

1985

# Waiting for Armistice

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## Recommended Citation

Lea, Sydney. "Waiting for Armistice." *The Iowa Review* 15.1 (1985): 38-41. Web.  
Available at: <http://ir.uiowa.edu/iowareview/vol15/iss1/17>

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## Waiting for Armistice · *Sydney Lea*

Under Aunt Alice's  
table, its skirts of chiffon  
pulled to, the little man  
played at his sullenness.

He had been lightly  
punished, whatever  
his sin, enjoined to act gentle  
from this day on. It was partial  
darkness he sought,  
now and forever.

From the GE above  
he heard the broadcast nightly  
news, and then The Ink Spots'  
baritone crooned  
"I want a Sunday  
kind of love."

*He* wanted summer,  
under the roundelay  
of tern and cloud,  
his aunts in that season  
in long-skirted dresses,  
blowing him kisses,  
rounding their blood-colored mouths  
to please him.

Aunt Alice,  
his favorite, had caught  
for him the lead  
ring on the sideshow carousel  
at a one-ring circus—  
good enough.

Now, as he hid,  
she sang along.  
Sweet trills!  
though here and there she gasped,  
went rough,  
as she had that time when his mother  
held her tight  
and keened and moaned:  
“Don’t cry. You’ll have another.”

“A love to last  
past Saturday night . . .”

Impossible,  
there, in his put-up remorse,  
to imagine the blue  
pushpin standing for Uncle  
Dick ripped out  
of the wall-map, and Alice  
done with her morning reports  
on the Allies’ progress;  
with her modest ladylike shouts  
of gusto after the news  
till this March: ’45.

How to imagine then  
the other husbands later,  
home, alive?  
All heroes. Strangers.

There would stand  
his own father  
in the June sphere of light  
that fell on the drive  
just before night  
fell on the house of the women . . .

How to imagine  
these women decamped,  
the lush perfumes of bereft  
Alice and Grandmother,  
and of the spinster aunts  
—Olive and Myrtle—  
and finally of Mother  
herself, dragged off  
in the winds?

How imagine his future  
brothers, battles,  
when the closest harmony reigned?  
Lisped trebles at bed  
and at meals. And for his sickness  
his choice of the softest  
sensitive hand  
to tamp away the runnels  
of sweat from his head.

And for his wickedness,  
whips laid on like wands.  
Sweetness of female indulgence,  
forgiveness, unearned!

The satin skin  
of the afternoon bay  
that summer would always return  
to the light-soaked cottage  
in an even gentler way  
its ever-so-gentle image,  
forever in mind  
wedded to the tunes of Tin Pan Alley—  
“You Must Have Been a Beautiful Baby,”  
and all the battalions  
of others,  
even sweeter,  
and the hopeful smiles of that season.

Wasn't there blood? O maybe . . .  
O surely! But it was hidden,  
the one thing unshared.

Every day a Sunday,  
so that these women  
in their refugee camp  
(the same old radio bears the word,  
nearly forty years gone by)  
—their clothing yanked  
away, and their lives—  
bring on the selfish little man's tears.

There is no safe place to hide.

—after the Beirut massacres