

Walking Point

He's probably 13 or 14, matchstick thin,
dressed in black pajamas like so many
Vietnamese, flip-flops, thick black hair:

but startled now, wild headlight eyes.
(He'd been walking the narrow jungle
trail, rifle casual over his shoulder, like

a 14-year-old carries a baseball bat,
when the American soldier stepped
into his path.) And the boy stands

frozen for a moment, then drops his
weapon and runs. The soldier snaps
his rifle to his shoulder, sights square

on the boy's back, then hesitates. *Do it*,
he thinks. But in that second, the whisper
in his head—half-remembered words

from childhood wedged for weeks now
in some itchy corner of his brain—begins
its tuneless buzz: *tongues of men*,

*tongues of angels, sounding brass, tinkling
cymbal.* And as the boy vanishes, he lowers
his weapon, no longer a soldier.