

Night March

by John Cantey Knight

Into the dank wood, footsteps filed upon the forest floor.
Toadstools the color of clammy corpse-flesh spread
in the solemnity of morning mist over a stilled landscape.
In the dampness of overcast skies, days of rain
remained on the softness of the pine straw and shushed
the sounds of soles that edged thickets. A startled doe
made down the slope away from the movement of men.
A silence held the soul in the strangling embrace
of expectation, the muzzle roar of not so distant cannon
too frequent for thunder. A woodpecker beat its head
in hungry idiocy into the coarse bark covering the heart-rot
of a giant oak. Almost to the ridge, the Shenandoah
would open like a door for the line of figures that blended
in the haze with the sky. A gray wrath fell on the valley
in the chilling yell of foot calvary dispossessed of all
but love of country and hate born of burned-out barns,
smoldering homes, property confiscated. Feet move faster:
ears listen for the order. The fat blue flank not expecting
a mountain to muster, or the thunder after the lightening
flash of muskets; edged steel disrupts a Yankee breakfast.