

Korean Vet Shot in Bar Argument¹

Cathy Arellano

A veteran of Army service
 on Nana's mantel
 between the dipping bird
 and Auntie Ellie's graduation portrait
 above the oval mirror
 that eight by ten of him
 with sweet lashes
 dark honey skin
 inside beige uniform and cap
 bullet-black eyes and sure smile
 don't reveal a single horror

in Korea
 a million miles away
 with thousands of other boys
 he survived the Cold War alone

was shot and killed
 husband
 of his third wife
 son
 who defended his mother
 from his father's blows
 father of three
 who cuddled his youngest daughter
 in burgundy quilt war souvenir
 brother
 who asked his four sisters

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after their break-ups
if they were *sure*
she didn't want him to *talk*
to that asshole

uncle
who tickled nieces
to steal back blanket

last night
second night of new year
second homicide of 1971

in a Mission
District bar
he grabbed kid brother
home on leave
pushed him down the stairs
out of their parents' flat
led him away from
their mother's "Stop running, yous kids!"
the kids' "She hit me!"
his brothers' "Tackle!"
for a game of pool
coupla beers
an hour of peace
three blocks away

after an argument
over the war in Vietnam
the war
any war
a bar stool
song on the jukebox

Sonny Martinez,
28
twenty-fucken-eight

was pronounced dead
no more smoking that smoke
no more getting lost

in Jimi's psychedelic riffs

at Mission Emergency Hospital
after the shooting
in the De Lux Bar
at 18th and Valencia Streets.

Valencia to Guerrero
Guerrero to Dolores
Dolores to Church

Police Sgt. Ed Epsting said
witnesses reported
the argument but were
unclear which side Martinez had
taken in the dispute.

this side, that side
right side, wrong side

Martinez was shot in the chest
with a .32 caliber pistol.

“Mama, Mama” as his head knocked
on wooden bar before slipping
between two stools
“stay with me, man”
brother cooed to brother

Epsting said a description
supplied by witnesses led to
J---- T-----, who lived
nearby and was found in
another tavern
in the neighborhood.
T----- was booked on
suspicion of murder charges.

the blood that spilled onto floorboards
soaked through earth
dropped into Our Lady of Sorrows waters
joined five hundred years
of blood flowing beneath Mission Dolores

we have been attacked
in body and soul
we have been denied justice
and pushed out
but we will always
be connected
to this land
these waters