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A Non-Protest Seasonal Poem

Keith Moul

The cafeteria cheers with holly, lights, children in good form. Mistletoe would be too much in a public space, stolen kisses offending rectitude. Jesus cashiered to do bank duty in the north with reindeer and St. Nick.

A veteran in old fatigues stands by, talking loudly to his dark reflection in the window, or perhaps to others beyond the glass walking unaware on the sidewalk. He derides his voice as only loud, not strong enough for the fights he's set to in the past, or others he'll provoke now, so be it.

He displays no patch of rank or unit, nothing but the lost bearing of rank.

"Some officer," (to the air) "ordered me to see a doctor of disordered minds."

Customers near dessert have reconsidered, left hurriedly by the side door. Others make no progress, like hydraulic stampers without a wit to shape. Faster now, ever faster, other military lower their heads to avoid his eye.

"I may have drunk kerosene from a drum." Then, more ambitious: in Iraq "I know as a fact I swallowed fire from a buddy's helmet, then out of use, but preferred to this civilian pap." Not a child by parents was left behind.

Outside, rain changed to snow. A festival of birth continued a child's play.

"A puny voice makes a weapon of my words," he confides his amusement.

Now a suddenly casual man struts toward the door, says "I wonder," exiting, "if you understand a Christmas blessing from a King now that you hear it?"

Poinsettia, leaves lobed, bracts brilliant scarlet, sit on tables like pots of blood. Not the Mexican flower, not the laughs, not the lights, not our veteran visitor, not the snare we missed for kisses, not the everywhere holly, not the indigestion,

but snow coming softly in blizzard drifts, make this stark story a seasonal poem.