

IT HASN'T BEEN LONG

No. It hasn't been long since I was small. Not in size, mind you. Or age.

It's something else. Something inside.

It happened, I believe, in 1969 or 1970 – I don't remember which,
Viet Nam, the Army.

Oh, I didn't fight. I objected, conscientiously, to that.
I wouldn't raise a gun in anger – I remember saying that many a time.

But I fought, plenty hard. And damned if I didn't lose every battle ...

A medic – 91A10, then 20, then 10 – Army talk for promotion,
Demotion, promotion again – much like the theory of the
Continual expansion of the universe, or contraction – I don't
Remember which.

I saw more mis-shaped heads, and trunks, and limbs. It made me sick, at first.
Then angry.

By God, I said, I'll fight. But it won't be the Viet Cong. It'll
Be those "gooks" in DC, the desk jockies, the bureaucrats whose
Machines run on blood and young men's futures.

What a laugh. At 22, I was 12. Sheltered. The spacious
6-family apartment building in which I was raised –
The beautiful oak paneling and beams, cut glass windows –
And my parents, proper, Catholic, lawyer, then judge,
Successful, unsoiled.

Shit. I cried for one solid hour on the evening of September 5, 1969, in my bunk,
In a barracks crowded with 110 other soldiers.

I cried because I was scared to death. No, not "to" death – "of" death.
My own. In all my glory days of high ideals, I never thought I
Wouldn't care about those 110 other guys.

And I didn't. Oh, I guess I did, really. But, then again,
One day, one of them was going to yell "medic" and I was
Going to have to get up, out from behind a tree, or rock,
And run or crawl through a curtain of fire,

And ...

Well, I didn't go to Viet Nam. I went to Hawaii. That was 1970.

I was safe. But the hospital. Filled with broken bodies.
Broken minds and hearts. Yet I was safe ...

I felt guilty. Frustrated. All those broken bodies, yet I was
Safe. Why? The guilt grew. The worry. The anger.

That's when the war started for me. To end a war. And, like
Don Quixote, I took up my lance, donned my armor, and
Charged every windmill in sight.

Ha! Yea.

On TV, in the great books, defeat doesn't hurt. The fall isn't painful.
It's just an end – even death is just an end. Prison just a few seconds
On film, or a few pages, chapters even, in print.

But in reality ...

No, it hasn't been long since I was small. Not in size, mind you. Or age.

It's something inside. Something died. Or just withered
Away. And what seems odd is that there is no past.

Others remember. I have nothing to remember.
Only the future.

It makes me brave.
Fool's brave.
And dangerous.