Spring 2013

Operation New Dawn

Hugh Martin
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.

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.

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
collapsed 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

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—you 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.
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.