

Brian Turner

AT LOWE'S HOME IMPROVEMENT CENTER

i.

Standing in aisle 16, the hammer and anchor aisle,
I stare at a 50 lbs. box of double-headed nails
I've busted open by accident, their oily bright shanks
and diamond points reminding me of firing pins
from M4s and M16s.

In a steady stream

they pour out onto the tile floor, constant as shells
falling south of Baghdad last night, where Bosch
kneeled under the chain guns of helicopters
stationed above, their tracer fire a bizarre geometry
of light.

At dawn, when the shelling finally stops,
hundreds of bandages will not be enough
to treat the wounded.

ii.

Bosch is walking down aisle 16 now, in full combat gear,
improbable, worn out from fatigue, with a rifle
slung at his side, his left hand guiding
a ten-year-old boy who has seen what war is
and will never clear it from his head.

And I don't know what to say as they come closer.
Here, Bosch says to me, Take care of this boy.
I'm going back in for more.

iii.

The forklift driver has swiveled too fast
over on aisle 3, puncturing metal drums
filled with mineral spirits, xylene, turpentine.
Maybe he's seen Sgt. Zavala on the other side,
there on aisle 4, breathing hard in a fireman's carry
as he searches for a place to lay a dying man down.

iv.

Sheets of plywood drop with the airy breath
of mortars in the moment they crack open in shrapnel.
The retired couple in the lawn and garden department
don't seem to notice, the mower blades are just mower blades
and the Troy-Bilt Self-Propelled Mower doesn't resemble
a Blackhawk or an Apache. In fact, no one seems to notice
the casualty collection center Doc High is marking out
in the Ceiling Fan Department, there on aisle 15.
Wounded Iraqis are given I.V.s and propped up
against boxes of Paradiso ceiling fans—92 sample fans
hovering over them in a slow revolution of blades.

And the forklift driver is sure to get fired
because now he's over-adjusted, swinging the tines
until they slice open gallons and gallons of paint cans,
Sienna Dust and Lemon Sorbet and Ship's Harbor Blue
pooling in the aisle where Sgt. Rampley walks through—
carrying someone's blown off arm, cradled like an infant,
handing it to me, saying, *Hold this, Turner,*
we might find who it belongs to.

v.

Cash registers open and slide shut
with a sound of machine guns being charged.
And it doesn't make any sense. The dead
lay splayed out under the register lights,
right there on the black conveyor belts,
and the people in line are still reaching
for their wallets. It doesn't make sense.
Am I supposed to stand over at the magazine rack
and read *Landscaping with Stone*, or
The Complete Home Improvement Repair Book.
What difference does it make if I choose
Tumbled Travertine tile for the bathroom,
Botticino Fiorito Marble, or Black Absolute granite.
Outside, palm trees line the asphalt boulevards,
restaurants cool their patrons with patio misters,
and fireworks explode over Bass Lake in July.

vi.

Inside, aisle number 7 is a corridor of lights.
Each dead Iraqi walks down the aisle, amazed
by Tiffany posts and Bavarian pole lights, track-lights,
pineapple fixtures with pewter gold finishes.
Motion-activated lights switch on muted incandescents
with frosty bulbs as they pass by, reverent sentinels
of light, *Fleur De Lis* and *Luminaire Mural Exterieur*
welcoming them to Lowe's Home Improvement Store,
aisle number 7, with me standing here in mute shock,
someone's arm cradled in my own.

The Iraqi boy beside me
reaches down to slide his fingertip in the paint, an interior latex,
Retro Colonial Blue, which pools at our feet, before writing
T, for *Tourniquet*, on my forehead.