

HUGH MARTIN

FOOT PATROL

The blue bruise under his eye
is like the skin of a cold plum. Blood
dries beneath his nose

as we listen to the eucalyptus
scratch the violet sky
in the dusk wind. My platoon stands

with our rifles in the day's leftover
exhaust smoke settled
in the valley. The Iraqi sergeant

smashed this man's face
twice with the wooden
butt of his Kalashnikov;

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he'd swung it
with both hands
like a tennis racket. The man

had been seen digging
beside the long road
into Jalula. The young boy

who sells blocks of ice
pushes his red cart home,
waves, *Mister, Goodnight...*

When the echo of his creaking
cart dissolves down the alley,
in the deep silence, my body

says there could be a blast—

enormous—in this dusky
muted night, but we are moving

for a foot patrol where I have
no choice but to press my feet,
softly, on that road of earth.