

JESSE GOOLSBY

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## What My Dead Wife Should Know

**I**F YOU EVER SHOW YOURSELF, COME ALONE, AND WEAR your black hair down like the night we met in Dallas; just don't look at me like I've done something wrong;

If you're going to watch us please stay quiet; I'll always be in recovery, and Janet lets little things distract her in bed; yes, I tell her I love her, and if you can read minds you know that I try to convince myself these are the best days of my life, even the fifth anniversary of your death, when our only son left for Iraq;

I don't know what you thought watching Janet and me in the shower as Dylan undressed near Kirkuk; believe me, I replay the scene: my fingertips on her white body as electricity bolted through Dylan's soapy feet, ricocheted among his organs until he collapsed, curled in the soiled shower shaking out his soul;

Do you know that I believed them when they said he grabbed a live wire? They sat in pressed green uniforms where we used to stage the lit Christmas tree, and I nodded along, an open and ignorant child; I even conjured it as truth: Dylan on his wet tiptoes reaching at the sparking wires above;

If you can come to me, then you were there, by the yellowed birch trees and redwood casket, just one of fourteen accidents sinking into the earth minus wartime medals; and I, hearing Janet's veiled sobs, I needed you there;

If you ever catch me alone speak to me; maybe you can fold back time, to the moment Dylan returned from the dusty patrol; whisper his slow motion disrobe as he peels away his rifle, helmet, vest, body armor, boots, blouse, pants, socks, shirt, underwear; how his body was our bodies;

Everyone knew what to call me when you left, but no one says widower to your face; now, there's no name for what I am, but sometimes I try to think of one; it's always at dawn, when I rise alone and find myself in the basement, quietly opening up old photos of holidays, but I can't give the feeling language;

I promise, I won't ask about God, but remember, come alone, cause I won't hold up if Dylan's here, floating around like the helium balloons we used to give him as a kid, rubbing up the static that he'd grab and ground, sitting on the balloons awaiting the inevitable.

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**CAPTAIN JESSE GOOLSBY** is a graduate of the United States Air Force Academy, and holds an MA in English and Creative Writing from the University of Tennessee. He was the recipient of the 2009 John Gardner Memorial Award in Fiction. His work has appeared in *Harpur Palate*, *Storyglossia*, *Vestal Review* and *The Poetry of Love* (Federation of Poets). He teaches composition, literature, and creative writing at the United States Air Force Academy.