

# Awaiting the Cessation of Cannons (July 3, 1863)

by Philip Bartram

Perhaps it is not the thunderous retort  
Of cannons that have upset our bellies,  
Increased our trembling, and caused our  
Dry lips to crack.

As if the cause, we curse the cornmeal  
And chicory root. Surely, the Sawbones will  
Concur: Sickly men cannot endure the trek  
To the stolid stone wall beyond the swales.

What unwavering tenure keeps us in this  
Dust-stained light of afternoon, when the  
Battle is drawn, and there is nothing more  
To do? When ordered, will we loiter and  
Shuffle our feet or go into the stone, falling  
Like leaves prematurely, and never return  
To the tree?

Field mice and the lowly June bugs  
Burrow deeper beneath the long grasses.  
As if sensing a violent rain, the studious  
White-tailed deer and sly red foxes  
That had hidden in maddening angst  
Now begin to mourn for us.

In silent harmony, we sing the old Church  
Hymns, and to each his recollection of some  
Elated youthful indiscretion.

But now the fusillades have ceased and  
As our blood-stained ears dry,  
We are striding, without hesitation,  
Forward in no certain cadence,  
Into the stone,  
Shoulder to shoulder,  
Our last notes of endearment  
Pinned to our butternut jackets,  
Whistling Dixie,  
Hard thin steel to the sun,  
With the shims of our gaits gone.

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