

“Memorial Day”

by Donna Isaac

Great wings like palmetto fans flap silently
as the eagle rises from its piney roost,
and I think of Uncle Leon, deaf,
alone in his head, in his quiet life,
enlisting in the Air Force at the end of World War II,
serving in Korea, the arena of Vietnam,
reading lips over the roar of rattling metal,
the placidity of the skies. Though he heard nothing,
he saw everything, especially through a camera lens, shooting
fly boys in navy and silver-sparked bombers
bearing insignias and sweethearts' names.
The other senses stepped in –
a flocked Valentine beneath his thumb,
line-caught sunnies from a cold lake,
delicate white flesh on tongue, butter and booze,
lilacs and peonies in the spring,
brittle-cut bedsheets edges, freshly folded towels,
and sharply honed knives stuck to a magnetized bar.
He used to bring chocolate éclairs to his mother,
both relishing the sweet cream in the center.
Before death, his skin like gray rubber,
tracheotomy, nourishment from a plastic bag, his eyes
blue pinpoints, we stroked his hand,
the faded tattoo on his arm, wishing we could feed
him the things that he loved.
Once on a fishing trip, my brother
pointed skyward so Leon would look up:
"I wish *I* could be an eagle," he said,
to soar above the silent roar of the world,
to ride the currents of buoyant air.
On the day of his funeral,
we felt an ascension, knowing he was in the heavens.
Later, we ate strawberry-rhubarb pie
a la mode, just like he liked it.