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After a War

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WILLIAM HEYEN

AFTER A WAR

I

Our generals clear their throats: we'll napalm
the monsoon itself, or the fields

will never dry; the paddies, though thick
with excrement, dead fish, will never yield

all the bodies we've claimed.
We'll burn the land to a desert.

II

It is beginning April. Winds rise
in the southwest, swirl. Gusts of rain

scatter the husks of rice. In waters
where the dead lie camouflaged

and still, April begins in watery syllables. Eyes,
tongues of the dead dissolve in their skulls' sockets.

III

Yes, let us gather the relics together:
from the west a wristbone to beat a drumskin with;

from the south a ribcage strummed by a plow;
from the east the tuned teeth of a jawbone struck,

as though in a music box, by circling oxen;
from the north the curved bow of a legbone.

IV

After a war no one could win, come,
let us honor the Asian dead we exhume.

Let us stand, heads bowed, solemn,
at a flag-draped monument of stone.

Let us listen to their harsh, disparate music,
until the dead be counted, or be damned.