

## Military Woman: Evolution

she says truth was the uniform caught my eye first time I saw them walking so proud and tall could have been that uniform stood up by itself—starched so clean it was and the hat she says the hat set jaunty over bangs pressed tight like a roll of half dollars—everything jazzed till you get down to the shoes a dead give away cause no woman I knew willing to trade in her high heels for brogans look like a man just stepped out of—seem like that uniform left them more man than woman anyhow and the wives whispered “hard woman” whispered “hold her own against any man” and wondered if their man was ready to take them on—still she says first time I saw them parading like they had suit hangers up under their shirts I nearly bust out laughing looking at how stiff they moved till I figured that uniform let them walk on any side of the street they’d choose—I was walking on a stretch of wasn’t nothing wrong but wasn’t nothing right either so I signed up for a bunk and a duffel bag and sanitary napkins issued once a month—I signed up cause truth was I didn’t know which way I was going in that world where folks didn’t believe a woman could do a man’s job thought one woman could put a platoon at risk the men rushing in to save her sorry ass and I re-upped to prove them wrong—I signed up thinking I’d walk tall in parades thinking I could show them what I was made of how I could work a gun steady as a man and hold my own—least that’s what I dreamed for more than twenty years serving my time in quartermaster in armpit towns never even seen women like me before and the Brass not letting us off post except in pairs on account of civilians who copped an attitude when we passed—she says none of it turned me around cause I was thinking I was a woman who’d seen more camps than any boy back home and knew rank by the stripes and units by insignias—I even dreamed myself in uniform but like my mama used to say “dreaming ain’t doing and shoulda never crossed nobody’s bridge”—still I stayed moving up in rank watching the world slide by in slow motion—grunts

got it different these days going from boot camp to combat in  
a short stretch—yet I'm the one greeting them when they re-  
turn body bag or walking—I'm senior non-com old school in  
white glove uniform time in grade slashed on my sleeve—I'm  
the one telling them it's not the uniform what makes me proud  
but what's in it—and I'm the one to salute them all

## Recruited

she says after high school  
it was this or some dead-end job  
so what choice did I have

twice recruiters chased me  
across the mall caught me between  
cheap clothes and fast food

told me about a good life  
in uniform until they had me  
thinking how good I'd look

Afro braids tucked under my cap  
she says there was no place  
to hide—recruiters tracked me

down strolling along like I had  
time to kill and going home  
was the last thing on my mind

we're all family they said then  
dropped me in this detachment with  
dumb chicks waltzing in acting crazy

like nobody ever sent them running  
cause of the color of their skin  
and if you want to know the truth

all of us crazy on dust and blood  
and how much crap we gotta take  
before this war is over—and

about the time I'm thinking  
black or white one body's good  
as another on the front line

reporters come in to scoop the action  
for folks back home and the white  
chicks pose for cameras and I'm thinking:  
this ain't family worth a damn

## Humvee

she says there's no reason  
to go home after her folks  
gave away her cat—the one thing  
she loved—so she'll serve another  
stint and pick up skills she says  
she can use later  
and later—to make the point  
she pulls the trigger—a short  
round clearing the street  
like a new broom

back home they write—"girl  
you got it going on" but  
there's no reason to go  
home—she says—there's nothing  
there for me and shuffles  
the worn out photos of tree  
lined streets the gym the bank  
the tabby her folks gave away  
and thinks of what she doesn't  
tell them: how twelve hours  
in a Humvee you piss in a soft

drink cup—anything that's handy  
after another day of dust  
and sleep that stings your eyes  
until every shadow is a target  
still she re-ups for another hitch  
in a burnt out world where only  
her Humvee matters and a power  
drink that gets her through the day  
where there's hell to pay  
and little more to count on except  
the ache in her ribs like she's pulled  
something loose but can't remember when

## First Blood

*those who have seen death are content with  
the fever*

—Arabic proverb

claims she wouldn't hurt  
a fly before she got the calling

now she stitches the sidewalk  
with machine gun fire

just in case she says  
someone's waiting out there

to put a hurting on me  
you get used to it she says

keeping an eye on snipers  
suicide bombers man woman child

one body as good as another  
her eyes the innocence of the girl

next door minus the gun  
she cradles like a leg

of lamb she's brought home  
for Sunday dinner and the whole

damn extended family except  
a chosen few who will be laid

out like cordwood  
on the road behind her