

VERONICA SCHUDER

Seven Deaths

—for Aaron Michael

1.

They were hunkered down, the outpost
a hole some sand bags and a gun mount
circled by c-wire on a ridge in the Hindu Kush.
After rain, the smell of pine hovers
over pallets of mortars.

2.

There are different ways to learn
how much things cost. An incendiary
round's value is its trajectory,
which makes an absence of a man.
The threat which dropped behind
an outcropping along with his gun
is one way the mind talks to the heart.

3.

My father was born holding a radio
in a foxhole while Viet Cong shifted the ground
over his head. That first day of his life,
he wondered why he could not die
when he had such beautiful mountains
translating the words leaves say just before
they are shredded by suppressive fire.
Every day he looks out his window
into St. Louis's plangent skyline
and wonders where cowardice comes from.

4.

On a day so clear it seemed that present
would never end, a triangle floated over
the Sangre de Cristos, those crisp
wings black as the shadow
of a brooding hawk, a prince of air
so commonplace I can't remember
anymore what makes them important.

5.

Sometimes light is so pure and thin
it can slice in memory a hole
the way an eagle plucks
a spotted rabbit from a field.

6.

Heading into the valley from Asadabad,
a truck cooled its whimpering tires
in a stream that flowed over a road
mined with IEDs. But that's some
other story

7.

which leaves the one about left boots,
still tied, with feet still in them. Tossed
it seemed carelessly just inside the wire.
There were seven of them, my nephew
home from the war said before he fell asleep
on the couch with his hand scraping
his chest as if to get at his heart.

A Corner in Fallujah

Somebody's laundry reads the scene
under its clapping shirts.

It applauds the policeman's
dusty coat. Doves gather

on the fuse line; their eyes black
as the wreckage which blew

through the intersection:
a wrung-out fender, a splatter of glass,

somebody's untied shoe. Tomorrow,
a rat will scratch out a tooth

embedded in that stucco wall
over a thousand years old, thinking

it might be something good to eat.

Veronica Schuder teaches composition and creative writing at Louisiana Tech University. Her work has recently appeared or is forthcoming in print and web journals including *The New Ohio Review*, *The Florida Review*, *SOFLOPOJO*, *Laurel Review*, and *Weekly Hubris*.