

## Sergeant O'Donnell

*For Charles*

In the photo  
Your camouflaged face, green-brown,  
a smile,  
an AK47.  
Somalia.  
In one month,  
in the bullet-pocked hospital,  
you delivered eighty babies.  
All dead.  
And they called this a relief mission.  
Who exactly were you relieving?

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**Marianna Boncek** is an English teacher and author of *Gone Missing in New York* (Schiffer Publishing, 2011). She who holds a BA from Vermont College, an MA from Goddard College and is pursuing the PhD at the Union Institute & University.

Now, years later,  
you sit across from me  
in a chic Woodstock restaurant  
eating tiny rolled grape leaves,  
drinking sparkling water  
with lemon.  
You remember the Thanksgiving  
one of the other nurses  
spent the whole day  
sifting worms from the flour  
with a rusty window screen  
because for just one fucking day  
you should have bread without worms .  
When the waiter brings us warm  
pita with hummus, I offer you some.  
You turn it down.

The day you had to guard  
the front gate of the hospital  
from an attack,  
back against the door  
clip in your mouth,  
your surgical mask still hanging under your chin,  
you wondered if  
you killed more than you ever saved  
because you didn't save many.  
For one moment, you look across  
the table at me,  
forget where you are  
forget my name.

Tonight you will dream  
of the last transport  
leaving Mogadishu.  
No matter how many times you  
try to get on it  
you never seem to be able  
to leave.