you're afraid of the total.

Waiting can take hours,
a step across to the counter—
you move marching—
you have orders.
Grill burgers for supper.

You watch everything
and often you see faces,
you know they are children,
you know their destination.

Walk into a butcher shop, draw a number.

Keeping Days and Numbers Together

1.
Now this is halfway round the world, the Orient,
the other side with all its smell and it's almost
like you don't have to care or there is no need,
until somebody "eats it", "buys the farm"; then
all Asia bears down and you have never been
so put upon your whole life and it is your life and
you are mumbling "it don't mean nothing" and it
doesn't and that's all you keep track of, it's all
you care about and that's too much—one life, one
more worthless fucking death. So you lie, you
sleep, you say, *hometown, girlfriend,* you say
'59 Ford coupe, say *getting it on in the backseat*
with her and you drive her everywhere.

2.
Willing. You wanted to join. For the first time you had to go someplace, maybe kill someone and live through it, see what that means. You alone know what "Birdman" was cussing the day he got shot, what he was telling himself. *It was set-up*. They knew it would spin your wheels, that it could take years to slow down. They knew this could never be home anymore. Never again, again.

3.
All you got to do is practice releasing tonight.
Say to yourself a hundred times *the war is over*
drift into sleep. You could wake from dreams
believing some of the children were saved.
You can call it Tuesday, three a.m. or p.m. or
November fifth. You can say *for-fucking-ever.*

Stars

As if words were a long shot
Half hold to the dream side
Like we needed them
How far, fast
Whatever light is worth
The instant falls to freeze frame

The catch on burrs
We bring back
From each trip
The stop and go
Across the understand, you understand
Pitch and spin
As though we could forget
As if there were a dream side

Another Viet Nam War Poem for Leeboy C.

Woven or laced over the tongue
Gobs and clots strung along sung
Words show how they left themselves
Soldier boys face down in the paddies

I write as if you watch
Orange splash flash speed spread
Through that green
Over that village in that order

You see palms that look like bent match sticks
Burnt bent match sticks
And running children crying
Meaning passed on swollen into flames

Big chunks you don't recognize
Show up red one place
Real time spoken broken
You could be digging there at twilight

And it fits the night you spend waiting
Several words at once
And they fit darkness
The tough kind spills letter by letter

Whatever facts come in
Nights you button down
Suck it all into your foxhole
Like a dream because

– memoria Lee Childress, 1944-97