

Poetry Series

Sidney P. Roberts II

- poems -

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Sidney P. Roberts II(1970-)

Sidney P. Roberts II was born in Spring 1970 in Walson Army Hospital, Fort Dix, New Jersey, where they raised the colors at dawn and soldiers ran by singing. He lives in San Diego, California. He is the author of *Small Moments*, *SUNDOWNERS*, and *SPEARMAKER: love, war and musings from the blue-backed notebook*. They are all collections of short fiction and poetry.

In going where he has to go and doing what he has to do and writing the words which he must write, he tries to keep the notion about him that the most astounding feats, the most heart felt poems, and the stories which pry into one's soul often come from those non-descript strangers sitting quietly alone in dark corners, who we know little or nothing about.

A Vision This Day

A vision had I this day in a flash
Of my one true love held close
Sharing for shelter a woolen blanket
Atop a snowy hill at sunrise

A vision to me this day for a moment
Of my true love's face drawn near
(Whisky breath'd, full of each other
Shivering we were, but not from the snow
Trembling were we, but not from the cold)
As my sun ascended slowly into morning

A vision this day I had in a breath
Of my one true love held close
Of a face so soft in my hands
Of perfect lips to mine own
Of deep wet intoxicating kisses
Atop a snowy hill at dawn

Sidney P. Roberts II

All I Could Get

Roaming one Thursday with reluctance
Amid the smog and noise
Amid haste immaturity irresponsibility
Amid the rude sound of telephones
Horns blowing people laughing obnoxious
Screaming demanding refusing
Announcements warnings sirens
Amid this confusion which I loathe
Saw I a touching farewell at the ocean

And I wanted the world to be silent
And I wanted to sit and not speak
And I wanted only to breathe
Just to hear the wind blow
And the sound of the water foam grey
As it was greeted in peace by the sand
I only wanted to feel my own heart
Beating ever more slowly inside
And record the farewell in my notebook

For someone to read perhaps
In a hundred years time

For someone to eat perhaps
While the worms did eat me

So I sat on the sand and did not speak
But it was just too damn noisy

And all I could get

Was the shadow-bearded man
With the child on his shoulders
Looking
With binoculars
To the sea

As the red scarf waved
From the crying woman's hand

While the warship
Sailed away
From the three

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Allied Forces

Anyway the instructor seemed sound. That was good because sometimes they're not and they think they're all salty and are just God's gift to the gun-toting community and you just haven't been around long enough to have seen the incredible things they have seen and they are so much more than you will ever be. The funniest is when they are veterans and have had a combat tour and seem proud about that enemy marksmanship badge. My friend has a Purple Heart but will never admit it and neither would I if in fact I had one, which I certainly do NOT.

But this guy was modest and later we got off the subject and the military topic came up. He asked the class had any of us ever jumped out of an airplane before and my old friend just looked at me and pointed with his eyes to his breast pocket where the whiskey was and smiled and I remembered that cherry blast we had together when we got to Vicenza.

It was back when we were friends and peers and we said good-bye to each other just in case we should not make it to the ground alive and they made us drink a certain amount of beer beforehand for traditional reasons. I remembered how on that night I was so scared that I couldn't get out far enough and so I bounced along the side of the aircraft a few times as I fell and how later at the bar all we could stand to drink was water and he told me the same thing happened to him. He winked at me and we didn't raise our hands. Then someone made the old remark that they always make.

"What kind of a man is stupid enough to jump out of a perfectly good airplane? "

"Those are the words of a leg, " I said.

A leg is someone who is not Airborne and walks to his objective instead of bringing the destruction down from heaven like some kind of angel of death. The jealousy and insecurity which dirty nasty legs feel will always compel them to criticize the paratrooper. It's a fact of life as real as the irrational behavior one is prone to when in love.

My old friend winked at me and the instructor saw it and he smiled at us. I saw his eyes and knew right then and there that an ally had been revealed. We were now at least three strong in the class.

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Almost A Poem

Her name was Beautiful and if it was not then I care not nor render apology because I called her that constantly for it was true. And I before you standing here this blue morning while the moon pales away lean forward to touch your cheek and say the old Man I speak for is true and as such values truth. And when I cannot speak truth he insists I speak not a word at all. And to this I do comply best as I can. So, beginning now the only one of it's kind, this fair 27th day of the sixth month of this the 38th year given me by my mother and father, I speaking truth or remaining silent swear intent to continue marching in this manner till I die. There is much more which guarding silent I do not share. But speaking what I can I tell you now. This is the story of Beautiful.

She was from an island, you know, in that deep green water east and south of Florida. Third one I have met in my years. All three beautiful, but not Beautiful. Only this one. And as such so did I have not much choice in how to dub her. I would say hello Beautiful how may I serve thee. And I would look at her dark eyes and take good hold of her dark body and pull it to me roughly to kiss repeatedly best I could with little restraint or control.

"As dark as I am, she says to me, as
dark as I am the way you grab me it's going to leave a bruise.
And for a moment I think of my heart and do not say me
too."

Awake approaching 2am as all my kind I read this by candlelight on a scrap of paper I find a young kitten battling with on the floor crumpled in a corner. Something I heard her say and scribbled and hoped would someday become a poem. Thrown there one foggy night some time long ago or recent, I cannot remember. Remnants of another one. To be smacked by a combat kitten the middle of the night as time goes by for no other reason than to satisfy instinct. As I continue left right left through pathless wood my wander.
Almost a poem.

But reading it I think you know I rather like taking hold of a woman and how as a boy I never knew I liked it at all until I was taught it. By women. By this woman and that woman and the other woman. Who when I was gentle said to me in so many lusty words things like I'm not a china doll take hold of me beast be rough harder I like it. But that night I did not tell her these thoughts. I only said I don't know I kinda like to take hold of a woman. And to this she turns away showing me her back after telling me I'm not a woman I am so and so. She then repeats her name which is such a beautiful name it pained me I could not use it to address her as it was not the diminutive she introduced herself by because she thought it not so pretty. And now with praise correctly so she has confidence and speaks it loud and proud. But I still cannot call her by it. It was not who I knew her as and calling her by the perfect name her parents gave her I would only feel like an actor. And being an actor is denying myself. And denying myself is a mortal sin in the Church of Sidney Roberts. So at that moment I call her Beautiful because she is Beautiful and say I'm sorry I won't do it again. And I didn't. I touch softly then the arm I touched roughly a moment ere. Then no more words and we sleep. I wake with her nightmare like an earthquake and wake her from it and hold her and we sleep again. This continues awhile. But soon, this or that reason made me send her the way of the gun and the way of tobacco and the way of children and of love and all those other things no longer allowed. And then I reneged, to which she sent me that same way which I always knew eventually I would go. For I too am tobacco and I too am child. I too am love and I too am the gun. So to the banishment I looked at her and said so be it. And therefore back again with my notebook mistress I plodded along and got back to the business of speaking for that safe old Man who in troubled times I speak for.

She came looking for me though. In about a month. In the poetry section. As I was sitting on the floor legs stretched out with my heroes all in my hands fantasizing military operations about assaulting the store and stealing them all away. I heard something and I looked up and saw her right there in front of me. She stood all smiling perfumed and pretty with perfect hair and shaped as she was like a thing

you just have to touch. And in a white dress of all colors. White. And how she thought she might find me here and how was I and did I get her messages and how she heard I had a new book Sidney Roberts congratulations on that. She was so happy for me and she wanted to read it let's go get a drink, she says. C'mon. And when I all shaking and confused listened and heard the old man say there is no choice but to deny her young man I denied her. Polite. But straight and true because I had to do it the old Man spoke. She got very quiet then. Looking at me there Beautiful as ever but surprised and no longer smiling casual and very quiet. Well join the club, I thought. Just join the club. And when she quickly walked away I thought, almost created something there. Almost a poem. Almost. And when the old Man said to me that almost only counts in horseshoes and hand grenades, I said well. Then I guess that's the end of that.

Sidney P. Roberts II

As I Lay With My Head On Your Breast Camarada

As I lay with my head on your breast camarada,
As I breathe you inhaling your exhales,
As I feel your heartbeat,
Slow,
Slow, against my cheek,
As your fingers stroke gently the small of my back,
My stubbly head, the nape of my neck,
As softly I touch exploring,
Your moist thighs, your round hips, your slim waist,
As curious I probe your navel with finger,
I ponder a moment my self:
A youth interrupted then stolen by war,
A city submerged in a flood,
A trust betrayed by solemn oath broken,
I have been suspicious, somber, and mean.
I am sorry.
But I, here, resting quietly with you,
In peace now, on this day on this morning,
With you inside me and me inside you,
With acceptance, affection, and trust,
With my flesh to your flesh,
With my soul to your soul,
My love I have never felt better.

Sidney P. Roberts II

Ashcan Rantings

Scandal, craziness, lack of patience, most of all violation of trust led me to cold water bumper pull trailer minus bath. Leaky and swaying during storms when dust arroyo changed to raging river which I thought was going to rush the whole place away. My home was the size of a machine gun position. Barely enough room to climb in; you find yourself in a corner sitting trying not to move. Poems and stories all scattered around rejection letters under empty brandy bottles caked in wax. Beans and rice cooked on hotplate coil eaten from the only pot with the only spoon with the only glass broken picked up (there was no broom) thrown into the fire where the trash the beer cans the oak the eucalyptus the broken pallets our despair our hate our confusion burned making white smoke surround us.

There was Joel the welder, cartographer in the earth, esconder of beer from wife and daughters, faller asleep on sofas. Balduino, watcher of hot movies, loser of cars behind pizza joints, forgetter that he parked there, innocent notifier of police who discover his car his drunkenness and promptly take him away. And they even ate his pizza. Moises, the roommate, builder of many things, alien smuggler retired, claimer of fifty buck debt from Balduino for passage into the country, teller of stories of narrow escapes from pinche migra en horses en motos en trockas and they never catch him never. Federico player of the one sad song on the out of tune pawn shop six string that was my birthday present until it became a five string and a four string and a three string whispering hoarsely to garnish with the smoke the tortillas the fresh chiles the roasted nopalitos stolen from in front the school and finally me, Sidney, toter of guns, scribbler of notebooks, occasional hunter of rabbits,

questioner of many things, answerer of some,
failed fisherman and singer/composer of the
future famous Misogynist Anthem.

Back then the smell in your nose, the tears
staining your cheek, and the mix of chiles,
emotion, poverty, and brotherhood which caused
them was at times something like raw primitive
beauty. I stood many nights around the fire with
four of the last true men. Every penny minus
rations and rent back to families in Mexico, in
Arizona, in the trailer next door, to Moises' large
wife in ghetto small apartment El Cajon. While
the fire burned all women complained demanded
and refused to acknowledge efforts. And all
efforts continued regardless. Because saints are
never recognized before death.

Sidney P. Roberts II

At Captain Zack's In Hawaii

She was a not large Japanese woman of an age that you should check her ID before serving her an alcoholic beverage. She wore a melony colored bikini top and God only knows what underneath the skirty, beachy thing she had wrapped around her round little Asian bottom. Her boyfriend sat next to her on her right and I was on her left and when he wasn't watching she would turn slightly and bump into my right leg with a foot or a knee or the back of a hand. I never knew Japanese women were so flirty or fresh or came with such light colored hair but then that was probably like all the blonde Mexican women you see in the border area trying to be whiter, I suppose. Don't they know how attractive they are in their natural dark state? If one asked I would tell her but so far none have.

I could see her boyfriend was a little dizzy from drinking and she told me she had never been to the mainland and asked me was it true what they said about how the ocean is so cold there that you need a suit. I thought about a few days prior when me and the troops were on one of our last days together and even after a week they never tired and kept going like some kind of Special Forces Kids Branch, if there ever was such a thing. We were at Imperial beach and Pretty Lady Tasha read prettily, however silently, to herself and considerably overdressed, on the lawn chair next to me in the sand that I sat on. Maria and the landlady's kid were in the water on the boards for the first time with the waves pushing them into shore like they had been body boarding for years and Tasha next to me but higher up, me on my butt Indian style on the sand hiding my toes, and we smiled at each other when we saw Maria and Alberto ride the first wave in, giving us a thumbs up.

Malachy, youngest troop of the day, in front of me trying his damnedest to create a likeness in the sand of the pier stretching into the Pacific and needing water but not having a bucket to tote it with and he was being so modest about the whole thing not wanting to cause any trouble. He still doesn't realize that he can have almost anything he asks me for. So I emptied the cooler and fetched some water and my toes were icy cold when I walked out into the surf. He got to make a more accurate representation of the setting and the feeling on his face when I said I liked it was heartwarming. Even though we joke about how he might be part shark, and even with my freezing toes and Maria and Alberto's goosebumps and shivering lips, and even with Tasha in the jacket and my nipples hard and hair standing up, no one but Mal and I would admit the water was cold. I wished I had bought wetsuits.

Back at the bar, I told the touchy flirty Japanese woman without touching her back, "It's kind of cold I guess, compared to here."

Summer vacation was over and I started to miss my children again.

Fire In The Hole

Well this little boy came up to use the bathroom and had to wait because someone was already in it. The women started flirting with him because oh he was just so cute and they found out that he used to be five and now he is six. He was going to San Diego where he used to live but now he didn't. He was going to see his Dad. The woman I could partially see was eating a sort of trail mix that had chocolate in it and she gave him some. I was hungry and wanted some but no one offered me any.

Then the boy went on talking and I got that feeling I sometimes get. It's like going down a roller coaster hill when your insides try to stay where they are and to you they feel like they're really trying to go up. Well this feeling was close to that except my insides were trying to go down. My body felt weightless on the outside and heavy on the inside and I tried to distract myself by wondering was that where the expression "with a heavy heart" came from.

I've learned to deal with it though and that doesn't mean it's easy. It can be pretty tough sometimes. You know my son turned six last month and before that he was five. And he keeps telling me every time I see him.

Then the headache came back. I was doing so good in the campaign and then the perimeter just began to fall. I had been dealing with that headache for at least a week. My reason called it a police action but I knew what it was. It was a war. I had won every single battle but some of them took a while to win and the allied forces suffered a few high ranking casualties. We had almost equal body counts though. I didn't know how I forgot the pinche painkillers in the car but I did and so I asked the girl if she had anything for a headache. She said, "sure," and smiled and gave me two aspirin and a glass of water but she didn't tell me to call her in the morning because she wasn't a doctor she was a flight attendant.

Then she poured me a half cup of the pretty trail mix and I accepted and my soldiers started to regain the ground against the headache.

The next thing that happened was I heard someone scream, "FIRE-IN-THE-HOLE! " and a SWAT team of words breached the back door of my mind. There was a flash with an explosion and the team forced entry yet again. "Federal Agents, it's a warrant! " they said. And before I knew it they were in and hit the corners, guns all on me.

I tried to run out the front but they had that covered so well like they always do and I was forced at gunpoint to open the notebook and begin again.

Sidney P. Roberts II

He Wandered Through Sunlight And Laughter

The headline read HE WANDERED THROUGH SUNLIGHT AND LAUGHTER. And it was all about me. And bathing in this my sun and laughing in this my laughter realizing solitude and nature and accepting it kicking up musical leaves I walked north and came upon the trail that leads to Canada. And at that moment a summer breeze so softly blew so I stopped to take it in. And glancing a moment for novelty back at Mexico listening in that clearing I heard a small something. It was just me out there carrying rations for one and notebook and camera but I heard something then I'm sure of it. Like a poem. Little bitty poem upon the wind. And it almost just came, almost. It was just almost right there. Something about a spot against a wall where my old friend my lover I held dear did first hold me tender. And unfastened buttons and plunged her dark face and pressed sweet lips to my bare chest and my neck on this side and on this side and on these two very lips. And said the wind to me: Do you see? Do you understand? Do you see where she kissed me? She kissed me here. And I kissed her back and it was good.

And as I reached for the notebook easy as that soft wind whispered to me that poem and easy as I stood on the trail listening and recalled those moments the wind ceased falling silent and that tiny little bitty poem went away. So with the notebook in one hand and the pen in the other I kept on marching toward the unknown place on some high hill where I hoped to make fire and sit and eat and rest and be. But as I walked I was saying where did it go where did it go what happened to it. And thinking and breaking it all down I remembered again how I discovered long ago that the place where poems go when they die must be the same place they were before they were born. It has to be. That's where they go. So wandering through this sunlight I no longer laughed. But I say to you dear reader whoever you are that you will be when you die exactly where you were before you were born. As is my dear old friend my lover. As is the soft poem whispered to me by that summer wind while I kicked up leaves. As are these words. As am I and as are all other living things.

You are alive too. And you will be here just a moment. And when you die will go back too from whence you came. But during that moment you are here, which is now, I ask you this. How will you spend it? How will you spend that moment? What will you do? What will you do right now?

Sidney P. Roberts II

I'M Gonna Kiss Her

Outside a hotel in San Francisco
I am shivering
Cheap cloth jacket, black
Grey cotton hoodie
Smoke smelly, drawstrings tight, fatigued
It is drizzling glistening rain
And musical as it is
Like drum-taps marching
And much as it reminds me
Of younger days
In forests outside Frankfurt
(My comrades all about
'You eat in the foxhole, '
I remember telling a young private
And that muddy hole
All slippery filth
In the days I smiled
Happy and young
As a soldier)
But even this rain
All silvery draping down...
No I'm softer now
And my cigarette is wet
And this notebook and pen are rotten stingy prudes
Who know damn well they want it
But give up nothing at all but crap

Off I go then
Tennis shoed, light hearted, wet and silly
Inside right up to the bar
To find a brandy is eight fifty
And you know me
Any price is just fine, depending of course
But if there are two candles I squint
Two lights I am blind
Two other people and
It is a batallion of lusty strangers
All feigning disinterest
Well tonight there is a brigade

Saturday night, what do you expect?

And there is no smoking at all
Except back outside
Where I peek it's now raining buckets
Buckets of tiny kittens and puppies
All squirming and whining and writhing
In wet pleading breaths
Of vain existence
Schopenhauer comes to mind

But romancing the clerk,
He gave me his card
And had the bellman take me to Lucky's
(Anything you need at all Mr. Roberts,
Oh you're too kind, I said, thank you
So very much, as we shook hands
Believe it or not I even smiled, yes,
As his finger stroked lightly my palm)
Where I got a Lucky bottle for seven
And eight pieces Lucky stale chicken
Lucky fries and Lucky bread
Another seven
I'll drink water from the tap
To wash it down
Add a five buck tip
Makes nineteen dollars
Sundowners, gentlemen,
All around

On the way back
In the hotel shuttle
That grey dingy van
Under tortured puppy and kitty cat rain
Starving orphans meowing and yelping
Like their mama just got run over
By the garbage truck in the morning
With the illegal alien driver
Who could use a shave
While he babbled in tip-interest motivation
(I tried to give him ten
But he only took five

Bless him)

As the Blues at Sunrise song wailed in my head

I thought about a certain girl

My own little wound dresser

(Or so I would like,

Or so I was hoping she'd be)

And I could see her clearly

That fine light hair

The natural smile

And I could feel clearly

I could almost

just

taste

How she kissed me

Quite a few times

HOT

Then I realized oh my

I had barely kissed her at all

I had only responded

Happily yes, but still

I had never just grabbed her

And kissed her

Que injusticia!

I'm gonna kiss her, I thought

I'm gonna kiss her HARD

Soon as I see her

You better believe it

Watch out, I thought.

You better hold on to something,

I thought, from far away

Yeah

And I hoped she would call

But if she didn't, I thought

Sitting in my room

As Lucille wailed

Smoking the ever present Marlboro

As B.B King gave the setting
(At the Philmore West...)
As Stevie Ray imitated Jimmy Hendrix
(Who was dead of O.D.)
As Janis walked in with her little glass
(Also dead, and she was 27,
That li'l beatnik crazy girl,
Always had a little glass, too,
But that's not why I like her,
Okay maybe it is,
But only just a little)
And if Janis was here
Like it or not
I might just have to kiss her too!

As I chastised the phone
Which kept refusing to ring
After I shook and tortured the phone
Which still refused to ring
After I asked what it had to say for itself,
I thought,
Oh well
A night alone
Nothing new
And nineteen bucks
Hey
Even alone
Not too bad for rations and privacy
Not too bad at all

I'm gonna kiss her though
When I see her
You watch
I said to myself
Just you watch and see
I'm gonna kiss her

And that
As they say
Will be that

In The Company Of Baboons

I was raised in a wet forest by a small troop of baboons who picked parasites out of my nappy hominid hair and screamed and gave me fruit to eat which often gave me diarrhea. "Do not forget that we are not apes," they said. "We are not like the black chimps or gorillas. Nor are we the same as the orangutans. Certainly not. Remember we are baboons." Besides this there was little instruction. Often I remember how I used to fling shit and shout obscenities at the other primates because they were inferior, or so I thought, and this was what I was supposed to do, and in this way I would be safe. Much of the rest escapes me, I'm afraid. But at some point I began to question. And the same answers and accepted instruction made less and less sense. So finally I dropped down from those swaying branches. I wrote the beginning of a song and sprinted out the green brown woodland, singing.

So help me I will never go back.

And since much time has been wasted, I offer below a few words of advice, from the way I wish it was, in the event you ever find yourself in the company of baby baboons.

Love, art, emotion, expression. Encourage encourage encourage. Explain what you know of the mind, the brain, the soul. And seek to learn what you do not. Preach peace and tolerance, even for hatred. Preach acceptance. Preach questioning. Take your youth outside on a clear night, hold them and say: "My gift," while pointing at the sky.

Science and mathematics are wonderful things to be inhaled and explored to eternity. Fish, hunt, plant flowers, paint, write poems, carry them in pockets and share them. Theorize, conduct experiments. Get down into the thick of things and try it. Because you never know until you know and it is only then that you know. And everyone before us has died and we will die. So do things today while there is still time. Teach how to teach and teach how to learn. Ride. Gallop rowdy horses in yellow dawns. Race the sun to the hilltop in the morning and sit quietly. And notice the steaming flared nostrils of the horse. And feel your straddle widen and narrow as she breathes. And feel her heartbeat. Notice as much as you can.

Responsibility for one's actions, respect for others, choice, consequence, caution, trust, suspicion, the right to deny anything without proof. All this will protect them for that day when they leave the rainy forest. And when they do if you have prepared them, they will have an advantage over the other primates. ONLY

THEN WILL THEY BE SUPERIOR. ONLY THEN WILL THEY BE SAFE. They will enjoy many happy moments and will have to fling shit on no particular primate to do it. Good day.

Sidney P. Roberts II

Just Before A Rain In Arizona

Pensive
in Arizona,
sitting in weather
before a rain,
searching
(for therapy)
kind pretty things
in an ugly world,
I notice briefly
the musical wind
in this high desert
mixing with distant
eastern thunder.
It does not howl
nor whisper
nor scream
nor cry
yet is beautiful
as you are.
And as one looks up
to see a stark grey cloud
moaning slowly
it is not difficult to imagine
for a moment
while feeling the first slender drops
of monsoon season
that whether or not
one has the future
one at least
at times
with boldness
has the present.
And as the wind picks up
there is
in the eye of my mind
a strong
brilliant
image
of you

and your dark immaculate face
and how the taking of your hand
and the back of your neck
and how looking into you
and bringing your lips
softly to touch mine
or roughly
in this symphony of weather
would
for a brief moment
would
make everything
that has happened
and everything
that will happen
totally
and completely
irrelevant,
as kisses from you
and kisses to you
so very often
do.

Sidney P. Roberts II

Kiss Me Hard

When I'm with you baby I feel totally mad and out of control,
I feel deep in Indian territory with a full head of hair,
The insanity of love and lust grabs me and jerks me and throws me around,
At once I surrender to you and am completely vulnerable,
With you I am on a tightrope between skyscrapers,
On that tiny edge between complete bliss and utter destruction,
When I'm with you it's like roller coasters before the downhill plunge,
It's galloping in the rain
Holding on to the mane
Barefoot bareback bare-ass naked!
It's skydiving blindfolded at night with no reserve chute,
It's popping drunken wheelies at 90 in heavy traffic with no shirt and no helmet,
Between lanes passing blurry police cars,
Screaming I love her I love her I love her!
And meaning it,
So walk with me talk with me hold onto my hand,
Or in a crowd of strangers across the room
Mouth the words I want you,
NOW,
Because I want you too,
I WANT YOU RIGHT NOW,
YOU ARE ALL I WANT,
YOU ARE EVERYTHING,
And this moment can last forever if we let it,
And if you touch me I only shake because its electric,
And if you touch me I only shake because its true,
And when I feel your skin upon mine its like plunging into a freezing pool,
After doing it in the hot tub in the middle of the winter at noon,
After eye contact with the neighbor peeking through the curtains,
To feel your touch on me is an earthquake,
To feel your kiss on my lips is fire,
So hold me tight and bring your lips close,
And look into my eyes as I tremble,
And kiss me once more like you did once before,
Hold me tight and kiss me again HARD

Sidney P. Roberts II

One Rainy Day

Partly cloudy. Nippy with scattered showers. Light winds from the east. Greenwich mean time plus one on wet black streets and dingy sheets equals two thirty seven pm local in the mildew cheap room they found for me. One rainy day it was. In Paris. Armed at Gibbs Kaserne in Frankfurt hours previous with rucksack with sleeping bag with two week Eurail pass with a bottle of anything a package of cigarettes a puppylove and brilliant advice from the sage whose name is now somehow fool-heartedly forgotten. Whose words however that day testament again to the fact that God blesses all sergeants with training in advice and counsel. Because God loves all privates. And all privates being babies as such require a certain guidance. So thus spoke as I departed the representative backbone of the Army to the young babygreen me: If young soldier you get into a bind first you will seek and then you will find somewhere nearby a payphone. And no you will not destroy it. Nor will you eat it drink it capture it or fornicate with it. You will use it to call the airport. And you will ask the kind voice on the phone politely sir or ma'am may I please have the USO. Orders being orders the payphone survived and nineteen dollars later in the place found for me a key was turned and slowly did the man open the door for me to look about the room. And I could pay so did he say to me day by youthful day and I said we'll take it. The rusted drip sink in the corner. The squat toilet down the hall. Passing doors left and right creaking decrepit wood with wool green army socks through smoke and stale still air of cheap wine and door-breathed songs of lust in the afternoon. In this ancient tenement continually baptized by weeping hiss from grey-belly brilliant sky of cloud and rain. In the morning downstairs softening hard rolls of brown bread in hot chocolate sat at the next table smoking in black turtleneck Pat Benatar. Or she who from appearance certainly could have been. Or at least her identical twin had she one. We are young we are young heartache to heartache. Then off we go with pockets full of Francs like arcade token playmoney and the old weathered beatnik travel guide with the hitchhiker's thumb on the cover something like get off at Pere Lachaise and follow the local sleaze they will lead you right to it. A woman on the metro in a cheap cotton dress, a light color, almost beige. Healthy specimen with textbook fine posture and more so when I pretended not to notice. Clearing her throat louder and louder and louder and louder and as I continued pretending she began bumping me with her crossed leg. I playing possum on the shoulder of the woman I was with until she woke me saying we need to get off we need to get off we're going the wrong way! Then running across the echo corridor and up some stairs and down some stairs and decoding the dyslexia diagram a second or two then across some track and I noticed the stop was Bastille as the doors closed behind us on the train. Those moments come to me some nights. While my children sleep far

away or stay awake as all our kind do so often stay. While perhaps a combat kitten batters crumpled failed poems in some dark corner knocking over an ashtray wishing in vain she could somehow kill. If she could just kill something just once only once just one little time to kill some tiny little thing and eat it. While an aging contemplating arthritic gelding nibbles rubber lips in a vacant manger flaring nostrils which know the oats are there and sniff and lip and seek and know in a moment again they must be there but in fact they are absolutely not. This faith renewed and lost repeatedly through moonbeams while some stay awake while kittens battle and while in soft rainfall Pere Lachaise stands solemn and silent. Though graffiti stricken and defaced proud still as a mountain. For as defaced or not as the vision as the child as the kitten and as the horse it remains. It does not move. With arrows all about to reckon lost forgotten pilgrims the last leg home. In the heart on the grave itself there lay that silver day six yellow roses on pristine perfect white sand in the raindrops. Revered. Untouched. Respected. While surrounded by filth. A fortress with walls invisible. Buried there as well in close proximity none other than Johan Sebastian Bach. Who despite death and all legend controversy nihilism and useless hope of foolish pilgrims is certain beyond all doubt and youth that in fact Jim is actually there. This, for never having rested a day since he arrived. The Frenchman sitting lamenting the loss of the long since dead rebel poet did not like Americans, he told me, and he did not like cameras. So I turned it off and ceased all questioning and told him I was truly sorry. But he did not care nor seem forgiving at all in any way able to be perceived. I mourned with him then in wet silence for a time and soon in the wet silence did I then take my leave. Suspecting not at all I was never to return. And after lamenting with the Frenchman and after washing in the sink and creeping down the hall and after dipping bread in chocolate years passed and all the while never knowing of the French Revolution I shared jokes with no other person about how once, when I was young, I did storm the Bastille. It is true. I stormed the Bastille. Visiting the grave of Jim Morrison. One rainy day it was. In Paris.

Sidney P. Roberts II

Sergeant Major Shotgun

It was great fun in the beginning. Things were exploding all around me and I was just blasting away at the targets and being the careless indiscriminate little dangerous baby goat soldier that I used to love to be. The noise was carrying me away and the smell of gunpowder pleasantly sharp like needles where my nose turns into my forehead and my eyes sizzled. Before very long the guns almost acted on their own. This was especially true of the shotgun. She is the same one that we use today. I have yet to meet anyone so calming or nurturing nor as faithfully reliable or consistently predictable. She can give more confidence than the best of Kentucky whiskies sometimes.

I remember something sliding toward me from my right when the sergeant blew the whistle and said, "Cease-fire! " That is when I knew I was a three time no-go and would not be graduating that day. I would have to repeat the entire course or go back to the unit a failure.

So I stopped, unloaded, and made the shotgun safe. I placed her on the ground gently and took one step backward and stood at parade rest, hands behind my back, eyes straight ahead. I was well winded with my nostrils flaring like a racehorse and my heart trying to break free from my chest. I could not see what it was that we shot because it was now behind me and I was not yet allowed to look. I was plenty worried because I knew he always asked.

He asked me what I shot and why and how many times and I sure as hell didn't know. The shotgun did most of it of her own impulsive accord. The same way a rabid coyote bitch protecting a two-day dead pup from an innocent branch falling off a rotting mesquite bush might, she bit and bit and bit again. It wasn't my fault. Something approached from the right and she protected the pup. I looked at her for an explanation but she would only say, "Remington 870 Pump, Sergeant Major, US Army 0065389." I did not like that answer, but I suppose all one can do is respect her for it.

Sidney P. Roberts II

The Forest Floor

As you take a step forward on the forest floor, you hear and feel the dry pine needles crinkle under your boot and they sound well, for being dead. You look down at the sound and wonder how many infinitely small things or worlds or lives may have just been created or destroyed under the boot. Then you squat down and now you are lying down because you decide this is as good a spot as any. But you are very afraid.

You hear the frantic noises that sound like someone angry, someone scared, and someone nearly dead. The noises cause your eyes to traverse up and to your left and they track and focus until they join your ears on the three birds and you can see that actually the woodpecker chick is not dead yet. The hawk is fleeing fast and silent now while trying to hold on to her intended dinner. She seems surprisingly afraid but holds on to the chick as best as she can and you figure that makes her brave because she does not let her fear control her actions. You admire her bravery.

But the woodpecker rooster is on her fast screaming and diving and charging and taunting. He persists and the hawk increases speed. The chick is wriggling violently in her grasp. You watch the hawk's confusion and fear and her nervous and loosely gripped talons and see that she somehow drops the chick. The chick tumbles forward and hits the ground rolling like a static line jumper and you remember for a second exactly what that feels like. The rooster is still in pursuit not processing quickly enough what has happened and that his youngest son is free. You see him finally realize and bank left and dive incredibly fast. He lands near his son on the dead pine needles on the forest floor not far from where you lay and hops over to him while scanning nervously for the hawk. The rooster finds the chick lying alive but injured, afraid, and weak. He tells his son not to worry because the hawk is gone. He tells him all is well because his father is there. The rooster is now faced with the new problem of how to get a chick that cannot fly from the ground back into the nest, which had proven unsafe a moment ago but must certainly be safer than the forest floor.

You witness the entire four-second event and wonder what a hawk might ever have to fear from a woodpecker one sixth or seventh his size. With that you realize that credit must be given to the rooster for boldness of attitude. You begin to feel just a hint of confidence. Then you see the first soldier coming slowly and cautiously and two more behind him. Your only comfort is the fact that if a mere woodpecker rooster can face a hungry red tail hawk in defense of another and a wounded and captured chick can actually break free from that same hawk's talons, then maybe you do have a fighting chance. You take aim on the furthest one back that you can see and rest your finger lightly on the trigger. You affirm to succeed and remind yourself that you never know how things might

turn out. Sometimes if the chick is really brave and does not quit, if he fights hard and does not surrender, the hawk might become afraid and sometimes the hawk will actually drop the chick. Except this time you are alone on the forest floor for the very first time. The rest of the squad is dead and there is no rooster to help. You see the soldiers getting closer...

Sidney P. Roberts II

The Love Of Your Life

The love of your life lives not too far from here. Really, she does. It's just out the driveway, to the right a few minutes, then a left, and another left. You see the bar on the left, and if you're like me you remember and smile for a second. Then you make two rights and pull over. You can see her truck there below. It's ruggedly pretty. But you can't get too close. So you park above and walk on down the grassy slope and press the doorbell, ding. She answers wearing a white robe. You're nervous. She does that to you but won't believe it when you tell her. She didn't always do that to you. But that's how it goes. It's that way now that you do not have her. I guess you never really know what you have until you no longer have it. That's what they always say anyways. And I hate it but they're always right.

Then "Time, time, time... See what's become of me..." That's from an old rock song.

Time passes and you never see her. But sometimes once in a while someone mentions her, or you see a white truck or her name comes up in conversation. They know she means something but don't realize how much. They know she means something but they'll never admit it, at least not to you, or any government background checker. So even if they're not really your friends, at least you know they are good for something. So you ask them about her in your best undercover acting. And how did she look? Well, she looked just fine. Tell her I said hello, will ya? And how is she doing? Well, she's doing just fine. She sure is. And she's working where now? Oh really? Well that should be good for her. She should like that. And you miss her for the hundredth time that day. But you hold it in and they never know. At least most of them don't.

She lives over there, the love of your life, not too far from here, on a street that's named after lightning struck on wood. And you wonder about her. You wonder whom is she holding and who is holding her? Someone must be. And you can hardly stand it. You wonder does she ever think about you and a tear rolls when you consider the answer. No, she probably does not. So to take your mind's frown away, you breath deep and you remember those summer days. Your heart was young and you just didn't know it. So much bliss. It is not fair that time was so short. Life is not fair.

Even more time passed and maybe then you saw her once again. Maybe a sinful evening by chance and 30 minutes worth of planning. Maybe she was ten minutes late and you were thankful because you had more time to ingest the

liquid courage. And why is it sinful, anyway? Maybe you never had a better time in your life, except with her. To look into the eyes of the woman you love, to have your arms around her, to smell the perfume, to feel your cheek against hers. That smile. Those eyes. The heartbeat strong. Your shaky hands. You forget all else. Of course you'll follow her home. You know, just to make sure she makes it all right. Sure, okay.

And you spend the night.

Then slip back to your world, but you're always thinking. You remain still always remembering. A year at least goes by and there is not much change. It seems like a decade. You can see her face on any woman for an instant. You can hear her voice. The smile, the sin, that night, and the countless before. You miss her. She always ordered a special drink, and it used to make you so mad. It wouldn't make you mad today though. The perfume that you could never name, no matter how many times she told you, but will not ever forget. You could smell it from a mile away. And you have, almost. At least across a hall. No need to summon. No need to close your eyes and imagine. It never left you. You can still smell it now, can't you?

It's over now. You admit it again. For God knows the how-manieth time. Where once was a glimmer of hope, is dark. No one's fault that you can see. Except your own. And it's been months, and still no word. So you go on with your life and try to be brave. And you try to not anger at how things worked out. And you've almost got it figured out. And you are doing much better. And almost, and almost, and you are absolutely wrong. Because you still miss her.

You hope for a second life. And a second chance. You try to hope just for a second life with a happy ending. Is that how it is with your one true love, the love of your life? No? Must be just me then.

Sidney P. Roberts II