

ABBY E. MURRAY

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## Corners of the Ceiling

I married a man who sleeps with a gun under the mattress.  
He's made his living at war, in an army-issued freight container  
near Musayyib where soldiers drew straws to get out of waking him,  
the way they had to slam the rusted door and shout his name  
then drop like spies before he fired a customary good morning shot.

I found him praying in a chapel ten years ago and took him home with me.  
He emptied his pockets after dinner. Condom, lip balm, quarter, compass.  
I thought he would be a grizzly bear in bed and he was,  
handling me easily even when I tossed over him like a fish.  
Afterward he slurped water straight from the tap.

When we married he told me we'd carry our rings in our pockets, just to be safe.  
We moved from ghetto to ghetto, covered our windows with bedsheets  
and stashed ammunition so he could sleep.  
We lay in bed and listened for neighborhood gunfire; he pointed  
to the different corners of our ceiling as if he were explaining the constellations  
and told me which way the bullets had gone.

## Lieutenant Charles in the Jungle

When Jim Flancey stepped on  
the first landmine since Sunday  
his body shot straight up  
into the melaleuca tree  
like a bouquet of red bottle rockets  
and Lieutenant Charles knew  
there weren't any flat rocks or stones  
lying around to knock  
the limbs down so he had his men  
take off their boots and throw  
those at the branches instead.  
Everybody's feet were rotten by then  
anyway and those who could  
feel the mud bubbling up  
between their toes said it felt good.  
They all smiled and cried  
and threw their boots in the air  
to knock Jim Flancey from the branches  
while one sergeant waddled  
back and forth holding a black bag open  
like the mouth of a floating fish head.  
Everyone agreed that the platoon  
really came together that night  
and it was a shame Jim Flancey  
wasn't there to see it.  
Lieutenant Charles clapped his sergeant  
on the back and told him  
he held that bag like a real pro,  
like he was back home at a baseball game  
catching his first foul ball.

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**ABBY E. MURRAY** has an MFA from Pacific University. She teaches English and creative writing at Pike's Peak Community College in Colorado Springs and waits for her husband to return from combat. Her poetry has been published in recent issues of *Cider Press Review*, *CALYX*, and *Georgetown Review*. Her first chapbook, titled *Me and Coyote*, was chosen by Marvin Bell to be published in the Lost Horse Press *New Poets / Short Books* series.