

K Y A R E A V E S

A Woman at War

I try to throw bits
and pieces of me away
but I float back, hovering
first above my head
like a halo rusted and
elongated like a child's
bent hula hoop, then about my neck
dog tags silently bark,
choking me,
into the empty space.
I try not to pass out
or time with the shrapnel.
But it's a war. I am the desert
battle-ground soaked with red dew
that settles day after day,
absorbed by everything,
replenished by none.

"Lightning never strikes twice."
I pull the scorched skin away
from the bone and place it gently
between my cheek and gum.

“Eating the dead skin makes you
heal faster.” But remember
“never chew the cud.”
Old wives tale
make more sense
leaving the lips of ladies.
“Cursing is so un-lady like.”
I speak with a soldier’s tongue,
I *effin* engage, drop, and bag;
I never *effin* kill.
I never *effin* reveal.
“All the sand man gone get out me,
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I got “pregnant
off of watermelon
seeds” once.
In some places, watermelon
grows ample in trenches.
In some places, my holes
are still wet and deep. Some-
times I can’t remember what
I gave away to lay here;
my head using my helmet as pillow.
Next time I will
carve a name there, like head-
stones dedicated to the dead
so I can mourn what rigor
left under my Warrior’s Mask.
“Your face will get stuck that way.”

In some places, mortis is
worshipped. Here, bodies
are shipped home, planted
like seeds to produce death
in the ground.

I can see clean through my left
hand now. I write with my right
like most people. No one
speaks on that.
It is normal. War
is not. Yesterday,
I reached for my golden
wedding band
on that missing hand.
It was heavier than the things
they carried, tight around my finger.
“Thank you for your service.”
Oak trees chopped down,
and yellow ribbons float
away.

KYA REAVES, a Developmental Education Specialist in English at Kennedy-King College, received M.F.A in Creative Writing from The University of Memphis. As the mother of a 22-year old son with Cerebral Palsy, profound health issues, and mental retardation, the focus of her poetry has often addressed the social and emotional struggles of being the parent of a disabled child. In addition, being the daughter of a Vietnam War veteran, she has a personal interests in the effects of war on mental health and socialization. She is currently working on publishing a collection of poetry that chronicles her experiences with her son and her father.