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The Place Where Pickett Charged: A Southerner's Lament

Neal Allan Olmstead

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The Place Where Pickett Charged

A Southerner's Lament

NEAL ALLAN OLMSTEAD

Mine eyes have seen the Glory
of a breeze twelve thousand men wide
brushing its palm across the face
of a gold and grassy green,
issuing forth fresh flaxen waves
to crash on a copse of trees
and a gray stone fence at the field's far end,
where the pale and purple flowers grow.

Mine eyes have seen the Glory
of the tall oaks on the ridge behind,
standing like Napoleons
before the nature-dressed expanse—
a sun-kissed street of Glory in the Fall.

From the wood run anxious deer,
bouncing ebullient and brave into the open,
until exposure tells of risk and
everlasting sorrowful eyes look back
at the line of trees, then ahead to
the gray stone fence on the opposite ridge
where the pale and purple flowers grow.

Like ordained orphans on a wild dream,
they catch the wind and surge across the
field
and disappear into the tall grass and wild
weeds,
stirring a massive murder
of crows that foist themselves upward
like black souls winged, screaming and
cursing,
clawing up the sky
above the gold and grassy green.

In another field a cow lows,
blowing low on his horns as the great

gold watch slips from its azure purse
and drops into the raging red mist
above the rounded purple mountains.
As the sun boils longer,
the crickets grow gayer,
until the blue sky and the gray shadows
march hand in hand into the inexorable
night.

Mine eyes have seen the glory . . .
An acorn strikes the earth
as if to call distinction between voices
imagined
and the ground beneath my feet.
Inside my heart a young boy runs crying,
panicked by a carnage too great to bear.
And I . . . I walk slowly like an old man to
my car
and drive away down Hagerstown Road.
If not for a few decisions and the falling of
darkness,
I might have gone across that expanse
to the Copse of Trees and a gray stone
fence,
and maybe lingered, maybe stayed . . .
where the pale and purple flowers grow.

Neal Allan Olmstead is an American writer born and raised primarily in the southern United States. An extensive traveler, he has resided throughout the United States and in France, Iceland, and Saudi Arabia. He attended undergraduate and graduate schools in Florida. He has made his living in corporate management, investment consulting, academic teaching, and business ownership. He currently makes his home in Chattanooga, Tennessee. His works include novels, poetry, short stories, children's books, and spiritual writings.