1968

For Tom Way

Clarence A. Amann
St. John Fisher College

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For Tom Way

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FOR TOM WAY
KILLED VIETNAM, OCTOBER '67

FOR TOM WAY

The spoken
and unspoken "whys"
will not be answered . . .

To men
death is never timely . . .

In battle . . . and violent . . .
and pulling the full flush of youth,
it abhors the sensitive,
rivules the statesmen
oppresses the philosopher
strains the theologian
confounds the scientist,
mocks the smiling promise
of a youthtime given to lights,
stifles with all-gulping darkness
a youthtime given to lights . . . and joy . . . and hope

And yet
how better bear
the burden of penultimate despair
than summon Him
whose death seized ultimate hope,
whose symbols all
proclaim
that death's not all
nor life . . . here . . .

To Him
death is never untimely!

SITTING ON CANNON SQUARE WHEN YOUNG

We are all turning khaki green
from washing our clothes in red cross puddles
from sitting on cannon square when young
and smashing scientific pacemakers
with memorial mounds of chocolate cream
We are all turning khaki green
from cutting naked army mess lines
from playing taps on civilian coat hangers
and thinking soldiers are only stunt men
in summer reruns of guacamole
We are all turning khaki green
from an unshaved state of kill
from an unbrushed G I bill
and sweating alcoholic history
in antiseptic volumes of suburban libraries
We are all turning khaki green
from pulling dead lots of exaggerated votes
from singing the gospel of conscience
and cooling our tired feet
in a bucket of programmed poker cards
We warm our hands in our armpits
waking up stung from a wet dream of peace
asking with our dark eyes
to the G I Joe
when his black hand will freeze the air
We warm our hands in our armpits
starting in horror through reflecting windows
asking with our dark eyes
to the G I Joe
when he will send his soggy package of care
We warm our hands in our armpits
we gather our shrinking skin
we wait
we wait on the commonplace rattle of natural causes
we wait for the homecoming of a wasted generation
we wait for generals to melt their stars
and recast a cannon plaque to
: his reign was mild
All war hero museums
should be treated as jealousy consoles
and drowned in ten cent comic books

Thomas Hughes