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Operation New Dawn

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OPERATION NEW DAWN

—December 15, 2011

1.

It began with a bang,
the first of many—the seismic cough

of a bunker-buster
in Baghdad. *Yes,*

the woman near Haifa Street said,
I was in shock; I was in awe.

Later: Babylon for sale
on eBay.

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2.

That man in As-Sadiyah said
after Uday took

his sister, fucked her
for a long weekend,

she went home,
bathed in gasoline

in the family courtyard
and burned

on a spring afternoon.
He said *Thank you,*

and shook my hand. He said
Saddam,

and spat on the road.

3.

On television, I watch the End
of Mission Ceremony,

just as I also watched
the bunker-busters drop.

The war began
in my living room

and ended
in my living room,

but this time,
on a much larger television

with a perimeter
of surround sound.

4.

Also today on the newsstands:
Ms. Lohan's shadow

of cleavage, her lips thick,
red like wax candy.

On Twitter, readers have complained
about the freckles

airbrushed from her shoulders
and chest. Hugh

Hefner says
the January/February issue

has eclipsed sales records.

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5.

On CNN dot-com's
Home and Away

Casualty List, a white dot
on a map of America

represents
a dead soldier: name, rank,

town of birth. Zoom out
and the dots blur

together like human lights
from space at night,

or a map to show
where the country's suffered

a heavy downfall of snow.

6.

I don't know how many
Iraqis are dead. I know there was

that blue van
our 113

Armored Personnel Carrier
collided with one night

on the dark sloping road
of Route Willow. The van

going 60; the APC, 35;
one headed west; the other,

east; the road
unlit, unmarked. The passengers:

dead with their blood
on the leather seats.

The front of the van—
a mangled web of steel.

The driver's face flat
to the steering wheel

as if he'd been trying
to dive through it.

7.

It is difficult to say
my name to a girl

I've met at a loud bar;
it sounds too much

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like *Who* or *You*.
Before Iraq I had

this problem, and after Iraq,
I still have this problem. When a girl

with black hair and silicone
breasts, whom I met

on my lap in a Las Vegas
gentlemen's club, asked me

my name, I said it; she said, *No*,
you—your name. I gave her

the same simile I'd been using
my entire life: *like Hugh*

Hefner, which began
a conversation

about her time living
for three months

in the Playboy Mansion.
I told her I gave an Iraqi soldier

a *Playboy* for his black
Iraqi Army hat, a souvenir

I could take home (because I wanted
concrete reasons why

I was going home). Later in that hour,
she asked me

Should we be There? I only
sighed. She was wearing

a silk thong, her breasts were inches
from my nose, and she whispered,

looking down, *So much*
suffering. She sat there

on my lap for an hour. I didn't
even purchase a dance.

8.

At the ceremony's close,
two soldiers take down

the United States Forces-Iraq flag.
One holds the flag horizontal,

while the other
pulls on the Desert

Camouflage flag condom,
gently, respectfully,

like the careful taping
at Abu Ghraib

of a wire to a man's scrotum.
They march away, carrying

the flag as the Army Band—
off-camera, unseen—

plays a patient low brass
while all of the soldiers

hold their salutes.

9.

Sometimes, I just want
to tell stories:

the girl who burned;
the 13 passengers dead;

the boy and his father
accidentally

shot; the 100-year-old
man who sobbed

and said when we invaded,
his son—locked in a cell

for 15 years—came home;
the raid where we knocked

over a stack of dishes—
they shattered

on the dirt floor
and the woman, already

screaming, refused to take
our money for the damage.

10.

In the velvet light of the club,
that woman's hair shadowed

her lovely face; her teeth seemed
to glow fluorescent white. Soon,

she went to another
man across the bar,

her ass on his lap. Sometimes,
I still don't know

what I was doing There. Sometimes,
I do. I know

we were there. They were there.
I am the man. I traded a *Playboy*

for a hat. Someone almost killed me
with a rocket buried

beneath bricks.
A dead man was kissing

a steering wheel. We broke
a woman's handmade plates.

She wouldn't even take our money.

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