

JULIET BARNEY

In Observance

The first time he said he loved me he said it in German, which was weird, because he didn't speak German. I reveled in the artificial romance as he tucked me in, kissed me on the forehead and boarded a plane to the Middle East.

Three years spread across the Atlantic like a bomb throbbing to detonate. The fires sent smoke of his letters that claimed to be love. I would hang his dog-tags off my bed post and dream of the safe return of an army medic who was sweet on me. It was an old-style romance built on solitude of pens bleeding falsities on paper.

It ended, as it began, with a deluded cellular connection. Two devices held together by a string of bondage fractured by words on one end, silence on the other.

The glistening metal he wore around his neck chants hope and whispers words of encouragement. Messages written from my hand to his heart that he buried in the sand of the desert heat, thinking I would never hear.

I sit here now, reading kind words to soldiers and veterans, thanking them for their service to this country as my heart calcifies and ceases to pump love through my veins thanks to his disservice to me.

The chanting metal crescendos into the scream of a banshee until darkness corrals me to the closet where his dog-tags rest, but not in peace. I touch the metal, feel it burn as his name and blood type are branded into my skin leaving a scar that will adorn my hand like a drunken mistake replaying on social media—a spectacle for everyone to see.

Running out the door, the air of changing seasons circles around me, paining my chest with its arctic breaths, I fall to the ground and dig and dig until my fingernails bleed from the grating soil until his emblem of dishonor is suffocated.

Slowly, I begin to mourn the loss of time instead of the loss of a soldier.



JULIET BARNEY is originally from Lake Placid, NY and uses the unfortunate life of small town living to influence her writing. You can find her publications at *Drunk Monkeys* and *TLLA: A Journal of Indigenous Expression*.