

Two Poems

H.C. Palmer

While You Were Shopping

after W. D. Snodgrass

Go Shopping. Keep on shopping.

—Tony Blair and George W. Bush

They fly home tonight, a 10-hour trip in Emirate's first class:
Florence to Philadelphia. Last shop, Caravaggio's Florentine
Leather. Her new handbag is fashioned from calfskin, and
Jimmy's wallet cut from the skin of a goat.

I'm going to tell you something very ugly—so you won't make a fool
of yourself if you feel *the patriotic urge*. Three days ago, in this Iraqi village,
a boy, wearing a bomb-vest, walked right at our Humvee.

When Jimmy is a partner in the firm, he will think of her as he folds
money in. He will remember; she gave him a 100-dollar bill
to practice. Their plane lands in Philadelphia. At baggage claim
she sees a man wearing a uniform, 10 feet away.

At 100 meters, Gunny gave the order, "Shoot it." My .50 caliber round exploded the vest, and the boy. Dirt and debris, and what was left of the boy, choked the air around me. When it settled, I saw the road ahead was a big empty crater.

She points to Skycap, then their luggage. Then, bent to her son's ear, says, "Tell that soldier thank you for keeping our country free." She nudges him ahead. "This is Jimmy", she says. "He wants to tell you something."

The Marine steps past Jimmy and stops in front of the woman—face to face.

So, this woman at the luggage pick-up shoves her kid at me. I'd heard what she'd said, so I got in her face—right up to the shiny label on her Gucci glasses.

"A boy . . ." I screamed. "A boy like yours . . ." I couldn't say the rest.

I couldn't say the rest.

I had breathed that boy,

and his bomb, and his vest.

Taking Communion at the Fire Base: Phouc Vinh, Vietnam, 1965

Destroy them utterly.

—Joshua 8:22 and 22 more

*god is not here—

but here's a saltine—*This is My body.*

Sodden from monsoon, there's no broken in the bite
anymore. And here our bodies, broken and bagged
for lie after lie.

god is not here—

but here is rice wine—*This is My blood.*

And here is our blood—insufficient to wash
the sins of a nation, but plenty for blood-
bait to catch every devil fish in Indochina.

god is not here—

but decreed destruction of Jericho and Ai—
the same as we learned in boot camp. *We will lift them*
to you, Lord, after sunup, bound and blindfolded
and rope-tethered, neck to neck.

Send us to the world—

Where death angels ride illumination flares,
rocking down, rocking, rocking down every night.
Death angels' lights that deepen our doubt
there ever shone a star so bright.

**god is not here*, an Iraqi War memoir by Colonel Bill Edmonds.

H.C. Palmer, a retired Internist. He served as a Battalion Surgeon with the First Infantry Division in Vietnam in 1965-66. His work has appeared in *New Letters*, *Poetry Daily*, *Verse Daily*, *War Literature & the Arts*, *Narrative Magazine*, *The New Mexico Poetry Review*, *I-70 Review*, *Flint Hills Review*, *Gray's Sporting Journal* and other journals and anthologies. His first book of poems, *Feet of the Messenger*, from BkMkPress, the University of Missouri, Kansas City, released in October 2017, was a finalist for the 2017 Balcones Poetry Prize and was a 2017 Kansas Notable Book. He was the 2017 Anthony Hecht Scholar at the Sewanee Writers' Conference. He works with a veterans' writing program in partnership with the Kansas City Public Libraries and the Moral Injury Association of America.