

5-1-2012

Two at the River Lethe

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Recommended Citation

Johnson, Kelsey (2012) "Two at the River Lethe," *Forces*: Vol. 2012 , Article 19.
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.collin.edu/forces/vol2012/iss1/19>

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INTEGRITY FIRST SERVICE BEFORE SELF EXCELLENCE IN ALL WE DO
THIS WE WILL DEFEND ***** HONOR COURAGE COMMITMENT
***** ALWAYS FAITHFUL ***** ALWAYS READY *****



Two At the River Lethe

KELSEY JOHNSON

I remember the floor
of the back room: black-speckled,
off-white, linoleum.

That day it was dusty,
sticky with spilled soda
and peppered with plastic.

"I leave in four days."
Four hours ago
he hadn't been sure.

I remember triple checking
a pink cell phone, relief-giddy
toes tracing red brick.

Garrett's laugh always sounded
like a bear hug. His eyes turned
green when he smiled.

There's a solemn-faced soldier
on thousands of postcards,
posters and billboards.

The text reads "US Marines:
Here lies your best friend."



Before He Deployed to Korea

SYLVIA ROJAS VAUGHN

His Mother had taught him
to swallow sadness.
He was not an angry boy
but reared
to be strong despite
everything.
And when
the exploding grenade
severed
a foot, fingers,
gouged an eye
he bit his lip,
smiled feebly
at the corpsman
applying pressure
to so many points.
When discharged,
he tossed the Purple Heart
in a drawer
with the .45,
fingering them
with his good hand
from time to time.