

J.M. Ricks

After the War

The acrid smell of war lived on in its dark patrols
and as it slowly died away, it took its final pleasure
hovering by the sinking graves, the charred remains of homes.

We were children of survivors, offspring of good fortune,
fascinated with uniforms, campaign medals and belts,
knowing nothing of the nightmares stalking father's dreams.

Little did we understand our parents' relief at having made it,
their travails cloaked in silence, their tortured waiting for peace.
We had other things to do. We were discovering *miracles*:

The way a magical orange powder turned oleo into butter;
mother washing out feed bags so she could have a new dress or two;
green stamps pasted into booklets to get dishes or a toaster;

creamed chipped beef on toast, the peppery gravy thick and dripping;
decorated jelly glasses, breaking, and being replenished again;
saving up the bacon grease to make some simple bath time soap.

Shortages didn't stop my father from finding a Lionel train
and starting it off on a circular track, his small son gleaming.
No Christmas tree that year, just some blue paper, festooned with stars.

Scarcity turned out to be, not such a brutish blind force,
but the cradle of miracles and dreams, even transcending war victory
in the small triumphs of new dresses, fake butter, homemade soap.

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