

Bullshitter

By Lily Jarman-Reisch

We got sick of his bullshit,
saw less and less of him,
stopped having him over the house.
Even at Thanksgiving: didn't wanna have him anymore.
No one in the family believed him.
Well, Lily did, sure.
But she had a soft spot for Joe.
He took those kids in, Sam and Lily,
after Hank died.
I'll give him that.
But he was a fuck-up,
barely got through high school.
Always in the shadow of his brother.
Still, he idolized Hank.
So what does he do?
Enlists in the Korean War so he could be a hero,
a paratrooper like Hank.
What he does over there, I don't know.
Comes back in '53,
real skinny.
Starts drinking. Heroin even. Heroin!
boy raised in a nice home...
What the hell?
We all served, guys my age,
we didn't come back crybabies.
Talk about crybaby:
Some 50 years later, 50 years after the war
says he's being treated at the VA for PTSD.
PTSD, I say. For what?
Tells me he was a POW in North Korea
and what they did to him and his men —
rape, torture, what have you.
Yeah, right.
We don't hear nothing about this for 50 years?
So I ask him,

This on your discharge papers? Being a POW?

They put it there if you're a POW.

No, he says.

Bullshitter still wants to be a hero.

He keeps this shit up every time we get together
so I just wash my hands of him.

We all do.

Well, not Lily.

She doesn't know why he'd lie about such a thing,
macho guy like Joe.

Anyway, I don't see him for a long time.

Then Lily calls.

Tells me he died, she's making his service and will I come.

Sure, I tell her. He's family.

She finds a nice spot to bury him, Lily does,
spitting distance from Hank,

by a garden where she holds the service.

Flag draped over the coffin, him being a vet and all.

More people than you'd expect,

Joe being Joe.

Way more military, too,

active duty guys standing in the back.

Lily gives the eulogy.

Says she wondered like everyone else about Joe's time in Korea.

Spent months looking through Army archives,

POW databases and what not.

Doesn't find shit.

Until after he dies.

Then finds two versions of his discharge papers,

both legit:

checked them out with the U.S. Army.

One was his cover,

the other U.N. Special Forces. Top secret.

Copies on the table near the coffin, she says,

with the guest book and photos

and all his medals.

All his medals?

Says she found them after he died
in a bottom drawer in his apartment.

Had the Army check those out, too.

Turns out the guy liberates POWs,
captures government officials,
destroys radar, supply installations.

Gets a fucking Silver Star with Oak Leaf Cluster.

It's all in the papers, she says,

likewise 13 months in prison camps:

captured after Pork Chop Hill

with six of his men he tried like hell to protect.

Seven officers in the back come up front,
surround the coffin. Salute.

One off to the side starts playing Taps,
Lily looking like she's gonna break.

Truth be told, there aren't a lotta dry eyes,
even less while the guy plays.

They fold the flag military style like they do,
present it to Lily on behalf of a grateful nation.

She curls around that flag and sobs right into it.

The men raise seven rifles,
fire three volleys...

shots echo in the cemetery.