

56

**JENNIFER
ADKINS**

CHILD SOLDIERS

The children are hunting now,
polishing their weapons and curving
their spines. Eyes shining in the dark
like cigarettes, their skin a sunken
wasteland of ash. You don't say it, but
you are sickened by them; the gaunt faces
stretched across your TV screen, reminding you
of the one you left behind, pale and still
in a lonely room, tubes running through his
heart and nose; the children are turning into
machines, programmed to fight for their lives
and yours is about to join the ranks of phantoms,
becoming a part of the darkness, a part that sifts
heavily in your dreams, making you shift
uncomfortably next to your lover as they try
to touch her cheek and remember what it was like
to be loved. And you'll wake tossing them angrily
from your mind and lie in bed wondering what it was
like for them to be human, for they are no longer
children now – yours or them – but creatures, baring
their teeth at the fragility of their innocence.