

Flies Swarming

poetry

William Rudolph

2023

In this cafeteria flies swarm the recruiter's cropped hair.
"One thing I hate—" he spits out—"flies!"
His dominant hand swipes the air. Pure reflex.

.
In this same room girls carry plastic babies, lifeless until
internal mechanisms inspire crying when
they haven't been fed, haven't slept, are jarred in some way.

.
The recruiter cozies up to one boy's lowered eyes. I should whisper,
"Son, you're fully armed. Listen only to amputees
who would hand over the pen with bone-white teeth."

.
Instead, I ask the recruiter, "You served over there?" "No, sir."
"You got boys over there you recruited?" "Yes, sir."
"Any been killed?" "No, sir. Some close calls.
I try to—"

.
he fills the brief silence with a half-hearted fly slap
"—to stay in touch." So. Maybe the man does flip
and flail some nights. Maybe he is not the enemy. Maybe.

.
For seventy-two hours our daughters parent Baby Think-It-Over to glimpse
that responsibility; for the same trinity of days our unfortunate
sons should carry AK-47s, clips of rubber bullets,—.

.
A mechanized baby begins to bawl. More boys huddle around
the recruiter's uniform. From this safe taxpayer distance,
I do not spill my coffee on his pale enlistment forms;

.
I write this worthless dispatch none of them will read
and formulate empty threats: tomorrow, I swear, I will invite in
the neighborhood pimp and the local crackhead.

.
What's that?—the administration claims

those are dangerous characters. O yes—they do
deal in the stuff from which aborted dreams are made.

William Rudolph coaches student writers at Grinnell College, Iowa and in GC's Liberal Arts in Prison Program. His poetry has appeared in *Barrow Street*, *Grub Street*, *The North American Review*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, *Poetry East*, *Quarterly West*, *Rattle*, *Steam Ticket* and other journals.

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