

PHOTOGRAPH: *SUNRISE, SYRIA, AUGUST 2017.*

At first, only desert: red-baked outer night,
mute churn of rock and cliff, weathered
by regimes of wind that tug and turn
the dead hawks hanging from telegraph poles,

black pennants celebrating the long burn
of nothing gained, or learnt.

Dawn severs the dark wire hieroglyphs
which fall, silenced, from the telegraph poles
onto highways of sand.
Wind rakes the cliffs through the frame,

throwing blades of dust
that cut your fingers to the quick.

Look deeper: there, the vast bird-less silence,
the inner night, the desert,
the clusters of knife-points masquerading
as stars. There, the shadow in the rough tent:

a child, her skin corrugated by spine, a disjointed
line of bone curled on a hospital cot.

Even though her head is turned almost out of focus, follow
the curve of her eye: how wide, how
straining. The blink of an eyelash, slowing.
Her cold black hair is in pigtails,

rainbow elastic around each end,
pink plastic bobbles shiny
and clean. Maybe she polished them, maybe
she used to put the bobbles in her mouth. For comfort.