

# The Reunion

Rachel Firth

Autumn leaves, rustling to the appointed place,  
the old warriors come.  
Pilgrims, drifting across the land they fought to preserve.  
Where they meet is not so important any more...  
They meet and that's enough for now.

Greetings echo across the lobby.  
Hands reach out and arms draw buddies close.  
Embraces, that as young men they were too uncomfortable to give,  
too shy to accept so lovingly.

But, deep within these Indian Summer days  
they have reached a greater understanding of life and love.  
The shells holding their souls are weaker now,  
but hearts and minds grow vigorous remembering.

On a table, someone spreads old photographs; a test of recollection.  
And friendly laughter echoes at shocks of hair  
gone gray or white, or merely gone.  
The slender bodies lost forever.  
Yet they no longer need to prove their strength.

Some are now sustained by one of "medicine's miracles,"  
and even in this fact they manage to find humor.  
The women, all those who waited, all those who love them,  
have watched the changes take place.  
Now they observe and listen, and smile at each other,  
as glad to be together as the men.

Talks turn to war and planes and foreign lands.  
Stories are told and told again,  
reweaving the threadbare fabric of the past.  
Mending one more time the banner of their youth.

They hear the vibrations, feel the shudder of metal  
as propellers whine and swirl, and planes come to life.

These birds with fractured wings can see beyond the mist of clouds,  
and they are in the air again, chasing the wind,  
feeling the exhilaration of flight, close to the heavens,  
the wild and blue yonder of their anthem.

Dead comrades, hearing their names spoken,  
wanting to share in this time, if only in spirit,  
move silently among them.  
Their presence is felt and smiles appear beneath misty eyes.  
Each, in his own way, may wonder who will be absent another year.

The room grows quiet for a time.  
Suddenly an ember flames to life.  
Another memory burns.  
The talk may turn to other wars and other men,  
and of futility. So, this is how it goes.

The past is ever present.  
In their ceremonies, the allegiances, the speeches,  
and the prayers, one cannot help but hear the deep  
eternal love of country they will forever share.

Finally, it is time to leave.  
Much too soon to set aside this little piece of yesterday,  
but the past cannot be held too long for it is fragile.

They say "Farewell...See you next year, God willing,"  
breathing prayers for one another.  
Each keeping a little of the others with him forever.

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