

# Five Poems

## Graham Barnhart

### The Morning Detail

We come in early and assigned to it.  
Turn on the lights. Mop the floors. The other  
soldiers arrange themselves outside in uniform.

We punch a code on the cadaver lab door.  
Wheel out nine stainless bins and spin  
their vault-like levers to open the lids.

By that same mechanism, the bodies lift,  
and murky, thick formaldehyde laves  
like olive oil from their ears and nostrils,

their pointless and embarrassing pubic hair.  
Just like forgetting, we peel away our rubber gloves,  
ball one inside the small pouch of the other.

Absent but accounted for, we wait inside  
with the anatomy. Not looking or looking away.  
Outside the sprawling fort attends the day's attention.

Hidden speakers call reveille. The trumpets  
wash the ruined fields and open torsos,  
the brown depleted hillsides paling.

## Pond of Frozen Horses

Having survived, all they felt  
was curiosity in the smoke-  
scented snow. Before dawn,  
before the rooster,  
before each night knew  
it was time to sleep,  
galaxies wheeled  
their sudden ignitions  
through the constellate skull  
of each frozen horse.  
And the sentries danced  
among the rearing faces  
only enough to warm their feet.

Against unblinking eyes  
they knocked the heels  
of their empty pipes  
inventing only the necessary  
songs and mercies untroubled  
by wonder's inarticulate catechism.  
Who had been flesh  
surprised into glass,  
they called memorial  
long as winter,  
who were horses first,  
who were horses and moved  
as liquid over the earth.

## Thinking Like A Mountain

A week in the Himalayas with the Nepalese Rangers. A week of hotel and shooting range. Sudden fog as deep as the sky. Learning to smoke so I can stand outside. I turn 32 with singing bowls beneath my bed and clouds pressed to my eyes. Assembly lines of rifle fire shot through every midnight with breaks to let the weapons cool. Expenditure the only reason. Enfilade the only cause. I want so badly to say it means something. Sudden fog as deep as the sky. Machine guns learning to talk green strings of light. Consciousness like a thread. Copper rounds fills the mountainside with hot, bright flashes and the pointlessness itself begins to feel important. Gun barrels glow drowsy, drooping like the persistence of memory. The earth pulling clouds like meditation beads. Consciousness like a thread. Cut in half. Cut in half. Never ends. When there are two ravens on the railing, I learn to expect a third. I want so badly to be spoken to. Humans once called those thunders *brute* who refused to prophesy.

## Introduction

WITH THE **DRAWDOWN** OF COMBAT TROOPS AND MEDICAL ASSETS IN AFGHANISTAN, **SMALLER** DEPLOYED FORCES **OPERATE** IN AREAS OF LOW-INTENSITY CONFLICT GLOBALLY, WITH MINIMALLY DEVELOPED US MEDICAL FACILITIES. THE SPECIAL **OPERATIONS** FORCES (SOF) MEDIC MUST BE PREPARED TO CARE FOR SURGICAL **CASUALTIES** FOR AN EXTENDED TIME UNTIL ARRIVAL AT A FACILITY THAT OFFERS DEFINITIVE SURGICAL CARE AND MAY NEED TO RELY ON HOST-NATION MEDICAL CAPABILITIES WITHIN MANY **THEATERS** OF **OPERATION**. **TERRAIN**, **WEATHER**, AND **OPERATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS** MAY ALSO IMPACT EVACUATION TIMES IN AREAS WHERE PROLONGED **FIELD CARE** WOULD **NOT** OTHERWISE BE EXPECTED. **MOVEMENT** OF **CASUALTIES** MAY CROSS NATIONAL **BORDERS** USING MULTIPLE **EVACUATION** PLATFORMS, MANY OF WHICH MAY **NOT** BE OUTFITTED FOR **CASUALTY** CARE.

## Dawn Turns Drawdown

dawn

rations

casual

borders

evacuation bells

the field

into a field

of theaters

**Graham Barnhart** is a poet and military veteran. His work has been recognized with a Wallace Stegner Fellowship from Stanford University, a Pushcart Prize, The Blackwell Prize, and The Jeff Sharlet Memorial Award for Veterans from *The Iowa Review*. His first poetry collection, *The War Makes Everyone Lonely*, was published in 2019, and he is currently working on a new collection of poetic erasures exploring medicine and traumatic narrative.