

## Jesus

When I was sixteen, I had faith  
in pain. After practice or a game,  
I limped into the training room  
where the coach cut the tape on my ankles  
and ripped it from my skin.  
He sent me to the whirlpool  
where I bathed until everyone left.  
I showered, dressed, and waked to my car,  
slowly, feeling the sore spots, breathing  
the cold of the autumn night.  
When I broke my thumb in a game I lost,  
I drove home from the hospital on a night  
without a date, the sky starless, the thought  
of becoming a priest slipping away  
like a ball brushing the tips of the fingers.  
The best was the day I broke my nose  
against Mission High, a 6-0 loss  
in November sleet, the muddy field freezing up  
before the game's end. I hurt all over.  
I sat in the ER for two hours, waiting  
to be taken. No one was there.  
Eventually a doctor appeared, patched me up,  
and told me to go home. I drove  
past Bayview Package and the shipyard  
to a house where my parents slept in their rooms  
and the coffee burned in the dark.  
I didn't turn the lights on.  
I didn't call the girl  
I'd been dreaming of for weeks.  
My head ached. I didn't take the pills  
and I wouldn't take a drink.  
I went out to the back porch  
and sat in the cold for an hour and a half,  
the greatest night of my life.

## Scouts

At Camp Squanto, we sat by the fire,  
inductees arrow-marked by blood.  
We held flint and steel and pledged Pawtuxet  
allegiance to our new brothers in arms.

All his married life, the *Nisshoki* flag  
hung in my father's closet. Red and white,  
*The Rising-Sun* marked the Navy valor  
he lost in women's bedrooms, the taverns

of squandered money, his funeral business  
fingerprinted with padded bills, forged  
invoices, the undercurrent of bad  
blood, affairs gone wrong, and angry men.

Tisquantum made deals with Massasoit,  
translated lies that brokered two lives.  
Peacemaker, he died in poisoned fever,  
blood trickling from his nostrils. My father's

blood, stroke-driven, collected in his ear  
and dried in a knot on the lobe. I found  
the box beneath the flag, Pacific love  
letters from my mother and his mistress.

Old Squanto's face was on the treasured patch,  
*The Order of the Arrow*, a secret  
tribe for those who upheld the Oath and Law.  
Surviving a night alone in the woods,

we became would-be soldiers, readying  
for bamboo stakes and the Airborne Ranger  
patch on our fatigues and dress blues. We were  
boys, cocks of the walk, preparing

for history's thicket and the small boxes  
of love to be hidden in the corners  
of dark rooms, artifacts of lust  
waiting to be found by the next in line.

## Nightmare

The night the Firestone factory burned to the ground,  
your husband woke me, told me to get dressed,  
and the embalmer and his apprentice son  
went to claim the dead.  
It's hard to remember: the fire engine,  
the riverbed lost in steam, elms smoldering,  
voices booming at the discovery of two more men.

At seventeen, it was work:  
the bodies filled our house, a home of rosaries,  
the grieving in their weeping.  
And you, silent mother, you walked across the parking lot  
each morning like a ghost in search of her body.  
And now I want to tell you that factory wakes me  
in the hour before light:  
I see a man's charred chest, his face a look  
Lon Chaney would have envied.

A young woman reappears in the rubble, a face I've seen before.  
She has no eyes, no ears, no nose.  
She says *mercy*. She says *miracle*.  
Through the smoke, daybreak becomes  
a coffin of bronze, lilies in a false dawn  
that will not disappear. I'm in the hearse,  
and I see you, again, holding that woman,  
my hands searching, fumbling  
for a roll of clean white tape.