

## The Bed

Sharp winds scissor and scythe those plains.  
And because you are broken and sleeping rough  
in a dirt grave, we exchange the crude wooden cross  
for the hilt and blade of a proven sword;  
to hack through the knotted dark of the next world,  
yes, but to lean on as well at a stile or gate  
looking out over fens or wealds or fells or wolds.  
That sword, drawn from a king's sheath,  
fits a commoner's hand, and is yours to keep.

And because frost plucks at the threads  
of your nerves, and your bones stew in the rain,  
bedclothes of zinc and oak are trimmed  
and tailored to fit. Sandbags are drafted in,  
for bolstering limbs and pillowing dreams,  
and we throw in a fistful of battlefield soil:  
an inch of the earth, your share of the spoils.

The heavy sheet of stone is Belgian marble  
buffed to a high black gloss, the blanket  
a flag that served as an altar cloth. Darkness  
files past, through until morning, its head bowed.  
Molten bullets embroider incised words.  
Among drowsing poets and dozing saints  
the tall white candles are vigilant sentries  
presenting arms with stiff yellow flames;  
so nobody treads on the counterpane,  
but tiptoeing royal brides in satin slippers  
will dress and crown you with luminous flowers.

All this for a soul  
without name or rank or age or home, because you  
are the son we lost, and your rest is ours.

Simon Armitage

Written to commemorate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the burial of the Unknown  
Warrior at his grave in Westminster Abbey.