

Meg E. Griffitts

Our Marital Bed

my love—
the body You kept secret
once laid now bound
on our bed,
a stainless steel autopsy table.
the palm of your fingers
dig and dissect,
below my clavicle, my jugular notch,
Your hands keep going,
You find it—
my sternum
vivisected,
the skin peeled
like cellophane coating
over bloody pomegranate seeds.

snap, crackle, pop.

see the underside of my lungs
press thumbs into them,
watch them sputter and stammer
with the clamor of a train,
the burden of reticence.

You lift & hold my chest
close to your lips,
my thoracic cage split like a virgin bride
on her marital bed, Your
fingers clasped around
my shoulder blades
sharp like shovels—
forcing back.

Your head hovering over me—
a sleepy halo forms,
the shadow of Your skull
eclipsing my mouth.

The Phones Are Down

Unfamiliar phrases discharge
like shot gun shells
reiterating loneliness—
home, IED, casualties.

*You knew Franklin right?
Well that's why the phones were down,
his family had to be
notified.*

There's not enough delay
in the computer screen
for me to pretend
I don't know
the weight
of this braille
like a muzzle forcing
my tongue back.
This dimpled
steel language
you can only feed to me
in pieces.
I have seared it
to my clavicle
so if you
come home
I will be identified
as yours
or
something
that has been
lost.

Boot Camp Bible

It was in your things, the ones they
returned to me,
that Bible your mother gave to you
before she started crying
as you got on that bus,
before the jarring clamor of *yes sir*,
and gritted teeth forcing back spit and blood,
your sweat bleeding into the fragile text,
bloating it's pages,
my picture dissolving into your flesh.

I remember how you used to say
you didn't understand why people said late instead of dead
you're only late coming home.

I don't remember if I laughed at this or not.

I do remember
the brassy voice in the background
of a static phone call
screaming, a wail, an alarm,
your calloused hands rummaging for
the lace of your boots
and me
asking
will you be safe
then a silence weighted by
a brethren I could not understand—

You said
I'm going to be late.

The Proposal

He proposed by an ocean
a private little beach with
veins of black sand
that stayed in my hair and ears
for weeks after we left
like shards of ammunition
from standing too close to the
mounted, diaphanous paper silhouette.
The waves were bigger than
anything I had ever seen before
crashing into my hip bones
with an increasing ferocity
as the moon hummed its siren song to
the tide surging and evaporating,
eliciting increasing salty sighs from Poseidon
for me, the girl,
trying to clutch any remnant
of the undercurrent.

That's where he told me he didn't believe in god
while we looked at the stars that
pulsated and fled our vision

He told me he needed to marry me.

I know now
he just wanted his own North star,
light not from a god
but from a girl
that he couldn't blink out.