

"The Calligraphy of War"

by Jack Stewart

All I have is a stubby pencil,
So please forgive the smudges
From the dirty eraser.
I am writing this on my lap,
The only table I have right now.
Sometimes, especially in the morning,
When the mist has not yet risen
From No-Man's Land,
And the sky has not chosen its color,
I can almost forget myself,
But the barbed-wire curls
Like words in a medieval manuscript,
And the war goes about as slow in its making.
You must understand, though,
That war is never beautiful,
Not with the bellies blown open
And the mud flying high as larks
When a shell hits. Then the best
You can do is try not to shake
Or scream, but somehow you manage
To move and give an order
To someone just as scared
But showing it a little more.
Last night, a flare lit the sky egg-white,
And we all pressed harder against
The wall of the bunker
Than the earth itself.
The boy next to me held his helmet
Over his face.

It will be strange to help you garden
When I get back. Tomatoes will be
Such a luxury. Beans will be more
Beautiful than the sunsets we used to watch.
But shovels will look loathsome.
You wouldn't believe
What you learn to believe here.

I hope General Delivery gets this to you.
I'll write again soon.