

DAVID RIDDLE

Darkest Congo

Lean men with granite faces and souls filled with coal
Straightened the line of future victims in the village square
Kalashnikovs jammed into the backs of the slowest women
Tears dripping into the red clay dust
Blood fills the boot prints of Mai-Mai rebels
The tears are eaten by the earth
Come morning, after a long, long night
Not a virgin will exist in Luvungi
Not a mother left intact, not a child unruined
And the men with the Kalashnikovs, tired from a long night's work
Will sleep under the umbrella of the thorn acacia trees, where the shade is deep
Where it is cool and safe and tired backs can rest in the breeze of the early morning
They are boys really, but past redeeming
Carrying heavy rucksacks and another burden that will damn them
Which feels the heaviest now?
Loaded in dirty mean trucks they move on to the next village
There is another line to form up

* * *

Denyse is folded like an infant on the dirt floor
Her skin and clothes and the earth all look the same; affinity
The only thing that is different is the Jackson Pollock
Done in scarlet on the bed, the walls, the bread that was to be breakfast
Her mother who fought the hardest, is in the well, with father as an example
But she is beyond thinking of undrinkable water
She is past beyond, in a place we cannot see
And she will not look back at us
Why would she want to see beautiful Africa again
Everyone she knows is dead, damaged or in that next village
She wishes that the earth would eat her too

DAVID RIDDLE is a student at Fayetteville State University. His poems have been published in *Calliope*, forthcoming in *Red Clay Review*, and *The Chaffey Review*.