

# Three Poems

## Henry Hughes

### Sergeant Dark Joins the International Legion for Defense of Ukraine

Still kickboxing at fifty, scaling scree on sore knees,  
range firing rounds that squared his stance. *First just war since*  
*Big Two*, he tells me over a beer. He tracks Russian tanks  
across his screen, artillery in the elms, smoky rubble, a roofless  
winter schoolgirl cradling a kitten, tenacious purr

under rocket-clawed skies. After his last shift, he asks Lily  
to lead the union, Tim to take his arthritic dog.

Embassy interviews, visas, extra meds and socks. Brushing  
sand off his battle rattle, he packs his helmet, body armor,  
tactical gloves, Juicy Fruit and a rabbit's foot

his late mother gnawed from her purse. Sergeant Dark prays  
to all gods, helps a neighbor change a tire, holds open  
the post office door for a moldy pear who hates America.

He drops by to return my fly rod.

*Take it with you, I say. You never know.*

## The Retired Colonel Ties Flies

Bent over his vise,

pinching tight fibers

snipped from an eagle

hit on the highway,

he wraps waxed thread, snugging

the fly's pale wings

for service in trout territory.

*There, he smiles. We've put*

*that poor bird to use.*

## Selbstmord, 1945

Demmin's bridges blown,  
white flags, cherry blossoms,  
the long coated Red Army just in time  
for May Day's radio news: Hitler dead,  
*fighting to the last breath against Bolshevism.*  
The Soviet 65th swimming in booze and jewelry,  
canned beets and basement potatoes—  
the prettiest and ugliest frauleins for dessert.  
A Demmin grocer shoots his wife, daughter,  
two Russian privates booting up the stairs,  
and then himself. A thousand others swing from rafters,  
plunge into the Peene with their babies, swallow poison,  
slit Oma's wrists, fire long saved bullets  
into their own feverish heads,  
so when the walls are brushed with gasoline,  
screams rising and roofs crashing down,  
they can follow whatever it is  
that leads people this way.

A past contributor to *WLA*, **Henry Hughes** is the Oregon Book Award-winning author of four poetry collections and the fishing memoir, *Back Seat with Fish*. He teaches at Western Oregon University and contributes regularly to *Anglers Journal*, *Queens Quarterly*, and *Harvard Review*.