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Old Glory

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Old Glory

Mary Dengler

My neighbor's stars and stripes
behind his fence unfurl
their stories in the wind
between my frame of evergreens,
its bloody barber stripes,
subject of each breeze.
It waves its blood-striped hanky
toward a swimming pool,
a pumpkin patch
and other backyard projects
hidden from the streets.

Its stars illuminate an all-night battle,
agony of gas-war,
rat-infested trench,
dense jungle,
bomb-infested desert street.

Faded is each bloody band,
the barber's sign for surgery,
that buys the blissful rule in each backyard
while shards of shrapnel keep the boys
from school.

Like price tags placed inside a gift,
it signals, "Notice me."

If (as Washington supposedly proclaimed),
the stars allude to heaven,
goal of all,
the red to valor,
blue to justice, vigilance, or right,
or if (as Yeats believed) these emblems testify
an absolute idea spinning in and out of time,
then are we pure and valorous and just
Or just sleeping through
our backyard troubled dreams, unconscious
of the giver and the gift?