

JESSICA HOUSAND-WEAVER

The Load

I carry it
in layers
like calendar pages
folded over square days,
Port Hueneme, a Navy Inn
dorm room, the stink
of sailors and no hot water,
Leadville, fingers frozen
beside the boxcar of a derelict train
ten-thousand feet above the sea, blue-green
Kentucky summers, then
San Francisco, sushi in a fog, the seals
crying on the pier, wild horses
in Delaware, how you were never afraid
after Fallujah,
checked a charging stallion
with your body alone,
confronted demons
in our walls, fist-holes
that gape like lost days, spaces
I can slip my fingers through.

Confessions of a Military Wife

When I met him, he only paid
with two dollar bills. Rent
was a riot. Once he danced
on a friend's bed-pole wearing
booty shorts and half a shirt. I laughed
so hard I pissed myself. On New Year's Eve
he bought an entire bar a beer
just in case anyone was feeling lonely.
He always had this mischievous smile
like a kid with an incredible secret.

But he drove like a maniac. He eyed
the horizon not the road. Once in a bistro
he shouted at the waiter for setting
down a survey with blinking lights
on our table. He checked a metal trashcan
on the side of the road every time
we drove by. He talked about sleeper cells,
friendly fire, things that paralyzed *me*
in his sleep. He drank whisky instead of water,
put holes where they shouldn't be.

Later, he didn't speak to me
for days after I peeled
the fraying bumper stickers off
the old Chevy that read:
I served in Iraq
I served in Afghanistan
Sometimes his face changes
and I know I've lost him.
He's gone riding RHIBs
through Umm Qasr.

The Shooter

His gun-black eyes, the turret
roll smile, the way he looks
powder-packed and ready,
that camo flak jacket, the belted
ammunition we share, the round,
the shell in my palm, how I lean
in his arms, the way he handles
me, presses me to his shoulder,
holds me down—

JESSICA HOUSAND-WEAVER lives in New Mexico.