

## **Flight Ghosts**

They emerged as I knelt  
to weed the driveway's edge,  
wounded  
from a decade-ago war,  
waiting to be flown across an ocean  
to a myth called home,  
clean-shaven,  
unblinking  
as if they were in a lobby  
instead of the belly of a metal war beast.

All were broken  
and some burned,  
like three boys who swallowed bomb fire,  
pink skinless faces,  
backs on tables,  
motionless,  
masks over eyes,  
tubes in throats,  
oxygen bleeding into them,  
chests lifting, then falling,  
then lifting again.

Others huddled in shadows,  
could-have-been college sophomores  
in leg casts,  
arm slings,  
white gauze eye patches,  
carrying crutches,  
which could be forgotten,  
and other things  
which could not.

### **Confession, Aisle 37**

Forgive me for failing  
to realize how much safer it is  
to be a barely grown boy  
in khakis and a white shirt,  
your bandages hidden,  
just one more second-class passenger.

Forgive me for forgetting  
you are a mother's son  
who was ordered  
to hunt other mothers' sons  
in a Fallujah foyer  
when a boy in pajamas,

about ten years old –  
an age you remember well –  
sprang from shadow,  
carving knife in his small fist,  
and plunged pain into you,  
a man with a rifle.

Forgive me for being nowhere  
near qualified to console  
as you whisper confession,  
your deep voice razored  
by a broken heart's edge,  
your reality

shattered  
by the cold uncertainty  
of which blame  
is yours to bear  
and which blame  
is mine.

## **The Desert Cometh**

His desert  
had more mountains  
than mine

but the day's  
last light  
was the same –

wavering orange  
and bleeding red,  
as if the sky knew

who was dying  
and what to do  
with the dead.

## **Outside the Parliament Building**

Red spires spike a white sky.  
Flecks of gray swirl between them,  
a thousand birds.

Ten thousand more hunch  
near the river's edge.

The building takes your breath away,  
magnificence conjured  
to contain hollow spaces

like ornate halls and rib cages  
where hearts beat

inside angry men who play at mirrors –  
reflecting, so they say,  
the people's wish

for protection  
from shattered countryless women

and men who look nothing like them.  
So far, they have drawn lines with words.  
It is important to appear civilized.

But exclusion and fear  
are volatile ingredients.

There has never not been a time  
when that particular mixture  
hasn't exploded.

This time, everyone tells themselves,  
it will be different.