


you don't know who they are sometimes
when they come home
the military doesn't want her
neither do the hospitals or safe houses
I pick her up off of the street
drive her as far from Edmonton
and the military prison as we can get
Club Ed she says soldiers call it
for a month I listen to her cry
while I wean her off
the dumpster diet she is addicted to
clean the vomit and blood make
her use a toothbrush wash
between her toes try my best with
the mouth on her
buy her decent clothes
which she will not wear
insists fatigues
boots without laces
and greatcoat are
the uniform she needs
the prison she carries with her
she volunteered
to die if need be
trained for a
mental commitment to win
did her best
to be a good soldier
did it like the guys did
she says
she knows what's right
I see it
You need to see a doctor
she says no, terrified...
last month she ate nothing
but Joe Louis and slept...
now, suddenly she's awake
hassling me when I smoke
ruining my sleep and furniture
training myself not to breathe
without considering her feelings
in her confusion

I've been punched, block-tackled
one night she drove my SUV
through the plate glass window
at the bus station
couldn't get away from my love fast enough
trying to buy a ticket
waving imaginary money
hands splattering blood on the ticket lady
she says I've been good to her
can't bring herself to tell me
bad things she did
she's made mistakes
I look at her in wonder
she's one of the country's finest
what can she mean, what has she done?
I sit with her, pick the maggots
from her abdomen with tweezers
pretend to put them in a box
hum to her in spite of my terror
make her sip a little tea
she heaves dryly, fiercely
slams her head into mine
I hum and rock
ignoring the searing pain around my eyes
why are you doing this, she says
you're saving me, why?
I don't know if I'm a man
or an animal who'd kill
to protect his territory
I believe in justice
this country, its military
love, trust, literature, hope, beauty
the civilizing solace of Mozart and
a good glass of wine
now I think
if I get to a sunrise
without her blood on her clothes
or mine
one way or another
tell myself that's a good night
when she calls herself
garbage *la poubelle*

she came home

in the other official language
I say you're busted, dented, bruised,
damaged like the rest of us...
your valves have rusted shut
would I do all this
if I believed you were *la poubelle*
she left my home eleven years ago
shiny braids tucked underneath her hat
thankful for an endless supply of
military issue elastics, she joked
one of the country's finest
doesn't know who I am...
this time when she comes home





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