

New Poetry from Sheila Bonenberger: “They Gave Their Lives”



UNDERGROUND FORGETTING / *image by Amalie Flynn*

The brass buttons are piled in a bowl
that sits on the shop counter
beside the cash register,
so I buy one,
watch as the clerk drops it

into a paper bag, gently
folding the open end over
so the button doesn't fall out.

Such are the tender considerations
we resort to when it comes
to Union buttons mined
from Marye's Heights, the field
blood transformed into a massive
trauma center, and those many
soldiers, hastily tipped into graves
scratched higgeldy-piggeldy in the earth
and quickly left, without markers,
abandoned to the underground,
earth's crowded room,
to work its magic on the soldiers
and their uniforms under
the same gibbous moon
shining down on life going on,
so that one day a treasure hunter
turns the detector's sensitivity
to high, reaching well past
unreadable trash,
finally capturing a deeper
signal to shovel through grass,
past stones and worms, into dreams
of wealth or glory, pulling up
a solitary, now verdegris button
bent slightly as the soldier
fell hard perhaps against a rock
that would sleep unchanged beside him
until the treasure hunter conspired
to craft a stranglehold on history
proclaiming that this discovery
announced an end of sorts to the story
of a fallen soldier,
one that can be labeled,

one you can put a price on,
but the truth is that buttons
cannot be counted on
to hold a jacket snug, can even
loose their hold on the fabric
of dignity, on the fable
of victory, if what they hold
has been released to flourish
underground forgetting
that perfection is elusive
and we are not perfect
though we hurl ourselves at it
again and again.