The Teaching Assistant to His Second-Semester Composition Class

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THE TEACHING ASSISTANT TO HIS SECOND-SEMESTER COMPOSITION CLASS

If you were to tell me
about your first kiss
or the first time you got drunk
or the night you learned
your oldest brother had been killed
in Vietnam

and if you believed I really want to hear

you would remember her name
was Sally Mae Rankin
and you were fourteen
the night you slipped
out of the church social,
and how standing on the back steps
in the dark
you took off her glasses,
then had to hold them,
closed your eyes,
felt your heart
trying to crawl out your ears,
and brushed her lips

remember
speeding down back roads near Anton,
eyes peeled for red lights,
hearing the brown bottles crash
against rocks in the bar-ditch,
feeling your eyes tilt thirty degrees,
feet tight in your boots

or crying and throwing up,
then dreaming about mosquitoes
feasting through torn khaki
in a rice paddy
brown with water-buffalo shit,
and waking,
the way June bugs
crinkled blind
into the porch light;
how two weeks later
riding on a bus past the downtown Penney's,
you saw a display for winter clothes.

then we could sit over coffee or a beer
and know what a crime it is
to waste words
like "Hollywood makes many movies each year,
and not everyone will like every movie."