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The things we did, all the things that we do

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The things we did, all the things that we do

by

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A thesis submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
MASTER OF FINE ARTS

Major: Creative Writing and Environment

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As retaliation for rebel attacks, the government of Sudan supported a militia, the Janjaweed, to not only eradicate the rebel armies but also the entire self-identifying African population of the country.

Blockade

I.

This humiliation was started by the government.

Now we're helpless.

I was shot.

I was shot in my leg and went to the government seeking help.

White doctors came to treat us

and the government said,

"No."

They came to treat us and the government said,

"You cannot help these people."

Now,

everything, all

is between you and your Creator.

This is too much.

II.

We told the police what they did,
and the officers nodded,
smiled.

They ripped our clothes,
we said. They made us walk
naked in front of all their men.

Their general smoked
as we walked.
And he smiled, too.

We told the police this, kept
talking, said the things our mothers told us
not to say.

These men we told, they nodded.
No questions. Their hands held paper,
and nothing would they write.

Thank you, they said and moved
us away.

But do you know our names?

They placed their hands on our backs, pushed
us away.

But do you know our names?

Present Tense

"It's like stepping through a time machine," he says. "Have you seen this?"

She sets their coffees down. Garfield ceramics steaming.

Morning reds flood the room.

"No." She takes the paper, sighs. His index tapping at the words.

Her eyes scan, rescan. She says, "They have to use wood? Like camping?"

He nods, says, "There's nothing else."

"Every day? In order to survive?"

He says, "Keep reading."

She sits, keeps going. He leaves to wake the children.

When he returns she asks, "Why do the police do nothing?"

"They're part of the government." He pulls two bowls from a cupboard.

He says, "They're all on the same team."

She folds the paper, stands. Kisses the children on their brows as they drudge in.

"So there's nothing for the women to do? That's it. Gather the wood and—"

"That's it. Simple. Either die in the camps from starvation or leave to get wood."

"But the things that happen to them out there."

"I know."

"It's so terrible. I can't believe it."

He pours Cookie Crisp into each bowl as she gets milk from the fridge.

The youngest says, "Mommy, what are you talking about?"

And smiling, she says, "Nothing."

Paper Words

On July 12 Sara wrote:

In a different camp there was confusion.

Word spread

That some were being moved.

Which was true.

But the gossip was quick and panicked and

Evolving.

Within one day there became great belief

That those being moved

Were being taken to Europe.

When the cars and jeeps pulled into their line,

Mothers swarmed the cars

With their children,

Holding them out,

Thrusting them out,

And where windows were open

Throwing them through the space

Between metal and glass

Chanting,

Take my baby, take my baby.

It took two or three hours that day

For the children to be returned

And for all that were there to know no one,

Not one,

Was going to Europe.

Just twenty miles further west,

To someplace not good,
Save for better supplies.

Each week Sara wrote to her parents like this
Of the things she heard,
And not what she saw.
As if the two steps of separation
From parents to action
Would allow them to place her into the role
Of story-teller,
Not daughter.

Steps

If you walk barefoot here
You'll notice the hardness of things.
Dried, harsh gray and ecru.
The ground looks like sand
But does not give.

Here, dirt, rock
Are the same.
Walking, running, the same.
Your feet do not sink.

In this place, not even knees get saved.

Herald

You see our skin and know
We are African.

And if you watch us pray, you know
We are Muslim, yes.

But that does not mean we are Arab.

We have:
Our culture, our words, expressions, songs—

Deli lebafl dawa lejfo.

We just use Arab
When we worship.

But in our lives, our every day,
We use our full language.

So maybe, yes, you will understand:
We don't like, you see, we hate Arab,

Because we must speak
to God in the voice of our monsters.

Transmigration

In Kalma they have Kalashnikovs,
Russian toys for African children.

The Dajo, Fur, Zaghawa
Who died as one family

At the end of Janjaweed
Pangas and guns, now

Turn metal
Against each other.

Tribes who signed
The DPA, a non-aggression pact with Khartoum,

Have their homes burnt
In the camps, bullets lodged in their faces

By neighbors who think
Peace comes through pain

And that five years isn't enough.

Disconnect

I remember my arm about her
As we sat on her crappy green couch,
The one her brother gave her
With the middle collapsed.

As we watched the film she grew silent,
No words or nods for my comments.
The children, sleepless and hungry,
Confessed through the screen

That many of them saw
Their parents beaten or shot.
The hour grew long and her eyes
Never left the scrolling names of production workers

Until all was black.

I remember thinking to myself
That she must feel a part of this world
I could not. That my heart
Was defective. Hers strong.

I could see the injustice and need
For things to be done. Even I
Knew my part, that I would write checks or letters
Or both.

But I couldn't really feel
Until two days later when she came over
For dinner and solved my mystery
By breaking things off.

Discount

When fathers exchange ten-year-old
Boys for promises

Of liberation, hope, and other words
That will only stay words,

We become mothers without voices,
Whose minds, in time, won't

Be able to form the faces of our children.

Flight

Sara heard a boy speak,
could not sleep for three nights
as his words played and replayed through her mind.

He said:

“I want to be a pilot,”
 but his dreams of flight
were fueled by things
she had never known,
could not understand.

He remembered:

his family’s camels, goats, and cows,
their land, peanuts, sorghum,
and how it was taken away.

He said:

“I will fly to America,”
 for he knew what such
a place was and meant.

He said:

“I will get many weapons there.
 Like they burned us,
 I want to burn them.”

Camp Story

Ahmed came here after Janjaweed
attacked his village with sticks, blades, guns.
Their assault came quick,
at night
in his own house.

While they beat Ahmed,
his little daughter, his son
got frightened, ran away.

The next morning God returned:

Ahmed found his children on the road to town,
but even with them pressed to him,
he thought he would lose his mind.
There would be no return,
no going back,
no home,
just miles and miles of fear
and the thought that in Kass
there are forty bodies and no one to bury them.

Education

My wife was home cooking
when I heard explosions.

The massacre humiliated,
convinced me
to join the rebel army.

I must help in this.

So I learned and learned
to fight.

You think it wrong?

It is very normal, like
drinking water.
Like air.

You will see.

If God hears,
He will grant me a long life.
And I will battle,
Liberate our homes.

Here, now,
In this jungle,
Stones are pillows,
Dreams are blood.

Any questions?

-No sir.

Any reports?

-No sir.

It was After a Speech

I felt terrible.

A young woman came up to me and said,
As diplomatically as it sounds,
“I’m concerned you’re painting a negative picture
Of Arabs.”

I back-peddled, fell over myself with speed and courtesy:
“I’m really sorry, I certainly didn’t mean to offend you
Or anyone, or to imply anything about any Arabs
Not in the government.”

“It’s all right,” she said. “I’m not offended.
But I do want to make sure you’re not saying anything
You don’t mean to.”

She said, “I’m a lot of things—
Muslim, American, Arab—
And I hate how the media is.

From 9/11 on,
Everything on TV shows just one
Kind of Arab.

I don’t want to see you or your group fall into that.
I don’t want to see you accidentally demonize
An entire race of people.

Living here, I won't pretend to know what it is,
But I want you to find it. The right thing.
I want you to include all voices."

Yes, She is a Human Being

But I rape because I have a need;
You don't know, don't know,

We have been suffering
And suffering in the forest.

I have no time
 To negotiate
No time
 To love her
No time.

I am in need.

I ask and she says no,
I will take her.

She resists, I say:
 I will use my gun.

Most of the time they end up accepting.

Collecting, Outside of Hamadea

God will not
forgive us for what we do here,
in the sand,
this sin.

The tree we cut is beautiful,
alive.
It is wrong.

We cannot go
to the jungle,
collect wood there.

The Janjaweed make us
sin,
make us come here.

Make us steal life.
They make us
and make us.

This is their sin, God
understand that.

Perpetrators

April 27, 2007

The camp crowds around radios

The static, British voice tells them
that names have been released
by the International Criminal Court.

Those gathered hold each other
tight and cry and await
the list.

They say nothing for fear
they will miss this joy.

This joy!

And it comes:

Ahmad Harun and Ali Kushayb have . . .

But there are no more.

The crowd waits
and waits,
and as the report continues for hours
it is clear that
only two names have been charged.

“Where is the devil Bashir? Where is his name?”

Voices raise, embraces release.

A small pot shatters as a young Sheikh walks away.

“How can there be only two?” someone asks.

And most of the crowds go back to their tents,

The only reply says, “There will be more.

God will make there be more.”

Magic in the Congo

Here, magic is not games,
Not cards, illusions
On stage on Saturday nights.

Here magic is life
And death, a guarantee
Of who wins in war.

In the Congo,
In combat zones,
Soldiers believe in
A potion of protection

Which requires rape.
By taking, overcoming
Women, the potion will work,
Will help these men

Overcome the invaders.

To hear them speak,
They honor women
With their assistance
In their success.

As Color and Culture Suggest

Sara sits at a table with three other women,
The four of them victims.

The women hesitate to speak
Until Sara shares her story.

They drink water as Sara explains
That she is not so different
As color and culture suggest.

That one night in college
As she walked the five blocks
Home from a party
A car pulled beside her,
And the driver said, sweetly,
“We’ll give you a lift.”

Sara tells the women she refused,
That she told the men she was almost home.
But that that was not what the men wanted to hear,
And two men sprung from the car
And grabbed her.

Sara tells all that she can of the story
Before one and then all of the women ask
To know about the war that is happening in her country.

Beauty

Fatima cries as she watches

Her hair fall to her feet.

Her father speaks as he watches

His wife take the same straight blade

To Fatima as she does to their sons.

Six years old, Fatima

Does not understand her father's words

As he says, "We must do what we can

To keep evil away."

Does not understand when he

Approaches,

kneels,

kisses her hand,

whispers, "Someday, I promise,

you will be pretty again."

Two Dollars

Dark shades propped to her forehead,
Sauda is a tall woman with arms like a man's.
The only woman officer in the city.
The only officer assigned to rape.

In her small, yellowed office,
She slides a picture of a group of soldiers
To the white man, uniformed in white, before her
At the other side of her cluttered desk.

Sauda taps above a specific man,
Smiling, head cocked back,
Gun in both hands before him
Instead of over slung shoulder
Like the rest.

She says, "I had this one arrested.
But for two dollars
They set him free."

The white officer stares
Through the paper,
Shakes his head.
"So now he's back at it?"

Sauda reaches across the table,
Takes the picture back,
Says, "We try to do justice.
But this is a dream for us.
Impossible."

In Garsila Village

There are brick walls scarred black without
Roofs, metal cauldrons
Surrounded by piles of ash.

In Garsila there are
No sounds,
No use for any of this.

Good or bad or unforgivable
The things we make and do
Always outlive us.

They'd Seen What Happened

In Zalingei:

A town turned into a playground for Land Cruisers,
A base of operations for the Janjaweed,

They'd seen what happened in Dalia,
The rings of *gottias*,
Black circles that once were homes.

So in Kuteri,
They chose to treat their invaders as kings.
To give them their food, their shade, their shelter.

In return so far, they've
kept life; the deal so far
a good one, yes?

Observations at the Front

Maybe you've heard that 3 million live in camps
With little food, little hope,

Maybe you've heard that less than 10,000
African Union troops aid the camps.

But have you heard the troops' mission
Is only for the eyes. To observe and report.

That they are not soldiers or warriors.
Just office workers taking inventory.

Colors are Brighter There

The women dress bright—
Canary, pink, emerald, scarlet—
Dresses flowing around legs,
Wrapped tight against face and torso—
Prints of flowers honor
That which no longer grows—
Stripes of darkness stand out against the light—
But it is that light you remember,
That canary, pink, emerald, scarlet—
Brightness, brightness—

Marla Village

Sara is shown a photo:

A brick building with giant green doors

Flung open,

A fire raging inside,

All that's inside: red and orange and black.

In this photo:

A man in green uniform

With a white cloth wrapped about face and neck,

Stands guard,

Making sure smoke consumes all.

The AU soldier who shows the photo,

Says to Sara,

"Remember that this is nothing here."

Says, "At the edge of the village

They found unexploded rockets sent from the helicopters."

Those who ran, survived.

Survivors tell Sarah: those who breathed the smoke

Vomited, died, that day or the next.

Make Me What I'm Not

Captain Steidle enters the village,
The only American in the team of five.

He is welcomed
By a handful

Who survived because they were smart
Enough to play dead.

A woman, not yet twenty,
Brings her baby to him.

Captain Steidle is white, male,
Therefore, to all here who see him, a doctor.

He is not.

The baby had a bullet pierce his back:
A small wound below the shoulder

Where the bullet entered:
A larger wound, a mess of blood and skin

On the opposite side,
Just above the hip.

Captain Steidle speaks English to the woman,
Tells her to lay the baby down.

She does not understand.

He takes off his shirt,
Lays it on the ground,

Takes the baby from her, gently,
Gently lays the child there.

He wipes away what blood he can, takes the shirt,
Ties it tight around the larger wound.

He shakes his head, again speaks English,
But not to her, not to anyone near,

And asks for help.

Only Words

Abaker strikes her with closed fist,
the knuckles tight, arm first cocked back,
as if he were fighting a man.

Only words are thrust
from Halima towards him
as he drives his foot into her side.

This is her husband's brother.

She places her palms on the dirt
but conjures nothing, no strength to stand
as his foot lands again.

Halima chokes on dirt and pain.
Her sisters run for help,
knowing none will come.

Abaker shouts, "They are our country's children now,"
as he grabs Bakoye and Hassan.
He tells the boys, "You will be heroes."

The boys hammer
at the man's gut and arms,
crying for their mother.

Abaker slaps Bakoye to the the ground,
points to the horizon,
says, "Soon we will all be kings of this land."

Djedida, December Morning, 2005

Kneeling, praying, the village's
Allahu Akbars echo
in the halls of the small mosque.

Their reply comes in both doors,
East and West,
a flood of men dressed as soldiers

who say nothing but shoot.
The village's confused stampede
attempts to break past them.

An old man dives
for one of the intruder's legs,
knocking him back

and into more soldiers,
so that
his two sons might escape.

A bullet enters the old man's eye,
exits
the back side of his throat.

But it works.

The old man's children
race past the soliders while
others find their escape

through small, tunneling metal.

Shouts of "The slaves have left!"
follow footsteps,
precede Heaven.

Janga

The government provided
flames from the sky
so that their arrival would come
comfortably on carpets of smoke.

Their main base is in Mistira,
where the government trains
them, gives them camels and guns,
gives them careers.

In Janga, their job
is easy. Anything not burnt is
theirs for the taking:
cattle, tools, daughters.

Those few who survived
the gifts from above, give
and give and give
to strangers' hands.

Proof of Purchase

On TV, in magazines, we see
Nintendo, Gucci, Cadillac advertised
as if they were air, food, water.

A man far smarter than me
once said, "Show me your budget
and I'll show you what you value."

God, it seems,
might want the receipts.

So I can't imagine God
nodding at the way I'm living.

For what justifies a TV I don't need
when the two I already have work fine?

Words - like big? And sharp? And pretty?

Taking stock of one's life means
I confess I care more
about twelve additional inches of television screen
than saving a dozen families from malaria.

What reimbursement should I expect on that?

Currency

As a child I was taught to love
my neighbors as myself.

But as my bones grow I learned
to replace faith in love with fences:

the definitions shrank with age
until brotherhood became bound by borders.

The cries of Tutsi and Fur sleep
in the dark blood of earth

we pump in our cars, then dance
and play our American dreams.

Our talk of the loss of 2, 975
as the greatest of tragedies

Confirms life
is worth more in America.

Night Commuters

They study, sleep
Five hundred of them
Bags on dirt
Ninety minutes from home
By foot.

Their march is what keeps them
From being soldiers.

Those left behind
Rebels take
Make boys murderers
Girls sex slaves.

So they leave
And return and
Leave and return
Summoned
By something, somewhere
Inside them
That says stay alive.

Bus station concrete
So far from home
Is comfort,
Promise
Of something, somewhere.

Margins

He wrote, "Not on my watch,"
In the margins of a memo.
Then proceeded not to look.

We took his cue, did the same;
Our news pumped airwaves for months
With Anna Nicole

While slow-motion devils
rode horses, mechanized hate
jumping from their hands.

We pretended to complain.

I wrote letters, gave speeches,
gave up. Turned
my tube back to Britney and Paris.

Sand and sorrow
have nothing on blondes.

Soap

At the river they lay in cool water.

Each takes turns
Scrubbing the other's hair
With bars of soap that arrived with the medicine.

Hands move swifly,
Dance around backs.
Hers bears scars.

Ten years of marriage
Finally brought forth a child,
Nasareldeen.

The summer before,
when the Janjaweed found her,
he was strapped to her back.

They took sticks
And beat her.

The strikes took him from her.

Now, at the river,
Cool water and soap
Make nothing clean.

Seconds

“Do you have a second, sir?” he asks,
stands on the corner, ankles buried
in pamphlets.

The other’s eyes stay straight,
transfixed at the light.

“Sir, do you have a moment? Sir, sir—”

The light changes
and the man’s strides are long.

A couple, young and pretty,
draped on one another approach.

“Hi, do you have a quick second?
Could you just sign a post card?”

They shake their heads,
The boy pulls the girl closer.

“Please. It will go to the governor,
can help end the crisis in the Sudan.”

“We’re busy,” says the boy. “We have this thing.”

"It's just a quick second, please.
I'm only asking for your signature."

They continue,
"Sorry, bro," trails behind them.

A tall woman passes,
going the other way.

"Excuse me, miss, miss, do you have a second?"

She stops, turns,
says, "What you selling?"

"Nothing. I'm not selling a thing.
Do you know about what's happening in the Sudan?"

"Jesus Christ, son, look,
let me tell you something:
I got a job, okay?
I stand on my feet all day and make jack.
Do you get me? Understand me?
Now I'm going to go home and relax.
Don't nobody want you out here bothering their ass."

"But people are dying. A genocide is happening."

"And maybe if you cared about our country,
our problems,
I wouldn't be making six dollars an hour."
And with that the woman leaves.

He stands, watching her retreat,
and slaps his clipboard
against the outside of his thigh.

In a moment, another man will pass,
will pretend to answer his phone and be asked,
“Excuse me, sir, do you have a second?”

I've Loved Some Women

If she says no,

Then I must

Take her by force

If she is strong,

Then I must

Call some friends

To help me.

If there was no war,

We would live normal lives,

Treat women naturally.

But we can't pretend.

What they Say

They found her in the house,
Belly large and ill.

They held her
By wrists and waist
As her husband stumbled away.

They were five soldiers.

Now, after,
She says to other women:

*I used to take care of my children
With my husband.
Now I do it alone.*

*He tells the children
I wanted to be raped.*

South Kivu

During the war
We stayed inside at night,
But we didn't know
What was happening outside.

It was the Interahamwe,
And I became pregnant.

I have a daughter, Lumiere.

I will tell her
That I didn't know her father,
That I was raped,
That he took me by force,
That there is nothing one can do
About the past.

But sometimes, still,
I spend days crying.

Hope God will grant me a husband.

He Stands in the Open

The baggy green uniform,

The blanket,

 Wrapped, tucked, twisted

 About face and neck

Protecting from bugs, heat, sun.

A gun strap hangs over his right shoulder.

A red baseball cap sits loosely

 Atop the blanket on his head.

He says to the woman, white,

 Surrounded by U.N. soldiers, local officials,

A camera capturing what it can of his face:

Here you have educated men,

Men who have gone to University,

Construction workers, carpenters,

Men who could make a living

If there was not a war.

The woman asks of him what they do to the women;

Her interpreter speaks for some time.

The soldier pushes the question away with his hands:

*We have an antidote,
roots we can take from the bush.*

*We take those roots,
We cannot get AIDS.*

Her Husband Tried

To give them the \$15 that he had

They said they didn't want
Such a poor man's money.

They cut him into three parts:
Head, chest, legs.

One of ten men turned to her, said,
"Let's kill his wife, too."

They took turns hitting her with the hilts
And flats of their machetes,
Until she collapsed to the floor,
Five of her teeth shattered.

She awoke, alone,
Naked, next to her husband's legs,
The rest of him gone.

Eight O'Clock in the Evening

Tuesday night on a city street:

The officer keeps insisting, asking
More and more questions.

He asks her, a fifteen year old girl:
Have you ever had sexual relations with a man?

Her eyes follow an old man
Hobbling on the other side of the street.

You have to answer my questions.

The girl shakes her head,
No, no, she says, I never,
I never had an interest.

The officer grabs her by her wrists.

She pulls hard, the other
Arm working to remove his grip.

His free hand slaps her to the ground.

The old man across the street
Continues home.

The officer says,
I have to verify.

Just Line on a Page to Us

I.

As you know, men are considered as kings:

No, not because, but *okay* because God said that man is superior to woman. God said that men must command. Must command. That men give orders. *Okay* because a man must do whatever he needs to a woman.

II.

Martine told the white woman:

If you have a child inside you,
They take the other children,
Make them stand or jump
On your belly.

They take the red from your womb,
Put it in bowls,
And say to you,

Drink!

They take and kill
your children.

Then return them to you,
Say to you,

Eat!

In the forest,
Every soldier is king.

And What Would You Learn?

They brought in a nine-year-old boy
To hold her.

He grabbed her about the waist,
As she stood, back-side to him,
Naked.

A second-grade child.

He stayed there, holding,
Unmoving,
As best he could,

As the six men broke the table,
The pots and bowls,
The bed with her daughter.

My Children Aren't Safe

When I was nine
My father got into it
With a neighbor over a dog.

The neighbor's giant Rottweiler
Would make the half-mile trek
Into our yard,

Would eat our dog's food,
Would rough our dog up.
My father told the man,

This is not right.

My children aren't safe

With your dog on the loose.

The man said he'd take care of it.
The very next day
The dog returned;

My father returned to the man's house.
They had words,
I heard from my mother.

Though she didn't tell me much,
And my father never spoke of it.
To this day, I don't know

What happened first,
But within the week that followed
That first argument,

Our family dog would go missing;
The neighbor found his dog
With a bullet in its face.

Something Else in You

My father always said,
Always, "Things have a way
Of coming back to you."
But this didn't mean karma.

At fifteen I had dreams of running,
Would stride mile after mile
Perched on toes. Now at twenty-eight
Aches in my knees
Are compensation for making my heart strong.

I've seen people
Who devoted their lives
To others as teachers, nurses,
Social workers, become something
Else, disillusioned, bitter,
Ex-patriots of compassion
Within the course of a decade.

My father was right,
In this at least, always.

Put all of yourself into something,
Something else in you goes.

Camp Story

Four boys kick

 The sandy brown ball back

 and then

 Back

Smile

 Then kick

 Back and then

 Back

Everyday at the camp.

Twenty feet away, two girls

Sit,

 watch,

 stroke

The coarse fur of a teddy bear missing

Right arm,

 Right leg.

They smile, too.

And yet,

In classrooms everywhere,

We concern ourselves with what

We can

Teach children.

Monument Circle

12:03, in front of great stone
soldiers and sailors,
cars go round and round.

A group of fifty people stand
together, at the steps of the gray
limestone tower, over a hundred years old.

Most of them hold white signs,
with simple block text:
PRAY FOR DARFUR 1 PM

A few cars honk or wave,
most passersby on foot pick up
their pace, drop heads.

At 12:03, one couple walks up,
in their forties,
still holding hands,

asks a sunglassed college girl
holding a sign,
“Who is Darfur?”

Confirming the Crime

Friday morning, March,
 Six years in,
 The floor of the U.N. assembly
 Fills with alliteration:

Callous and calculated...

Significant signs...

Facing fear...

And Confirming the crime...

The careful selection of syllables
 Hopes to impress
 Like a sixteen-year-old
 On a date, or in class.

But both date and teacher
 See through the sounds,
 Know that beneath them
 Is something short of *real*.

In response, tragically true words come:

*The decision of the government
 of Sudan is a legitimate
 sovereign decision
 which we will never reverse,*

and this should not be an issue for discussion.

Ways

We exterminate bugs,
Eradicate diseases,
Slaughter cattle,
Annihilate atoms,
Purge stains,
Abolish laws,
End stories,
Void coupons,
Eliminate mistakes,
Obliterate monuments,
Delete characters,
Extinguish fires,
Waste time on words
As if they bring justice
To what happens to people.

Sara Remembers Two Moments

I.

At twenty,
A Saturday morning
Breakfast with her parents.

The night before she came home
From college, said she was changing directions:
“I’m going to be a teacher.”

Her mother hugged her
Before the two of them talked about it for hours,
Before Sara’s father nodded, saying nothing.

That Saturday morning,
As he served up pancakes and eggs,
Her father said, “Do you know how much school teacher’s make?”

Sara smiled, never moved her proud eyes from him
And said as if it were her wedding day.
“I do.”

After scraping the pan clean of eggs
Over their plates
Her father half-threw the pan in the sink.

This, then, was the moment,
Number one of the two:
“Why don’t you fucking be something?”

II.

Years earlier, at sixteen:

Her friend Ally drove up in her I-ROC and dropped her off at eleven at night.

Sara opened the door to find her father

Sitting at the kitchen table. He said, "You were with her all night?"

She nodded, said nothing.

He said, "I don't want you hanging with her." He pushed an open newspaper,

Across the table, at her.

His fingers tapped above small print. "The whole town knows she got busted
For stealing," he said, stopped, shook his head. "You want to go to jail with her?"

Sara walked by her father, but his outreached hand stopped her there.

She said, "She's not going to jail, Dad."

"But she will be." He let Sara pass, but followed her through the hall,

"Someday she'll go in some store and take what she wants

And you'll be with her, either right there or in the car," he stops

Outside her door as Sara enters her room. "And it won't matter which."

That's when it happened, the second moment:

Her father said: "It won't matter which because you're part of it."

III.

Now, at thirty-two, at night in the camp,
She sometimes lies and thinks of these things,

And how, though he'd disagree,
His words were right on both counts.

Differences

A soldier and I were talking on a street corner.

He said, "What you're asking of us,

I think that's good, you know—

I get the need for us to give.

That they need food and medicine

And all that. I get that, I do."

He stopped and raked his top row of teeth

Over his bottom lip.

He asked, "But what kind of troops are over there?"

I explained the situation.

He said, "Exactly. I think a lot more than supplies needs to be done,"

And placed his hands in his pockets.

He said, "I spent sixteen months in Afghanistan

And we did a lot of good for the people.

But what would happen, see,

Would be that we would give them food,

Supplies, everything, and it is was great.

Everything was great.

While we were stationed there.

But as soon as we would leave it wouldn't matter.
We could be gone for even a day
And the Taliban would return.

They'd swoop in and take everything,
All the supplies, all the good we'd done.
Everything.

So the things we did, all the things that we do,
It doesn't matter unless we're there making sure
Everything is okay."

He stopped and pulled a hand from his pocket,
ran it hand twice over his hair. "So I think it's great
What you're doing and what you want us to do,

But it's not going to change
anything
Unless we make steps I didn't hear a word about
And send in a bunch of troops."

I shook the man's hand, said, "Thank you."

March 2009

James couldn't find it.

He thumbed furiously through the pages of *Newsweek*

But there was no mention of what his daughter, Sara, had said on the phone.

So he was sure he'd missed it.

He went back and read and reread every word on the table of contents.

Nothing of Bashir. The ICC.

The fact that 13 major non-governmental aid organizations

Were forced to leave the country

As retaliation for the court's decision.

Instead he found a page devoted

To "The Ugly Truth about that Poor Little Rich's Girl's Blog."

Two days later Sara calls from Paris, before coming home.

"This moment is so incredible" she says.

"And tragic. Without doubt tragic.

But ultimately wonderful.

This is the moment, I know it.

Everyone I work with,

We feel that it is.

The breaking point.

Obama will respond.

I just know that this has to end soon."

James says nothing of the magazines.

Just, "I miss you." And, "I want you home so, so bad."

Panzi Hospital

So few women
Lie in the simple white beds,
Because there is no one
In their villages to take them.

The cracked concrete floors,
Yellowed walls and curtains
Bounce only silence,
As urine drips down the women's legs.

In a closeted room,
Away from the women,
A young nurse says
To the doctor:

The men, they took
The stick branches, the wood,
They took the wood
And they—

The doctor closes his eyes
Momentarily,
Opens them,
Places a hand upon the young nurse's right shoulder,

He says, *Thank you.*

He returns to the women

And says,

There are things we can do to help.

NOTES

pp. 1, 4, 7, 12, 14, 41: Some words taken from and inspired by interviews in the documentary film *Darfur Now* directed by Theodore Braun.

p. 7: *Deli lebafl dawa lejfo* – a Zaghawa proverb: A snake that has bitten you will not give you treatment.

p. 8: More information on Kalma and the DPA can be found in “Violence Flares in Darfur's Kalma Refugee Camp as a New Cycle of Persecution Begins” by Jonathan Steele, originally available in the October 27, 2007 issue of *The Guardian*. Currently available online at:
<http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2007/oct/27/sudan.international>

p. 17: Inspired by interviews in the documentary film *The Greatest Silence: Rape in the Congo* directed by Lisa F. Jackson.

pp. 18, 22, 24, 45-54, 65: Some words taken from and inspired by interviews in *The Greatest Silence*.

p. 31: Inspired by the story of Brian Steidle. More information can be found in *The Devil Came on Horseback: Bearing Witness to the Genocide in Darfur* by Brian Steidle and Gretchen Steidle Wallace and in the documentary film *The Devil Came on Horseback* directed by Ricki Stern and Anne Sundberg.

p. 34: Some words taken from and inspired by a testimonial gathered via Amnesty International, June 2006. Currently available online at:
<http://www.amnestyusa.org/document.php?lang=e&id=ENGAFR200072006>

p. 39: Inspired by content in the documentary film *Invisible Children* released in 2006.

p. 60: More information on the United Nations meeting regarding non-governmental organization expulsion from Sudan can be found in "Sudan Says to Never Reverse Decision to Expel NGOs" by Louis Charbonneau. Currently available online at:
<http://www.reuters.com/article/idUSN20521830>

p. 67: A sample of the lack of news coverage can be found in the March 9, 2009 issue of *Newsweek*.