

Private Red

by AMTL

Don't shut your eyes, behind them
the terror lurks,
but it will find its way out
through open eyes.

Light another cigarette.
Let the smoke inside you,
let it caress your body,
turn your skin yellow,
your teeth yellow,
your eyes yellow.

When you marched back into town
after the war,
your red hair
had been scared
bone-white,
its color bled into European soil
through wounds of fallen comrades.
Your favorite nickname
existed only in the bright red
cherry smoldering
at the end of your smoke.

I smoke too, you know.
Yesterday I sat outside your house
at gray predawn
while the crows
circled overhead.
I lit my cigarette on a candle
and dipped the tip in wax —
waxen like your lungs must have been

when you gave me that Christmas candy
a few weeks before
you became too sick to see me.

While you were choking, my aunts said
they saw angels;
celestial, they flared like a flame cased in wax,
then vanished.
I don't think they'd lie
about something like that.

You were buried
on a chilly morning
with a fitting military salute —
a salute to you?

Ten years later, we still can't scrub
the yellow from your walls.

