

“Passage in a Time of War”

by Jonathan Latimer

Time was when everything he did seemed right, when no one was better at life, no one was better prepared; shining youth had no better example, no more successful exponent of good ol’ American exuberance and ability and ingenuity to conquer anything life put in his way. But then after high school he enlisted and disappeared for months, then years, and we all went on, living our suburban lives, doing what was expected, passing the mileposts and driving through the goals set by the orderly patterns of a familiar dance: romance, first job, engagement, marriage, promotion, first children, and so on, And we imagined that we overcame difficulties by facing our challenges, getting ahead at work, paying our bills, making the mortgage, credit cards, the insurance, education for our kids, taxes, the occasional emergency. And life was damn tough, but we made it through; we worked hard and paid our debts and seemed content, if not exactly happy. Little doubts were easily pushed aside. And we did not hear of him until he came home from the war. And we all noticed how rigid he seemed, stiff and unsmiling, his eyes scanning an area before he moved. And he talked less, not just about the war, about his medals, but about anything, everything. When he did speak, it was only in a monotone, without affect or inflection, just steady on and keep moving forward, low-keyed and angry. Even when he had drunk more than expected, taken more pills for pain and anxiety, his old self wasn’t there. Time having been ripped away, life seemed to follow after. He’d become a new man and one day he was gone, without explanation or goodbye to his parents, his friends, his town, but no one took notice at first. As awareness set in, we slowly realized he was missing. The odd space he filled was empty until he was found by accident outside of town, his car out of sight in a brush-filled gulch, a small pistol next to a body slumped over the steering wheel. No warning, no note, no nothing, just another shadow blotted out in a time of peace.