

Two Poems

Amy Schmitz

Dreams During Wartime I

1944

He was on a train stuck on the tracks and he smoked
12 packs of cigarettes waiting to get home.

He was 20,000 feet above the Tyrrhenian Sea
wishing for one sweet twist of a bottle cap.

He was flying through a box canyon made
of yellow sandstone, listening to the wind
warning him to climb out or turn back.

He was the train blowing through a snow bank.

He was in a B-17 smoking a cigarette
listening to the whistle of a bomb.

He was at home and his children around him
were fish and loaves.

1968

For a long time there was a village. Then
there was a burned village.

She washed her father's clothes by hand
under roof shade. Birds watched.

No good her tub of goat meat
for sale near the shack of the man
who tended banyon trees along the dirt path.
He did not want her anymore.

No monkeys.

Spent shells.

Flies adorned the meat.

Jewels, gems.

For a long time, she had nothing
to remove. Then she had less than nothing.

2001

Children were fishing, snagged
a gull by its wing, dragged it the length
of the beach.

They pretended it didn't matter.

Children were snatched by the swell
and bowled back to shore, spit out on the sand.

They retreated as if the lake were enemy.

Summer was over and children went back
to school, built 3-D interpretations
of *Guernica*, used real onions for eyes,
made plaster-of-Paris horse masks,
affixed lutes, window sills and lamps
to sheet music.

Children ran from burning buildings.

Dreams During Wartime III

after Amy Lowell

I.

I swam in water I did not know.

It grew clearer

until at last I could see

by tilting my head toward coral reefs

a girl-child swimming with me

wearing only white underpants—

loose, so the swell fluttered

the hem, exposing her skin.

II.

Across the ocean, men tested

weapons. They waded knee-deep

into water—tide sucking

their shoes—and hoisted

makeshift explosives

to their shoulders, aiming

for the horizon line.

Behind them, trees hid beyond

dunes.

III.

We built a bonfire,
stacked dried driftwood
like bones.

Spent match fell
after spent match
to sand, tomorrow
pecked over by gulls.

"I was never a Scout—I don't know how to light a fire
naturally." But I already had a plan—
join somebody else's fire.

IV.

The men pounded their shoulders red
and shouted, "Fire, fire."

But their ammunition landed
just past the breaking waves.

It blossomed beneath surf
and funneled sand into air.

They did not stop aiming
at where ocean touched
dawn.

V.

I followed the swimming girl,
who never surfaced for breath,
to where flowering seagrass rippled
and waved in the swell. She was not near
enough for me to catch.

VI.

The men wished for chemicals
or an airplane—something with consequences
and weight.

VII.

I set out to swim 15 lengths
in one breath
with minimal strokes
just above the seagrass
but it was not possible.
Instead I watched the girl
swim in front of me, the shock
of her pale skin in the sun
under water, bones
that didn't exist yet. The sea spewed

blood and I swam on
through red water,
slowly arcing earth.

Amy Schmitz grew up in New York and Virginia and now lives in California and Arizona. Her first collection, *Border Crossing*, was published in April 2018 by the National Federation of State Poetry Societies. Her work has been published or is forthcoming in *Apple Valley Review*, *America Media*, *Quiddity*, *High Plains Literary Review*, *Sugar House Review*, *Kestrel*, *Borderlands: Texas Literary Review*, *Louisiana Review*, *Askew*, *Poetry International* and elsewhere, and she has won awards from *Poetry International*, the Women's National Book Association and the Syracuse chapter of the National League of American Pen Women. She is a Returned Peace Corps Volunteer and holds an MFA from George Mason University.