

Hugh Findlay

He was a soldier

who sought a bed for the night
who asked the church
who asked my father
who said *Whoever in need.*

He smiled twice,
once when he arrived,
and once when he left,
and in-between, well just
something in-between.

My mother was taken in awe,
for she was reminded of my father
in uniform who captured her heart
so many years before.

My father said our guest
was only 19...but wasn't
and he worried aloud
about his morale,

the morale of the troops,
morale of the country,
the mood of the world.

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The soldier said
he would *be back soon*,
meaning there, not here,
and he watched the family dog
all through dinner.

That night, a Spring wind
blew the window drapes agape
and the sounds of the
suburb flew about—

distant yappings of yard dogs,
a rumbling roadster fading away,
the low thump of faraway trains.

I caught him with his door ajar, late,
still clothed, staring out the window,
the night offering only a turbid view.

He stood in silhouette, back to me,
as if at attention I thought,
with his hands behind him,

taking his time, the time of our house,
his hands somehow handcuffed there
in the stillness of our spare room.

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The next morning, he said his goodbyes
while my parents gushed
and took turns shaking his hand.

*Take care young man...be safe and
God bless you now —*
the ordeal stretching out forever.

And when he looked at me,
it seemed he knew I spied on him
the night before, and suddenly
I wanted to run away.

But then my mother filled
his only request made the day before —
a box of cherry Kool-Aid,

to sweeten the dyspeptic waters
of a nation at war,
and to carry with him a reminder
of his American home.