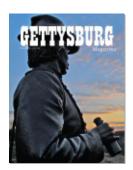


The Place Where Pickett Charged: A Southerner's Lament

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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.