

Cutter

Robert Cooperman

After he was mugged
he changed his name to "Cutter,"
half Arapahoe, he told strangers
at parties or meetings.
"Cutter what?" they asked.
"Just Cutter," he answered.

He studied karate
and carried a knuckle duster.
He played conversations in his head
that would lead to battle,
saw himself cave in the back
of an assailant with both fists
crashing in a crescendo
of justified violence.
He spat out threats in sleep,
his wife edging farther away,
her knees jack knifed ready to run.

Once she tried to wake him
by calling his old name
and patting his shoulder.
She nudged harder; he started awake,
one arm pulled back to punch her
through the window.
She lay stiff as a goat
in the tiger's embrace
while he tried to apologize,
their hearts crashing
like dinghies caught
on a jagged coastline.