

Anticlimax, 1943

Fred Reinhart

Postponed death came all at once.
The waves, the wash, the endless hissing wind
 insisted sand surrender
 its hoarded bones: the last parts
Of a Marine still
 since the fight on
 despised Tarawa.

Covered by years, his body lay
 in limbo,
 not his soul,
Say the chaplains,
Fluent in the uneasy irony
 of just wars
 and slaughter.

Dog tags and x-rays reach the
Brother and sister
 long ago told *missing* and now
 a final loss in *found*.
In a local paper, the incongruous notion of homecoming.
A small headline
 perhaps because anticlimax is small
 and does not draw.

For a few, the news began the world again:
*Long ago someone stopped at a light that never turned
 Green.*
*They cannot remember
 Why
They were driving and why
Their hands today
 are dry and doubting on the wheel.*
*Another was at a movie and the picture turned
 Yellow
With black edges.*
*The fire in the projector was smothered but
 people had left to buy milk and bread
On the way home
 to their lives.*
After the telegram of *missing* the parents

Watched for a marked car in the drive.
Again and again they heard the song
of his unchanged voice
at the door.

They did not hear his apology:

That he did not die sooner
or like others,
Die seen and certain,
and earn for them
An intact burial, his bright face at attention,
and pinned on patterned satin,
In frames for years propped on the mantel,
Medals.

The bugle sounds. Guns and uniformed men salute.
Survivors pause at the grave with eyes closed
considering a time for boys of nineteen
When clocks
Stopped
and the oblivious earth
kept to its seasons.

They do not speak
Of doubts
Present and accounted for
in the conquering gray air;
Of death
no longer dormant.

After the guns
There is something in the silence
about sacrifice,
About war and what is
right and wrong.

The wind and wash and
Restless sands of Tarawa
Remain,
And questions remain
for a world at war
and a war-transcending God.

Fred Reinhart writes poetry and lives with his wife in Chelsea, Michigan. Various family members served in WWII in the Army (father), Navy (uncle), Airforce (father-in-law), and Marines (father-in-law) and Iraq, in the Army (nephew). His poem honors them and all soldiers whose arrival home was delayed by years or decades.