

# Five Poems

## Holly Day

### Best-Laid Plans

During World War II, the U.S. government briefly considered using domesticated pigeons to carry bombs and guide them to their targets. Dubbed "Project Pigeon," the program was scrapped when more reliable navigation systems became available something relatively boring, like radar.

Part of the difficulty in using birds was that bombs are very heavy, and even very strong birds have a hard time lifting one off the ground and carrying it hundreds or thousands of miles to a target and then there's the issue

of birds passing one another in mid-flight, being distracted perhaps going into some kind of heat or rut (I don't really know that much about pigeons but I do know those words) and completely forgetting they were strapped to bombs landing in the middle of the French countryside with plans to roost, to nest, lay eggs, raise chicks

all the lovely things birds probably think about when not being used by government agencies to destroy things.

## When He Went

It was just after Germany fell  
and everything was broken and new  
he was walking home  
disappeared.

I have been told that there were no fairies or wolves  
in Cold War Prague, that all disappearances  
ended only in dark prison cells with the exits walled up  
that there is no magic in Communism  
that my great-grandmother was a liar and not a princess after all.

He grew up in a palace  
that was burned to the ground.  
Even Hitler said it was a shame, that destruction.

There are a few photographs left.

## War Stories

Whenever I tried to ask him about the war, he'd shrug and change the subject  
tell me he had a great idea for a book about time traveling or  
the origin of God, said that was the book we should write together,  
the war wasn't really very interesting, probably no war's that interesting  
it'd just be a book about noise. I was never brave enough to ask him  
about the medals my mom had rescued from the trash when she was younger  
kept in secret this whole time,  
a mix of brass German SS medallions and U.S. Air Force ribbons and pins  
a loose collection in an old cardboard jewelry box  
full of questions no one ever asked.

After he died, my mom finally worked up the nerve  
to ask her aunt for all of the old war journals he'd stored in the basement  
after the war, he'd told her she could have them when he was gone.  
My mom and dad drove all the way out to Kansas to pick them up after the funeral  
only to find mold had completely rotted the pages of the journals,  
turned my grandfather's snaky handwriting green and illegible  
a half-dozen leather-bound journals  
sealed shut with brachiating lichen and rust.

## He Never Told Me Anything About the War

All of his poetry was about  
horses, heads heavy over the gate, arching their necks  
to reach the nodding heads of mock sunflowers  
or daisies, their petals spread in a mystical configuration  
designed to tell one if they're fated for love, or meadow finches  
clinging to a single stalk of flowering rye  
barely bending the stem with their insignificant weight.

But he never talked about the tanks in the desert  
never wrote anything about how his lower leg  
became a phantom object in a night that ended  
in a hospital bed and a trip back home  
never talked about the fear, or the pain or the loss, it was as if  
he had broken into two people during his tour:

one that existed only  
to walk through seas of wildflowers and baking wheat fields

one that kept all of his bloody memories  
somewhere secret and far, far away.

## The Soldier

I'm standing right behind her in line and I can't help but pass judgment, I am not a good feminist, a good woman, I would be a terrible friend to this woman standing here holding a car seat with a tiny baby in it, a little blond toddler clutching her other friend this woman in combat fatigues buying cases of infant formula and several months' worth of breakfast cereal and assorted dried goods.

Next to her is a man with a beard typing something into his phone, distractedly looking up when the cashier announces the grocery total, looking back down again as the woman pulls out her wallet.

I remember how hard it was to leave my own baby behind while I worked various temp jobs, my then-husband left in charge of our tiny baby calling home two or three times a day to make sure my son was all right, ask how many diapers he'd gone through how many bottles he'd emptied. I can't imagine what it would be like to be deployed so far away from home that only one phone call a day would be allowed to catch up on everything or none at all for weeks, what it would be like to leave those beautiful babies behind pushed along through every day buoyed only by faith.

**Holly Day's** writing has recently appeared in *Analog SF*, *Talking River*, and *New Plains Review*, and her published books include *Music Theory for Dummies* and *Music Composition for Dummies*. She currently teaches classes at The Loft Literary Center in Minnesota, Hugo House in Washington, and the Indiana Writers Center.