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Of Janet

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OF JANET
David McGrath

Tell me not of shields and bones
 'Neath Trojan sands,
 A dream forever ago.

Nor of bodies bloodless —
 Time-washed by Normandy's surf —
 The black and white of ancient nightmares.

For the saddest soldier of them all
 Lies part-buried adjacent my dock.
 Its blue helmeted head and painted smile
 Popping up from the sand, a child's reach away
 From the yellow plastic pail.

And the broken toy shovel
 That knew the once warm grasp
 Of the busy tan fist
 (Digging and planting
 The carved wooden sentry),
 Stares like the barbed bayonet
 Ripped from my soul.

"Happy memories heal," advised the fool,
 Who never heard the lullabies against which
 I must shut my ears,
 The ones she hummed to her summer's domain
 Of tadpole trenches and coffee can castles,
 As she squatted frog-like in the foam,
 Her pink painted toes probing the wet sand.

Instead, let the dirges blow
 Through the aspens to
 Smooth over her footprints,
 And let the lake lapping lift
 This last soldier, and deliver him, too,
 To the numbing depths.