

New Poetry from John Milas



Ford Ice Cream Truck

Parade the Beef

"I declare this meat tasty and fit for human consumption."

– President of the Mess,

CLR-27, Landing Support Company,

Camp Lejeune, 2009

we charge our wineglasses to toast the dead
marines of the eighteenth century the nineteenth twentieth
twenty-first century their immaculate ghosts seated in
the empty chair at the tiny table draped in
black cloth in a candlelit corner of the ballroom they fork

ghoststeak through their lips it piles
on paisley carpet centuries of steak piling
while I can't figure out how to light a cigar

the smoking lamp is lit the floor open for fines
Sergeant Steele wears the wrong colored shirt

beneath his midnight blue coat Sergeant Steele
say it ain't so that's erroneous drink from the grog
we're too young to drink the spiked grog but
the staff NCOs don't stop us Lance Corporal
Butler's gold PFC chevrons gleam without crossed rifles

say it ain't so Lance Corporal Stapleton
passes out in the woodchips under the playground
swings before we march back in after
shedding a tear for Lord Admiral Nelson Sergeant
Newman grips my white belt to balance drunk

we drop back in our chairs before
Sergeant Newman falls out slobbering
in my face saying he'll fight anyone for me he's
got my back forever he's always
had my back because he says I'll always have

his even though that motherfucker put me on
an extra hour of barracks duty he's right then
his fingers slip off the edge of my shoulder

Saltpeter

Our Kill Hat shreds his vocal cords while
we wait outside the chow hall for dinner,
his sweat-soaked charlies a shade darker
now than when he first suited up in the
DI hut. He screams *□Chain of Command*
and we scream into the San Diego sky:
The President of the United States, the
Honorable Mr. Bush! Vice President of
the United States, the Honorable Mr.

Cheney! Secretary of Defense, the Honorable Mr. Rumsfeld! □And so on and so forth. On November 5, the Kill Hat wakes us up to tell us what happened the night before: □*Obama is our president now, you understand me?* We understand because we will be punished for not understanding a single thing he says□. The Kill Hat screams to repeat the chain of command with these new changes before breakfast. Simple enough, because nothing has changed. We are still the rejects of America, as he reminds us. We shit across from each other in doorless bathroom stalls and piss three bodies to a single urinal, sometimes four. None of us have had an erection in weeks. Rumor has it they put something in the eggs.

Episode of Hate Channeled Near Ice Cream Truck at Mojave Viper

Donatello's green head severed at the neck on a wooden stick, two white orbs embedded in that purple mask, eyes they've trained us to gouge, to tear out with our fingers, bloody. I let my rifle hang by the sling and hold the face in front of me, jamming my free fingers into the turtle face. In my head, □Execute. □From my mouth, Kill.□ □Kill. The gumball eye pops free, cords of rectus and oblique muscle pouring from its ragged orbit. Frozen gunk drips from my nailbeds, ants trailing to the sugar at my boots. I gouge out the other eye and suck frozen brains

from his skull, as they've trained us. Then I drop what's left on the ground and scream my throat raw at it and smash it with my M16 buttstock and roll around in ants and dust and if there weren't more marines waiting behind me the terrified ice cream man would probably slam his window shut.