

There was some truth to that fear.

These were the days before
the discovery of antibiotics,

HAND ME
THE SAW.

before doctors realized that unsterilized
instruments could cause infection.

More than twice as many soldiers died
of disease than were killed in combat.

Field hospitals, especially after
a battle, were hellish places:

bodies by the hundreds,

reeking of death in the
swampy summer air;

every surface
slick with blood;

the rasp of the bone saw;

swarms of flies;

a constant, agonized wailing.

And out back, mounds of amputated
limbs, waiting to be burned or buried.