

Phillip Korth

## **November**

*Wallace Stevens Poetry Contest, 1st Prize*

*Taking the first seven words from a poem by Frank Stanford*

While my mother washes the black socks, I am wearing the white.  
While my father contemplates his weak hands and cutting tires  
from steel rims,  
the scar on my knee is recorded on paper.

While my sister sucks her thumb,  
and my brother breaks another pencil lead,  
we celebrate Easter,  
and I do not think that Christ might just be a story.

While my father watches the news, my mother sings  
and folds the laundry for the two of them. She does not look up.  
After signing my contract, while removing my white socks,  
a processing corpsman asks me if I have any scars or tattoos.

While my mother cannot sleep eight hours in the past,  
my lungs fill with desert air, and as they do, I peel my boots like skin  
from my feet.  
I've made a scared-fool's mistake and slept with them on for  
three weeks.

While my brother bounces his daughter,  
and my sister plays her scales my first Easter back,  
I realize my faith in Jesus is hearsay.

While we celebrate Easter,  
and my mother folds the laundry for the five of us,  
while my sister sucks her thumb,  
and my brother is still at home,  
I run on skinny knees over gravel on concrete.

While my father cries, I am gone. I hear him say again  
he'd slash the recruiter's tires to keep me safe.

While I run on bare legs over gravel on concrete,  
I carry a colored egg, which I've just found,  
and while my feet slide out from under me,  
and a gash opens across my knee,  
my mother folds the laundry for the five of us,  
my father stops tying his tie.

While I stand near-naked in Lansing, eighty miles from home,  
I remove my white socks while my mother washes the black.  
After signing my contract, a corpsman asks me if I have any scars  
or tattoos,  
and I want to know why,  
but I point to my bare knee and pray.