

# Corpses

by Thomas Lambert

*Outside Kuwait City (1991)*

We came upon them mid-day  
in a rush for shelter from the petrol rain,  
three corpses upright in an armored personnel carrier  
as crisp as dime-store cigars.

Oil fires illuminated a blast zone  
surrounding the vehicle, casting a perverse  
half-light over the living and dead.

Some Marines took photos with the corpses,  
souvenirs for the living back home.  
I kept watch through the scorched, steel turret  
and thought of my Grandfather lying embalmed  
in a casket in Enid, Oklahoma.

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I was sixteen when Grandpa died  
and recalled him displayed like some wax mannequin  
stuffed with ice and vinegar.

The mortician overdid Grandpa's makeup  
which cracked like desert topsoil around his hairline.  
I half-expected him to rise up  
and scold the adults in the room for  
displaying him that way.

The preacher's pontificating seemed to run on  
forever, and I experienced the first growth  
of skepticism swelling in me toward claims  
that the dead reanimate in a celestial paradise  
surrounded by deceased pets and loved ones.

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Staring back at those unfortunate soldiers

trapped in a fiery death-box of American  
military might, the poison rain hammered away  
at our fragile notion of youth's invincibility.

An offhanded sentiment offered  
by our most-junior squad member,  
a boot private from Encinitas, California,  
proved a more convincing eulogy  
than Grandpa received.

"Sucks to be them," he said.

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