

War & Peace

by Jack Swenson

In the morning the fog boils up from the ground as I pad down the steps to the lake in bare feet. I stand at the edge of the water naked as a newborn. Tiny ripples lick my toes. I walk into the water until it is waist deep. Then I scrub myself with a bar of Ivory soap.

In the evening I sit in my dad's old leather recliner and watch the sunset. The color of the water changes from blue to black. The sky turns from pink to star-spangled ebony. There is no moon.

Later I lie in bed and think about my past life with more relief than regret, happy to have survived the train wreck, glad to be alive. I fall asleep listening to the shrill lullaby of crickets.

I dream about sitting in a bar in Saigon with Fuzzy and Mac. A kid comes in and goes from table to table selling fruit. Can't be more than six years old. She's got vu sua--star apples. I get up to go take a piss. BOOM. The next thing I know, I'm flat on the floor. I crawl back to where my buddies are. I can't see a thing there's so much dust and smoke. I find Fuzzy. He's sitting on the floor shaking his head. Mac comes through the door with a couple of MPs.

I wake up sucking air. I get up and sit in the dark in an old recliner by the window and watch the reflection of the moon bobbing on the inky surface of the lake. I think about my dead father and my wayward wife.

I recall the petty things we fought about, the undeclared war that my wife and I waged about the temperature setting in our house. My wife had night sweats; I was always cold. If she got up first, she set the temperature at 68 degrees; when I got up, I waited until she left for work and bumped it up to 70. This worked fine, except on days when we were both home. Then we changed the setting every time we walked down the hall.

