

All The World's Cold

by John Olson

Recruitment was low this year. The elders warned the young that war is not noble, but steals the soul and cages it in steel. A law was passed forbidding anyone to talk negatively of war. Many have been arrested. The war continues.

A ship anchored in the bay and the hospital made preparations for the wounded. I cleared some space for myself on the deck and folded my jacket to have something to sit on. The height of the masts was dizzying. The sails fluttered and flapped. Whitecaps pushed toward the shore. I gazed at the horizon, and tried to imagine what was beyond the other side.

An officer appeared and told us that we were already dead. We were already ghosts. As soon as you realize this, there is nothing to fear. I tried to feel dead but I couldn't. Life and fear and anguish continued to pound through my veins like the wild red blood of the forest deer.

I was one of the first casualties. I was killed by a piece of shrapnel. Or the blade of a sword plunged in my back. It is hard to say. There was so much smoke and confusion.

I miss skin. I miss drinking and eating and the feeling of a woman's lips on mine. The small of a woman's back. The heat of a fire on hands numbed and stinging with cold. But fear, at least, is gone. There is nothing more to be feared. This is a new feeling. Feeling nothing. There is no one to do the feeling. Do you understand this? Can you hear me? There is no one to do the feeling.

It is be nowhere and everywhere at once. A sound cut into light. Twitch of a horse's rump. The branches of the trees lift up from nowhere. The bottoms of the clouds turn red and the day folds over

the horizon. Eggs hatch in a nest high on a cliff. A gardenia blooms. A ball bounces down a street in Valencia. Fisherman unload baskets of fish and crab.

Death is not what you think. Life is not the opposite of death. Death is not the opposite of life. There are no opposites. There are stars. Billions of stars. Puddles in which the sky looks up from the ground. What we think of as spirits are holes in the fabric of time.

The participation in life is broken. But if you fish a color from a sky of fire, you will have in your hand something alive and pounding. A piece of language tangled among its words. On such occasions, the self is undone. We stand at a frontier between what is and what is not. Is this the fruit of war? No it is not. It is a hole in time. It is honey in your breath.

I was once a soldier and now I am dead. I saw the head of a horse burn, its eyes full of fire. I saw a man fall to the ground without a head. All the world's cold passed through his mouth.

