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War Games

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McFarland: War Games

WAR GAMES

Ron McFarland

Our mother watched from the window
while I killed my brother, not once
but often, the way Cain, probably,
thought about slaying Abel, that
weakling shepherd: sometimes a sword,
occasionally a Seminole tomahawk,
guns of various caliber and make
starting with the '73 Winchester
and including in no particular order
the M-1 Garand, the 1911 Colt .45,
German Lugers, of course, the 1863
Springfield, the Kentucky long rifle
(Tick-licker, we said, Old Betsy),
the Thompson submachine gun,
.38 Smith & Wesson, always, we thought,
a good cop gun. And miraculously,
our actual arsenal never numbered
more than four highly versatile firearms.

Or perhaps the real miracle had to do with
my brother's uncanny returns from death.
How well he could collapse on the grassy
lawn of Shiloh, the Alamo, or Belleau Wood,
or crumple against the gray cement block
wall of our Stalingrad carport
streaking it gloriously red
with his treacherous gore,
only to come back for more.
Meanwhile, our mother stood staringly there
thinking God-knows-what, in her apron,
concerned we would hurt ourselves, no doubt,

get carried away with our pinecone grenades,
or perhaps she recalled a few years back
when her brother caught one at The Bulge.

Two years younger than I, my brother
never once won a battle, but sometimes,
seized with a sense of fair play, I'd only
wound him a little, or take him
prisoner of war according to Swiss conventions.
Only a flesh wound, he'd say,
grimacing like John Wayne,
wincing against unmanly tears.
Bite the bullet, I would advise,
slipping him the shiny brass
from a thirty-ought-six.
We were practicing war and pain,
and a few years down the path
at a place named Pleiku
my brother watched it happen from a bunker
firsthand, just like our mother.