

THE QUEEN'S ENGLISH

Setting: The First World War. A Hospital
on the Western Front. Speaker: A Nurse

"I smell smoke but see no fire,
A wooden joint creaks in a sleeve.
There is a hush, but in this forest,
So many limbs, and so few trees.

Since the peace went all to pieces,
We pile the pieces by the door.
But as Humpty Dumpty asked the King,
What else are men and horses for?

Because if a man's for riding horses,
While a hand's for writing letters,
What exactly do you use
To put an eggshell back together?

But what was broken to make omelets
Now scrambles in their hats.
If their body is a temple,
Then the belfry's full of bats.

I write their letters for them,
Since they can't control their diction.
To speak the Queen's own English
Takes massive concentration.

I knelt beside a bedside,
And was rather decomposed,
I smelled a raw recruit
Going the way that all flesh goes.

He seemed to be all eyes,
They followed me across the room.
Then I saw his yellow belly,
His golden years had come too soon.

In the happy hunting ground
The sun was going south.
Since he couldn't really speak,
I took the words out of his mouth:

'I died for King and country
Gave my country for a horse
Put the horse before the wagon
Before the wagon left its course.

Of course these country matters
Matter more if you're a King
And if you've nothing in the mattress
Then he's got you on a string.

So I took the monarch's shilling
And I took the Kaiser's mark;
And now I'm only smelling
Denmark rotting in the dark.'

Then he turned as white as flour,
His eyes rolled into his head.
But the doughboy wasn't rising,
And what he needed wasn't bread.

He was shaking like a leaf,
So I covered him in glory.
His cold heart was a stone,
His ribcage was a quarry.

From this point on I knew
That Achilles couldn't heal,
Nor could Ajax scrub the stains
From the sink of how I feel.

Sweat was streaming from his brow,
I sought a slick embrace,
As I bent to kiss Narcissus
I saw my own reflected face.

And I said, I love you darling
The way a Dutchman loves a dike,
The way a woman needs a man
That needs a fish that needs a bike.

So do my feelings justice
And put your finger on my scales,
Because I'm the Little Mermaid
And you're the Prince of Wales.

Then he was quiet as a mouse;

I think the cat had got his tongue.
Beneath the whiskers on his face
A Cheshire smile was set in stone.

While sleeping with the fishes
He looked so statuesque-
The strong and silent type
Also need their beauty rest.

In his liver was a lily,
In his pants a piece of cod.
And so I laid him, gently,
In a Marquee piece of sod.

So if your man loses his marbles,
Get yourself a marble man.
Erect him in your courtyard
And let him court you if he can.”

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