

Katherine Arsenault

### holes

there is a bullet hole in my bedroom wall  
it's been pasted up with green tactical tape  
as sticky as glue  
at night, I peel it back with my fingertips  
a single strip of light pierces my dark room  
and cones out a flaxen glow across my face

when i am at school my brother  
covers that bullet hole  
but when i am home my eye covers it  
as i watch through my room  
past my punctured walls

## Prayers to the ignorant

they taught me how to save you  
though the gray-toned classroom smelled nothing  
like those words you kept murmuring  
as I exposed your wounds from uniform  
    caked with sand and sweat  
you called your armor

for now I hear the colors of your pain  
your veins trilling burgundy  
while your arteries chant the color of those  
cardinals  
    blurs of crimson  
    melting into this deserted ridgeline

they demonstrated how to stop your bleeding  
use strips of that armor and my strength  
and tourniquet off you femurs  
as the camouflage fabric mixes with your sticky blood  
    which you name your pain  
    and I call your clotted soul

I was told there is no humiliation in war but  
then there were those symbols i painted  
with blood across your forehead  
    TK 1536

but it was you who taught me combat and gauze  
are the only medals you that care  
for the stars and ribbons you wear  
    like badges of pain  
will only tell you lies  
    they will not veil your men from the external world  
for when you believe in dying I whisper in your ear  
    you are only a little dead

and it is all covering you  
masking your face and hair and arms  
with the same opaque color as you are  
completely hidden by my shaking hands  
    that you say is my innocence  
    but I call Afghanistan

the last thing I was taught was how to drag  
your dead through the dust and metal scraps

leaving wide-set tracks behind  
    which read like no map to salvation  
    I ever learned  
and you whisper to me  
as I drag you like the dead  
    I am touching death  
I flash back to that gray-toned room  
    they all eventually die  
and remember what they called me  
    naïve

as I first stepped out on that battle turf  
I thought that as I drag your men  
out of those sandpits  
that I will save you all

## Recruitment Officer

I walked in his beige office, with those wood and copper placards of high achievement lining the walls  
he sat reading the army book of ethics  
eyes dusted with a stoicism  
which made my stomach churn  
the only blood that ever touched this man's uniform was that of his  
own men

    boys like my brother  
so I sat down as he beckoned with his hands  
exposing his perfect teeth  
as I pressed my palms against my knees  
    my shaking legs

I told him I was having bad dreams  
I was having miserable fantasies of what was happening  
with the boy he took away  
    the boy he could not remember by name

I told him I was having nightmares and he  
smiled  
and walked around his cherry wood desk to  
lay a single stern hand on my shoulder

he told me men die

if you are strong enough you would be brave too  
and told me my hands would soon trick me with their stillness  
    eventually remain as statuesque as his

this man told me men die  
and my brother dying would make him  
a hero

long after I left his office my hands would not force me into  
submission, though  
and as I dream, that boy enters my thoughts

when this man told me that bad feelings would soon leave me  
so do not agonize  
he was so very wrong

for every time I close my eyes my brother drifts back  
cloaked in war medals and pride  
leaving a line of gold in his path  
as he lets out his last warrior cry  
and then before my very eyes falls down in ash:  
bodes down to the weight of his sack  
as he seems to die for the very first time