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For Alfred and Learning to Grieve

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For Alfred and Learning to Grieve

Your love was a life long sharing of unspeakable violence. From the beginning, Father, it wasn't from a sad height you cursed or blessed me, but the inner dampness of wheat fields and savage cold in the Ardennes woods.

You were born in the very mid-mid west where clarity surrenders to humidity, a thin film glazed your eyes, and all life taken as usual and available until you are dazed by its repetition.

You awoke with carcasses, colors ripe with death, their childhood sealed as was yours, and at 19 you saw the best of you doing the fierce business of a soldier wounded or dead (inside and out) along with your comrades, brothers, and enemies.

I've tried to imagine you there in the dark and or in a gray morning manning your quad fifties to take on Tiger Tanks and the drinking buddies exploding with a flash-bang whistle inside of your half-track - pin ball death.

It's in that frozen moment in the Ardennes that we swear an oath, you and I. You were broken, absent without leave to the family, confined to dim taverns where apparitions sank deeper and deeper into sweating glasses.

It killed you didn't it? The asking over and over what you are without them, the grief that had no past and only the here and now, sharing with us who were all alcoholics along with you while staring at a John Wayne poster.

I remember one kiss. After a half century living with corpses and your family dead to you, you sat unable to say what you had not said and would not say. Hunched in your orange-vinyl kitchen chair, condemned, you asked: "Why am I here?"

I kissed the top of your greasy head. You loved them I know, but they were gone, just as I was as I went out the door.