

SLIPSHOD ●

Sharon Kennedy-Nolle

Carter House, Site of 1864 Battle of Franklin, TN

Samuel Carter's shoes, still at the top of the stairs,
where jacks, toy soldiers, a top cuddle together,
size eleven, they point to the railing,
the section that needed repair.
A little scuffed, the shoes touch too tidily,
the way a four-year-old never leaves them.
When this house was a hospital,
blood pooled in the plank floor grooves
as they carried them in, continuously
—the aftermath of Hood's seventeen failed assaults—
off the front lawn, where fighting was fiercest.
The parlor door, unhinged,
became a table for the saw.
Out the window went arms and legs.
He did not see Todd, his older brother
of the 20th Tennessee, brought in bullet-ridden,
die three days later, that smoke-sifted November afternoon
because on an earlier day his father had been too busy,
always with his cotton gin accounts, come autumn.
So he had played alone, lining up the troops
leading them on the double quick to charge
until he fell too, as if reaching for the colors.
They found him near the newel below,
dead of a broken neck.
All his father could do was work;
so distracted, he put the spindles in upside down,
and so they stayed.