

*Dana Sonnenschein*

## The Gulf

Tracers burn green in the sky above Baghdad.  
We are watching CNN as the war begins  
Live, the hours smoking through darkness,  
Shot after shot, cigarette after cigarette.

Later there are smart bombs and diagrams,  
Heroic talk, static over distance... *It's all*  
*About oil, off the air, and even our allies*  
*Don't let women drive, say my friends.*

But my brother's at sea in the Gulf. I write  
And wait for letters he composes on the bridge  
At night, tiny print that indents the page,  
The smallest detail more important

Than all the conversations we never had.  
In port, he bought ambergris and a Koran;  
On board, they watched the smudged horizon,  
Mines floating like shadows about to explode.

In the end, the war gave me back my brother.  
He shares drinking stories, gets baptized,  
Gets promoted and starts giving me advice,  
But in his lines I still feel the orders

Holding something back. On vacation, he talked  
Once of pulling dead bodies from the water.  
*You have to be careful or they come apart.*  
*Sometimes they just do. The guys had to joke.*

I don't know what made him tell me this.  
Maybe lake-water like ringing in his ears,  
Dividing cold and blue, in the thin air there,  
Where he sat, on the other side of the abyss.

*The Venus of Milo*

Say time read the Roman mind  
And made a finishing touch or two.  
You've seen her with her arms untied  
Or roped off under flashing blue,  
And in the soldiers' Polaroids  
She does a private hoochie-coo.  
It didn't matter who fought who.  
When Mars and Vulcan took up arms,  
Olympus made a great to-do.  
Her propped-up torso had its charms,  
Her blank eyes were a dream come true.

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