



"Fool," said my muse to me, "look  
in your heart and write."  
Sir P. Sydney

# The Sad Story About the Six Boys About to be Drafted in Brooklyn

A Fable by Grace Paley

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## I

There were six boys in Brooklyn and none of them wanted to be drafted.

Only one of them went to college. What could the others do?

One shot off his index finger. He had read about this in a World War I novel.

One wore silk underpants to his physical. His father had done that for World War II.

One went to a psychiatrist for three years starting three years earlier (his mother to save him had thought of it).

One married and had three children.

One enlisted and hoped for immediate preferential treatment.

This is what happened next.

## II

THE boy who enlisted was bravely killed. There was a funeral for him at home. People sat on boxes and wore new sackcloth as it was one of the first of that family's bad griefs. They ate and wept.

Then, accidentally, due to a mistake in the filing system, the married father of three children was drafted. He lived a long time, maybe three months, and killed several guerillas, two by strangulation, two by being a crack shot, and one in self-defense. Then he was killed as he slept in the underbrush for other people think they ought to act in self-defense too.

A couple of years later, the boy who had gone to the psychiatrist for three years and the boy in the silk underpants were reclassified. Because of their instabilities, they had always been against killing. Luckily, they never got further than the middle air lane over the very middle of the Pacific Ocean. There, the mighty jet exploded, perhaps due to sabotage, distributing one hundred thirty-three servicemen in a blistery blaze to their watery graves.

As the war went on and on, the college boy became twenty-six years old. He was now in his eighth year in college. He could not remember the name of his high school when he applied for his first job. He could not remember his mother's maiden name which is essential to applications. Nervousness ran in that family and finally

reached him. He was taken to rest in a comfortable place in pleasant surroundings where he remained for twelve years. When he was about thirty-eight, he felt better and returned to society.

Now, the man with the shot-off index finger:

### III

**E**VEN after four years, he didn't miss that finger. He had used it to point accusingly at guilty persons, for target shooting, for filing alphabetically. None of these actions concerned him anymore. To help him make general love, he still had his whole hand and for delicate love, his middle finger.

Therefore, he joyfully married and fathered several children. All of them had shot-off fingers, as did their children.

That family became a race apart. Sickness and famine didn't devastate them. Out of human curiosity they traveled and they were stubborn and tough like the feathery seeds of trees that float over mountain barriers and railroad valleys. In far places the children of the children of the man with the shot-off index finger gathered into settlements and cities and of course, they grew and multiplied.

And that's how at last, if you can believe it, after the dead loss of a million dead generations, on the round river-streaked face of the earth, war ended. 