

To My Son in Afghanistan * (Tie for 2nd Place All Stars)
Mary Duley Guy

Since you left for the war in Afghanistan,
night after night, I tuck images of you into my dreams
like I remember tucking you into bed at night as a child.

Some night, I see you four years old again; tall for your age,
half asleep in the deep blue hues of night, you roam the hall
into my room, a rogue, a barefoot panda, teddy bear in hand.

And I scoop you up in my arms; tuck you into soft cotton
sheets safe from scary sounds of night, ghosts in closets,
wild things you say creep into corners of your room.

Some nights, I see you a teenager again, lean and smooth
like a gazelle, pockets stuffed full of string and old nails,
mouth full of Oreo cookies; a scavenger, an athlete,

you leap over fences, race the wind through mud, briars
and barrel around the bend on your bike.

Some night, I roam the hall into your room; curl up with
your dog Bear, smell your shirts, musty copies of John Grisham,
Hardy Boys, meshed with Frito bags, *Playboy*,
empty Coke cans stashed under your bed,

A sign on your door reads, "Mom, Keep Out!"

Other nights, I read the *Post*, fix dinner, stare at CNN,
fall asleep to sounds of Kabul, the Taliban, screams
of night, bombs exploding; echoes of your voice swell the room,
envelope the stairs like smoke from a burning house.

And I see your face a thousand times in the faces of every
young soldier on television; a kaleidoscope of faces dressed
in brown fatigues, faces as real as the grass that grows

outside my window, sober faces of eighteen and thirty-one;
faces brave as ancient Greek Warriors, chins up, rifles drawn,
dizzy, drunk on blood and terror that only old men,
bent crippled, sick on deathbeds should know.

And I pray over and over and over again that you will return,
that you will be safe.

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