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Reflections on Now and Then

Jack Frazer

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Reflections on Now and Then

Jack Frazer

Then

Even as a young boy, I knew without a doubt
My life would be an adventure, like those I read about
With Hemmingway as a mentor; Jack London as a friend
Tom Sawyer became my brother, along with Huckleberry Finn.

Among life's great adventures, that define the man I am
Was some military training, and a year in Vietnam
Back then we didn't realize, it was a politician's war
With patriotism interpreted by those who fought before.

It took both time and patience, knowing how and when to act
As thoughts of fame and glory were an aphrodisiac
It wasn't all that easy, respect was to be earned
Experience and awareness, hard lessons to be learned.

Johnny was my crew chief. While flying near Dalat
A round bounced off his gun mount, and tore his leg apart
A steel prosthetic femur, replaced his shattered bone
No one was there to cheer him, when Johnny came marching home.

A flight school friend named Edward, died without a sound
He crashed somewhere in Laos, his body never found
He left a wife and daughter, wondering where and how he died
Their questions still unanswered, their grief unsatisfied.

A local wedding column, featured the girl I left behind
We planned to be together; I thought that she was mine
She said she'd wait forever; forever was not that long
She married a rich draft-dodger before I reached Saigon.

During my overseas adventure; times changed while I was gone
Hey Jude was dead, the world was singing *Abraham, Martin & John*
Protesters were at the airport, an old hippie down on his luck
Called me a baby killer, then asked me for a buck.

The so-called best and brightest, up on their privileged thrones
Sent less fortunate kids to war, while theirs remained at home
And those who stole our honor; committed more than theft
But nothing fazed me personally, we were winning when I left.

Now:

The guys down at the tavern talk of girls and guns and war

Some are great pretenders; I don't go there anymore

Their stories are like bad fiction; the truth is seldom told

It's easier to avoid their past, and stay out in the cold.

Last night I was on patrol, though only in my dreams

Perhaps today's horoscope will tell me what they mean

My discharge will come someday; until that time has come

I'll maintain my duty station here as the VA's prodigal son.

A man showed up on Monday, but didn't say why he came

He gave me a business card; Agent Orange was his name

I wasn't very welcoming, just sitting there alone

Knowing darkness is all around, and the Devil protects his own.

Now sometimes in the evening, a mood creeps up on me

Like ground fog in the valley, or shadows beneath a tree

I question life's true meaning, and even my point of view

But the truth is temporary, so I remain without a clue.

The hourglass top grows empty, the bottom mostly filled
I think of those who got away, as well as those we killed
I mourn for those not with us, rejoice with those alive
But most of all, I thank the Lord for letting me survive.

A friend and I were talking, war stories and other lies
Memories and recollections, questions and replies
He asked me the big one: "Did we lose or did we win?"
I gave him my best answer. "It depends on now or then."