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Evans: Soldier's Apology

MILTON KESSLER POETRY CONTEST FINALIST

SOLDIER'S APOLOGY

Kerry James Evans

I.

What apology would my mother give—my father,
a room of doubt, where excuse evolves to reason?

*

My mother turned forty this year. My father
forty-two. I am currently eight years older
than my mother, when she had me.

When my father was the age I am now,
I was six—old enough to fire a gun.

*

When I was born, my father joined the Air Force,
then the Army, moved his family from the South
across the world. He swore I would never see
Jasper, Alabama, again.

*

*You cannot escape your family. You cannot escape
the South, Alabama, Golden Eagle Syrup,
the quarter horses in your Uncle's barn
or that goddamn clay red as your wife's hair.*

This is what I tell myself, living in Illinois.

II.

Why don't we take it outside, walk it to the lake
—drown it?

Tie a cinder block to its ankles—
no, that hardly makes sense.

Planning has never been my strength.
I get it from my father, the Colonel marching
troops into Baghdad.

I am one of them.

You are one of them.

We are all marching into Baghdad.

Jody is fucking your wife.

Your sixteen year-old wife, my sister, pregnant,
belly out to here.

She is carrying a baby boy
who is also marching

into Baghdad, *Persia, the last beast to fall*,
the pastor yells from the pulpit.

*

I would rather kill you than apologize to you.

When I say kill, I mean wrap det-cord around your face,
stuff your ass with a bangalore torpedo, stab a crown
of barbed-wire into your head—make you wish
you could be reborn.

III.

We are the dying multitude.

*

If you see my mother, my father—tell them
I followed my orders.

I carried the guide-on.

Engineers lead the way!

*

But you will not see my parents, and you will not know
them. I will not know them. We will not see one another
beneath the flares, rockets, tracers, mortars, grenades
tossed in our foxholes—we will not stop killing to say

I love you.

*

To our wives—to our mothers, our brothers, our sisters,
our fathers:

We are not sorry for killing you.

*

We know not what we do.