

Suzanne Steele



Suzanne Steele is an award-winning poet/writer (diploma for excellence, Scottish International Poetry Award, short-list Robert Louis Stevenson Award for Literature, National Library of Scotland/Scottish Arts Council), member of the Scottish School of Poets, Edinburgh, Banff Writers Studio 2006, St. Peter's Artist Colony, and guest Raving Poet. She is widely published and has read in Canada and the U.K., on the CBC and other radio stations. Her blog, poems and contact information can be found at www.warpoet.ca.

She is one of five artists nationwide to participate as a war artist in the 2008-2009 Canadian Forces Artist Program (CFAP). She is the first poet to be chosen for the program. In the course of research for her "deployment", Suzanne has spent hundreds of hours interviewing military personnel, visiting military bases and training centres, armouries and military functions. She is going to Afghanistan in November.

So Beautiful

for MCpl. G, 1PPCLI

The Many Men So Beautiful

*Men marched, they kept equal step,
Men marched, they were nurtured together.*

David Jones, *In Parenthesis*

I watch you infantryman,
so gucci in the Suffield dust
your body turned by a year of sweat
duress, Carl G sleeplessness,
like liquid glass blown gaudy
in the white-hot war furnace
into something steely, fragile, precious.
Your bed, the inside of your head
nodding into your frag vest,
mother LAV humming hot then cold
as Cpl. Zee on sentry blows
cigarillo halos at emerald worlds
of infrared, NVG, thermals,
watching watching arcs right
arcs left, ghostly glows
coyotes creeping tall prairie grass.
You, zenith of man at 26,
face sooted green with live-fire,
two-tour-old-guy-eyes in young man's skin,
I'll think of you when you go over again, your pencil, your pen,
your sketchpad falling from your sleeping hand;
I'll think of you, the bitching brothers
sleeping upright in the belly of the LAV,
shoulder-to-shoulder, knee-to-knee crammed,
doing time in cell-phone-Bible-land,
I'll think of you, all of you,
'til the Herc lands
and most of you
come marching home again.

note: I was challenged by some soldiers to write a poem that used the soldier adjective **gucci. The word gucci refers to anything good, expensive, shiny, valuable, a good job, a beautiful object.*

For You at the Shura

for AK, *عليكم السلام* (peace be upon you)

my pen has drunk from knowledge

— Jami

Golden, soldier, *Asaleem 'Alaykum*,
helmet off, frag vest on, cross-legged
you sit on rose petals, Persia's carpets,
beside terps, behind elders, your OC—
the outer ring of a stone dropped in a *wadi*.
Cups of steaming mint tea, scooped *qabuli*.
Moons of *naan* torn and eaten with gun hands.
Cigarillos passed, orbit Afghanistan.
Speak *Pashto* softly. Soft knock the circle,
your third tour of this broken, beautiful land.
26 year old, MCpl. A man. Full. Though
innocent wisdom comes, goes. Like black storks,
through drought, boredom, adrenaline, the metal rain,
Kohl-eyed angels of *burka*, the *shalwar kameez*,
watch over you in the desert again. I know.

24 hrs leave

war, this word so small so worried
over and out; you and I, self-storied,
the click of lips, our hips tented
into one, a shelter, new conquered
land; small, there it is again, 24 rented
hours just for this; wars' dragonflies
lapus lazuli, gossy gold, the fuse; my
few, between sand, 41 degrees Celcius
heat, the sheets, the folds, and you.