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Gone To Graveyards

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Gone To Graveyards

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Joseph Cook is a sophomore history major, Civil War Era Studies minor. He was born in the Bronx, NY, and lived his entire life in the small town of Bogota in Northeast New Jersey. He will be appearing on the ballot as an Independent candidate for mayor there in this November's election.

He needed to explain it. The excessive buying binges? Manic. Chemical imbalances in the brain. The sudden absences? Depressive. Chemical imbalances in the brain. It seemed an unlikely explanation, but I liked it because that way a bit of my aunt's oddity could be lifted off of her own shoulders and placed onto a classified cause. I'd like to think it would have made a difference had I known this about my aunt when my mom was ironing my black blouse before we threw the dirt onto her grave, that it would have taken Tommy off my mind and the glamour out of the occasion. But it's hard to know really.

As I stood out in the sunshine beside my aunt's grave with Mom, Aaron, Justin and the others whose faces I didn't recognize except for the woe that was in them, my eyes got very confused. The lids were heavy and I looked down to her casket, closed, dead in the ground. And then something did not feel right in them, so I had to look up, towards the sky, where a vision of Santa and his airplane sleigh sabotaged my thoughts. I tried to think of Tommy's arms, but I found myself again held against my aunt's warm chest. Tried to focus on my practiced pout, but the muscles around my mouth held a straight, yet strained position. Tried to rehearse a scenario for school tomorrow, but just couldn't remember my lines. The glamour was gone and I felt sick over it ever having been there. I looked down, stared at the box with my dead aunt inside of it, and fought the sting in my sinuses. My face pressed itself together into a painful knot, and it got to the point where I had to just let it go. It wasn't written in my script, but I cried. My eyes, something did not feel right in them; I couldn't see anything but sorrow.

JOSEPH COOK

Gone to Graveyards

*"Where have all the soldiers gone?
Gone to Graveyards – every one.
When will they ever learn?"*
-Pete Seeger, "Where Have All the Flowers Gone?"

Lost is the legion once led by Caesar,
The phalanx of Alexander the Great.
No more "We about to die salute you."
Farewell to battle, now what is our fate?

Gone the glory of Hector and Achilles,
The brilliant triumph of the towers of Troy.
Farewell to the fame of Hannibal's movement
That brought on the deaths of the bravest of boys.

Who recalls the blind king of Bohemia who
Commanded that he be led to Çrécy's field?
He determined to "...strike one stroke with my sword,"
Said goodbye to his people, tossed aside his shield.
Where are the gentlemen leading great armies
Who fought solely for honor and no other gain?

There was once one true honor and one true glory:
Those of duty done and integrity saved.

Never again will the outnumbered leader
Holler to the men of his heroic host,
"Don't fire 'til you see the whites of their eyes, men!"
No hand-to-hand victory about which to boast.

Where are the flags leading men into battle?
The drummers relaying their general's command?
The gentleman Lee and Grant the Human Butcher
Turned war into friendship with the shake of a hand.

When did we lose all the glorious charges
With cavalry sweeping the enemy's flank?
No more would Turenne or Marlborough matter.
No more horses in cavalry, only the tank.

Great Charlemagne is long forgotten;
His knights no longer attack with the mace.
Ne'er to be known is Napoleon's Grande Armée;
The army of France now a total disgrace.

Rusted are the medals worn by great leaders.
Where are Winfield Scott and Wellington's duke?
The only question a general now answers:
"At which major city do I aim the nuke?"

Damn the day politics entered the mixture
Ending such great men as "Old Blood and Guts."
Gallant men who wore stars on the fields of Mars,
Removed from command by fat men behind desks.

Why is conquest no longer commended?
The victor now viewed as a liar and a cheat.
A successful march to the Halls of Hammurabi
Bring the leader censure as a dastardly feat.

Their forms may change and their bodies vanish,
Decompose, and turn into coals –
But on the ground the spirits still linger
To consecrate the vision place of souls.

Calmly I sit here, watching the sunset:
The light going out on the heroes of old.
I feel I should witness the march to Valhalla:
The phantom army whose legends are told.