

PATRICK WALSH

Meditations of a Sniper

They sent me up this tower three days ago,
Just my rifle, rations, and a radio.
From here I can scope out most of the town—
The road leading in, the storefronts, alleys.
I have to keep down, so I crawl on my belly
Or roll round the dusty old slats of the floor.
With my friend here, it's just one shot, one kill;
I whisper in that handset and I can bring down all hell.

Now look at that tomcat, he thinks he's alone,
No one watching him stalk. Anything moves—
Bird on a phone line, the first chimney smoke,
Wisps the color of slate—the eye pounces
Long before the brain can evaluate.
I glance at a clothesline strung between pulleys;
There's something about it makes me homesick.
With people you only look at their hands:
What have I got, a civilian or a shooter?
An invisible family hangs in the wind—
Overalls, a dress, two sets of pajamas.
This war makes me feel like an intruder.

One of our shells ripped a hole in the roof,
Mangling the cogs of the old town clock.
Sometimes nothing stirs for hours below,

But I'll turn, look up at a jagged sky,
And see clouds slipping past. It lets me know
The world continues to spin. By my canteen
Two pale blue eggs hunker down in a nest—
Or so it seems as I blow off the dust.

PATRICK WALSH served four years as an infantry officer in the 25th Infantry Division. His poems have appeared in journals and newspapers both here and abroad, including *Barrow Street*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Chronogram*, *Evergreen Review*, *The Hudson Review*, *The Malabar Review*, *Poetry New Zealand*, *Quadrant*, and *scene4 magazine*. He lives in Princeton, New Jersey.