Dear Mother
Yours Truly, Nathan
P.S. Tell Ricky I love him

by Forrest Koch

16.06.05

this book is dedicated
to all unsung heroes
fighting to protect our country
from all possible threats.

to each and every hard working
individual who puts their life on
the line to insure
freedom of life,
liberty, and the pursuit
of happiness.

to anyone who will listen
don't ask, don't tell
is just another way
of saying that we
do not accept difference.

to Nathan
of whom the military said
the government thanks
him for his hard work
and politely fires him
for his homosexuality.

Nathan 13.10.04 Fallujah

I

Without clouds
The empty boy
Picked red peel
From his white over-bite
Cross-legged and blue
In his best suit,
Full of sticky lips
And grass stains.
Skipping school
With apple cores
He neglected books
And backpacks
For an old tree
Tempting knowledge
That morning
On his yellow brick road
Of life.

II

Liberty and the pursuit
Of trembling hands
To pull tight the shoe string
Of two neglected leather boots.
Empty the sand
In a shaking army of one
Soldier with eager face
Sapless down the sun shackled streets
Desert metropolis.

Muted Babylon
Painful red stains across her face
Her white body lying naked
And blue beaten
Bruised by stone hands.
Sandy ensanguined wound,
Her tangled body
In the arms of her sisters Tigris, Euphrates.

America the promise land

Storming around
Baring clever teeth,
Rumored drunk
On iodine
And band-aides,
Ignores the cut face
Of a pregnant Babylon
Whose head held
Many fists.
America, she's far to busy
With her Justice and her Ego.
She is far to important
To stop to wonder why
Her fists clenched
Have not parted
The fear ridden anger.

In an hour I will erase my hands
And begin to charcoal in new ones
That have not wiped clear the tears
On her face the day her son was born dead.
The name she chose
When the doctor said it's a boy
Was Persian, *Baghdad*
Meant *gift from god.*

Nathan 10.10.04 Fallujah

It was his birthday that day
And he was celebrating ten years
Of making love to a man.

They were eating shellfish.
A room full of stucco.
His voice on a whisper's
Way to a moan.

A phone call,
And he told his lover
To stay away when the time
Came to say goodbye.
Because God and country
Have hostility
When a man's heart crumbles
For another man.

America marched him
Out of his lover's arms.
He took a picture
So he wouldn't forget
A room full of stucco.
His voice on a whisper's
Way to a moan.

Nathan 22.01.05 Fallujah

I

His mother told him growing up
He would be a man longer than anything else.
And warned him he would be dead longer than that.

He has killed five
The first bullet in the head of a man
Who looked like the first boy
He ever kissed.
The third in the stomach of a woman.
Someone's mother.
Fierceness marched her
Screaming in his direction.

The second bullet in a child
Small face
Seeming older
Than his grandfather's.

II

He was ten
His father was teaching him
To suck it up and live life free of regret.
He remembers his grandfather's dead face
And the tears
And the pit of his stomach
Empty. For years
He rocked himself to sleep
In hope of dreaming back his grandfather's arms.

III

Today is an apology letter from
His mother.
She writes bright saffron sorrys.
Remembers the first time she caught him
Kissing a boy.

He was sixteen
Stumbling over his lips
He tense, fragile.
She ashamed.
She lost him that day,
She promises change.

IV

Today is a ten day old baby who sleeps nestled in dirty blankets
As flies buzz above her head.

Today is a home made of cans and mud where
Two little girls with dirt caked on their faces
Play with an old piece of tire throwing it back and forth.

Nathan 28.01.05 Fallujah

Never forget
Flesh on fire
A soldier policing the streets.

That night
melting body
Screamed obscenities
Suicide bomber
Taking life
His friend.

His mind filled
With soft leather,
Crooked teeth
Auburn eyes,
Sunken face.
Details he will put in his report,
Later with a clipboard
And semi-automatic democracy.

His voice drowned
In the constant honking
Haunting accident scene.
Hypnotized trying to shake
Himself awake.
He couldn't make sense
Of what had been lost,
Of what was at stake.

Emptiness has it solace.
There is nothing left to lose.
Suiting up for a stiff walk
Back to himself.
Closer to the ground
With sorrow and stealth.

Nathan 08.02.05 Fallujah

I

The roof fell on her son cutting his legs off.
All she could do was wrap his legs up
And watch him die.

Because no one is allowed
On the streets after dark.

She clutched his dead body in her arms
Till the wet sun leaked daylight
Onto her son's face.

II

He found her
As a boulder blocking the door
Broken down at the core
Of her last stand
Against Iraq.

He found her
Arms wrapped around
Ten years of her life
Gone in a night
Of bombs
That promised her freedom.

Nathan 27.02.05 Fallujah

Sundays
Remember drowsy rooms
Leaking sunrise.
His hand on my waist
Curled slumber
Waking
Inching closer
Legs akimbo.
Now spooning
A couple question marks
On a bed sheet page.
Waking
Wrapped in his arms
Lips on my neck
Sundays
Miss you the most.

Nathan 14.02.04 Fallujah

To jump at shadows.
To carry a dim flashlight
That found the child
Crammed behind a refrigerator
Three days after watching
Iraqi soldiers shoot her mother and father.

Drying tears, he told her
How he once scraped his dead sister's
Body from the debris
Of their family sedan.
He told her he knew what she meant
When she said she couldn't live without them.

That night he wrongly imagined himself invincible.
He doesn't sleep anymore.
Just a sleeping position and suspicious sounds.
A barking dog.
Showering gun fire.

He doesn't jump at shadows anymore
He simply stops to admire
Those that move with the grace of trees.

Nathan 27.02.05 Fallujah

I
He never
Held someone
So tight
That night he met Ricky.
He, drinking
Since the fifth grade
Stole his father's vodka
And locked himself in a closet
Listening to his mother being hit
For over an hour.
She stepped between her husband's fists
And her son.

II
Sixteen, still drunk
On every drop of his father's pain.
Never held like this before.
Stumbling over his
Lips for the first time.

For over an hour
Until his mother stepped between
Her son and the one man
In his life that cared enough to finally
Listen.

Afraid of what father would do
Mother and Son
Promised never
To speak it again.

She writes occasional apologies
Promises him change.

III
Seventeen, his father drunk
Caught two boys in the back seat
Of the family sedan
Making promises to each other
They will never let go.

His father knew
He raised himself a faggot

And warned his son
Never to speak it again.
After drinking.
After hitting.
After yelling
For years.

Each time he brought home
Broken nose
Black eye
Bloody lip.
His father
Told his son
If he hadn't kissed that boy
None of this would have ever happened.

Ricky, his lover
Now 26 and unafraid.
Holds hands in public
Sends him love letters, occasionally.

IV

Eighteen, his father drunk
Bellowing for his son
To help him through the door.

He gripped his father's
Body on his shoulder
Carried him all the way
To his mother's bed.
Where she lay
Silent, crying.

V

Nineteen, sober
Carried his father's memory on his shoulders
All the way through boot camp
To the edge
Of a desert land.
He lay tonight.
Silent, crying.

VI

26, nothing to be said
That is not already written

In letters unsent to his father
Apologizing to him
Promising change.

After all
He wants change.
The night his father
Drug him naked
Through the streets.
Screaming *faggot!*
At the top of his lungs *faggot!*

Changes his father made
In his heart
Now cradled
In his mother's arms
These letters
She sends her son
The only man in her life
Who finally cared
To listen.

Nathan 12.04.05 Fallujah

I pierced the threshold of the morgue at Al-Numan General Hospital
Crushing shards of glass with my feet
And carrying the shattered girl
I found dead crumpled in old news papers.

I burrowed through numerous bodies,
Many soldiers,
To an empty space
Beside a woman
With face and breasts
Collapsing.

I submerged her
Slowly into the sea of bodies.
Her hair with ribbons undone
Dancing softly across her face
Down her neck
Against silver necklace.

My mother gave a silver necklace
To my sister when she was fourteen in the passenger seat of my father's sedan.
She was singing her favorite song.
My father drinking since noon.

Only my mother and I survived
The shattered glass
Screeching tires
Painful screams of my sister's last breath.
I embraced her lifeless
When I found her next to a bottle cap
I now keep in my pocket. A bullet
From the gun I pushed against my head.

It took a man in the desert
With fists clenched and shirt torn
From shadows,
With lips quivering anger
And eyes eclipsing sorrow.
To give truth to where I would be
If I hadn't accidentally left the safety on.

Afraid and green my bullet splattered him
Across the face of the child
Who was holding tight his father's

Rusty semi-automatic.
I remember him.
This child with bruises on his face
Two eyes dead and piercing blue.
On the floor next to his mother
And his sister.

Nathan 04.05.05 Fallujah

The soft caress
Of the phone against my cheek
Gives strange comfort
As your voice
Drifts into my innermost
Memories of you and I
On those rare and beautiful
Occasions that left us stunned and dazzled.

With you a breath away in the curve of my neck
I catch myself calculating the distance
Between our voices
And your palm near my thigh.

We are bouncing off satellites
Into ears across tongues.
I taste your voice
Searching for the right words
At the perfect place
At the right time.
The moments
We embrace
Like forgotten letters
With no return address
We keep tucked away
In piles of shoe boxes
Safe and unread for centuries.

Nathan 16.06.05 Fallujah

He sat silhouetted
Weary to cry and trembling.
Catching glimpses of his fathers face
In desert reflections.
The smell of gasoline
Trickling down
His nostrils.

He sat caressing
Bottles, each like it was the last.
Calculating in his head
The distance between two stars.
Between brother
And sister.

His told her about his first kiss
The moon rising slowly
From his palm.
Warm glowing oil.

His sister died and
He received a blue
First place ribbon
100 meter dash.
He had never ran so hard
In his life.

Always running
trying to get back
Home. Mint ice tea
Summer nights.
The distance between two stars
Between brother
And sister.