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FEAR

-- after Stevens

In a burntout latrine  
in South Vietnam  
I met Fear.  
When the 107's came in  
I fell on my face  
On the officer's side  
And saw Fear  
On his face  
On the enlisted side.  
He and four friends --  
Three had GI issue tissue  
Trailing from their butts  
Like homecoming floats --  
Lay and stared into  
The rough cement  
As if they could read there  
The secret of life  
As death rained fragments  
On the galvanized roof.  
As I lay in that stall  
And tried to recall  
How the 23rd Psalm  
Goes, Fear glanced around  
At me with his eyes half-closed,  
Opened his toothless mouth  
And as the tears ran down  
His face tried to laugh.