KEITH DOUGLAS (English, 1920–44)

“Vergissmeinnicht” [“Forget Me Not”]

Three weeks gone and the combatants gone returning over the nightmare ground we found the place again, and found the soldier sprawling in the sun.

The frowning barrel of his gun overshadowing. As we came on that day, he hit my tank with one like the entry of a demon.

Look. Here in the gunpit spoil the dishonoured picture of his girl who has put: Steffi. Vergissmeinnicht in a copybook gothic script.

We see him almost with content, abased, and seeming to have paid and mocked at by his own equipment that's hard and good when he’s decayed.

But she would weep to see today how on his skin the swart flies move; the dust upon the paper eye and the burst stomach like a cave.

For here the lover and killer are mingled who had one body and one heart. And death who had the soldier singled has done the lover mortal hurt.

1943–44