

JULIA SPICHER KASDORF

## Elegy Against — , Ten Years Later

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I can't say his name but I still see his fingers  
holding onto a sheet of paper, trembling

until he spread and pressed them onto the table  
in that small room of bad light and bad air

in a place called the Cathedral of Learning.  
Female students complained: not his words,

but the ferocity of his voice, how his face  
suddenly shone with sweat when he spoke.

That fall I encouraged them all to write  
their sadness or their happiness. I didn't try

to complicate their language or smarten up  
their ideas. That fall everything seemed simple

and stupid. I bought spent asters from buckets  
on the street and walked aimlessly on rare days

of blue, lucid sky like the skies in Oklahoma  
where he grew up dodging belt buckles, poor

enough to enlist before Kuwait. His name lost  
but not the poem where he sits with an officer

in an open jeep somewhere in the desert  
as the officer gripes about his wife then pulls out

a pistol and shoots at a camel lumbering by.  
When I read the news, I imagined him bloody

in a claw foot bathtub back home. Surely  
in poor Oklahoma the tubs are ordinary, but

how could a plain tub hold his body? I want  
the graceful curve, white and smooth and cool

and tender against his large, hard shoulders.  
He said he promised the Army never to speak of—

I didn't know what to believe, there in my office  
I just tried to encourage him to write, as if—

Dan. Was it Dan or Dave? *How do you guys get  
such excellent posture?* I once asked him.

*They train you not to feel pain,* he said, gazing  
straight into my eyes.