

# Poems

by

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## *If I am fit to kill, am I fit to live?*

Night of the trucks.

On a deserted stretch north of Baghdad,  
sixty seconds of pure instinct.

Smell of diesel fuel. The conflagration,  
smoke roiling as one enemy truck explodes,

sparking others. Men on fire come running,  
mortar round cuts a man in half.

At first, a sense of exhilaration, how easy  
it is to pull the trigger, grateful

not to be charred and screaming.  
If you hesitate, you won't survive.

In this macho culture, Did you see the way  
I dropped that guy?

Memory is an amplifier.  
Feeling neither brave nor joyous;

later, the worst hangover you can imagine.  
Thousands of miles away, waking in a sweat,

especially when the wrong people die --  
young girl with her nose blown off,

husband carrying his dead wife.  
Scraps of flesh among the ashes.

## The Breaking Yard

### Alang, India

After lives spent on the open seas, like dead  
whales, they're beached, run aground

as a final resting place. Battered ships and ferries,  
hulls rusted, engines past repair, at the mercy of

a thousand men or more, scavenging like rats.  
Steel, cables, bells, planking dismantled

with chisels and blow torches; helpless tonnage  
winched piece-by-piece and carted off.

The air ripe with stench of rotting cargo,  
of men laboring in scorching heat,

lungs seared, skin blackened  
from fumes of burning steel and paint.

Men trapped, one misstep from oblivion,  
in a listing ship, its prow and stern

unbalanced, crews racing to extract them.  
Another bloodied from a falling crane.

For those bone-tired from the constant din,  
racked with fevers and parched lips

like seafarers stranded on a mythic shore,  
there's cool respite within a ship's bowels,

a world apart from ghost carcasses left  
to shimmer in the heat and salty air.

From far-off temples, salvaged bells  
ring out, unhindered.