

Two Poems

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The Missing Rib

He guided my hand
down the ladder of his ribs
until my index finger slid
into a valley, his flesh
bowing under my touch.

The rib had been yanked out
like a belt through loops
in a helicopter north
of Tikrit and boomeranged
to the desert floor.

His hand flashed open on mine
to press it hard into his chest
until my palm became an ear
listening for the thump
on the sand beneath.

War Games

The Marines have a girl somewhere the whisper circulates around the guard post at the roadblock. Have her in a basement in the town where they are billeted. *They'll let you have a go.* I watch the twin stars of headlights rotate their spokes in pixilated night vision then double back, drive away. We wait—a girl—There was a girl who sometimes brought the Boatman food, her chin tucked deep to her collarbone, never looking at me, a man unknown to her. It could be that girl. *You going?* Into town to have a go at a girl?

My boots grind the gravel up to the house where the Marines stand, joking. They open the door and let me walk alone to the basement where she is, scuttled into a corner, naked haunches up. I crouch and crawl over the way you do with a skittish cat, make yourself smaller. But she doesn't see me. Her mouth is smeared with bruises. She is easy to lift in a bundle, so small she tucks in my jacket, somewhere in those bones is a faint heart slowing. The Marines look away, drag their guns in the gravel. Where to take her? I want to walk with her into the blank desert make a bed for her in that ridiculous boat, drag her with me everywhere. I try my Arabic. *Live? House? Where? Father?* And someone to take her into that darkness. Finally a woman points me to a building near the minefield. I pass the girl to her father. We whisper back and forth as she sleeps without understanding. Our words little freighters back and forth, hulls empty.

When I wake to shouting, I run to the edge
of the minefield we ringed in barbed wire
strung with warnings about the landmines
and there that girl wandering on the field.
Bigs holds me back and she turns and looks
at all of us, tucks her chin down and rips
the dress slowly from the collar to the hem—bones,
bruises, a bandage black with blood—
all the while singing a little song quietly,
so quietly we heard the click.