

WINTER, KURDISTAN

The dip brims from Kenson's lower lip
like a pinch of fresh mulch. His breath fogs
the Humvee's side-view mirror
and behind him, the Zagros
white with morning snow.
Kenson's mirror was shattered
after the IED south of Kirkuk;
now I let him use mine. He punches
my shoulder again, *Get up*,
and looks back to the mirror, taking the razor
from cheek to jaw, the faint scrape like a shovel
far off on asphalt.
He splashes the blade
in the silver canteen cup,
runs the razor chin to neck.
When a thin hair of blood
streaks below his throat,
he doesn't wipe but lets it dry—
a scab to fall in the mountain air.
Even my retinas
shiver; I shut my eyes
and as that slow scrape on Kenson's skin
puts me again to sleep,
I feel the hand of Drill Sergeant Grant—
his way of inspecting our shave:
wipe up slow, the back of the hand
on the cheek, feel for the pricks
of stubble. When he'd take
his hand away, move to the next boy,
I could still feel that warmth
fading on my skin
like the small fires
from Kurdish herders
waking above us in the hills.