

O Ophelia!

by [Charles Hughes](#) in the [August 11, 2021](#) issue

Impeccable August sky, blue ice except  
The splotch of incandescent sun. I'm reading,  
In the bright daylight of days like today,  
Nick Turse's book, *Kill Anything That Moves*  
(A history of the war in Vietnam),  
Which, sketching napalm's part, describes a boy,  
Who made it to a napalm ward—alive—  
But with his eyelids, lips, and nose burned off  
By napalm, napalm made to stick, then burn  
Through skin to the bone and muscle of its victims,  
Of its child-victims. O Ophelia!

You've come, weeping, to mind today. I'm walking  
Along some train tracks, and just steps ahead,  
Lying forsaken on the blacktop platform,  
A rabbit's leg, a whole hind leg—how small—  
Still snug from haunch to foot in brown-gray fur,  
The leg of a young rabbit, all that's left,  
Now all I see, a little pietà  
For little lives dismembered for the sake  
Of something larger. O Ophelia!—

Driven mad, singing of death and spoiled love,  
Drowning among your flowers, overcome  
By a more evil, human violence  
Unlike the flaring hunger of a hawk.  
I think that, even given the day's pure radiance,  
If you were here, you couldn't help but weep  
For children—the mere children—caged, maimed, killed  
To serve distinctly grown-up purposes,  
Dark, anxious, tireless, not to be denied,

That will, in God's good time, reduce to nothing—  
That shame the stoic beauty of the world.