Closed Gate

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Closed Gate

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Abstract

Dull eyes, vacant. Blue, gray, brown. Crossed. Rolling. Twitching...
I watch the tall Captain—he stands erect by the door . . .
"I see you've abolished your isolationist stand." (to the boy who had scarlet fever a week ago).
He smiles, there is a twinkle in his eye.
"Oh, yes, sir," the boy laughs and moves on with the surging khaki.

To another . . .
"How is your calculus coming by now, Davis?"
"Just fine, sir, just fine."

Aluminum trays and khaki . . .
Khaki and aluminum trays . . .

To another . . .
"Johnson, you're not eating much this morning—what's up?"
"I don't feel so good, sir."

A call "AT EASE!"
The roar of voices,
Clanging of silver and dishes stops
As the Captain walks into the dining room.
He snaps off a list of men to report to him, then . . .
"AT REST, men!"
Once more,
Cups knocking on the table,
Voices, silver banging against aluminum . . .

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Dull eyes, vacant.
Blue, gray, brown.
Crossed.
Rolling.
Twitching.
May, 1944

The warped bodies stand dumbly against the wall,
Slumping beneath their bulging heads, their twisted faces.
They squat to reach a toy
Or sit.
Stare.
Their faces child-like, unmoving.

The teacher monotoning.
“Dog. This is the picture of a dog. See the dog?”
They do not move.
The eyes stare.
Waiting.

A scream—
A dark-haired girl writhes on the floor,
One arm stiff, awkward, her eyes open and white.
A worn oilcloth pillow is pushed beneath her twitching head.
Eyes brighten in sudden understanding.
Thick lips mumble.
“She forgot her seizure pills. Seizure pills.”
The antiseptic sweaty silence settles.

They bend over sewing machines with slow heavy fingers—
Dull short hair flopping in their glazed eyes.
They scrape carrots, chop cabbage,
Sagging breasts swinging against the ill-fitting denim.
They mop, the gnarled hands swishing the cold gray water.
They wait in hard chairs for bed, for meals, for school.
Silent children.
Staring.
Waiting.