

## TESTIMONY OF A PRIVATE

138

Sergeant said we could transport the detainees and do a write-up or deal with them by other means, it was something for us to decide and *We never had this conversation, understood?* I looked at these three hajjis kneeling on the dirt and the faded brown of everything behind them, and I tried to remember how we got here in the first place, the only happiness we knew being the things from before, being cold beer and A/C and little dick-sucking online babes, being our real girls, the ones we left puffy in airports, and the songs that exploded inside our eardrums, and I closed my eyes for a second, just needing a second to clear my head, and there was my dad, many years younger, ordering me to go play with this kid who lived next door to us in Barstow, before Vallejo, before San Isidro, and this kid—I don't even remember his name—sat on an old tire glaring at me for no reason, like I'd come to blow his house down, so that when I hit him it was only to teach him a lesson, to make him smarter about the world, because I said to him, I *warned* him, I don't remember how hard I hit him but he crumpled up anyway and pretended it was worse than it was though he didn't cry or tell on me, and I guess I hated him for that, too, and later felt sorry I hadn't done more...so that when I came to and I was back here it was hard to focus on what the guys were saying, Thompson and Garcia and the others, with these three hajjis still on their knees in plastic cuffs, bent as if to pray, sweat darkening their robes around the collar, making them look like holy vestments, and someone grabbing me, getting up in my face, asking Am I ready for this shit? Am I ready to make something happen? Am I *ready ready ready?* Thompson maybe or a few of us all together I honestly can't recall and that's the honest truth doing it in the back of the head quick and them falling forward slow and some woman wailing from inside a nearby structure, and all of us edging toward the gun trucks, trying to decide whether to look back, it might have been me looking back at the young one's cheek coming to rest against the earth, as if there were no other way it could have happened, as if the dark shroud of history lay over everything, every valley and bone, as if the dust below, drinking his blood, had been waiting for us for a million years.

THE IOWA REVIEW