

Brian Turner

Two Stories Down

about as far from Mississippi
as she can get, ten thousand feet above Iraq
with a blanket draped over her body
and an exhausted surgeon in tears,
his bloodied hands on her chest, his head
sunk down, the nurse guiding him
to a nearby seat and holding him as he cries,
though no one hears it, because nothing can be heard
where pilots fly in blackout, the plane
like a shadow guiding the rain, here
in the droning engines of midnight.

When he jumped from the balcony, Hasan swam
in the air over the Ashur Street Market,
arms and legs suspended in a blur
above palm hearts and crates of lemons,
not realizing just how hard life fights
sometimes, how an American soldier
would run to his aid there on the sidewalk,
trying to make sense of Hasan's broken legs,
his screaming, trying to comfort him
with words in an awkward music
of stress and care, a soldier he'd startle
by stealing the knife from its sheath,
the two of them struggling for the blade
until the bloodgroove sunk deep
and Hasan whispered to him,
Shukran, sadiq, shukran;
Thank you, friend, thank you.