

s.g.t. grasmuck

athena

isn't violence beautiful
when you know how to look
cherry blossoms dancing in the wind
she teaches them how

men make marionette puppets
strings tied to rifle barrels
the puppets owe their mistress
a song and a dance
before they are cut

i am not the puppeteer
but i did teach them
i am not the puppeteer
i don't need strings
to make you dance

andromache

sooner or later, all rivers end there. all of them, both real and imagined, though they're all real to me. the tigris, the euphrates, the styx, the acheron and for some, God willing, the jordan. but anyway—he got a hold of the sat phone and he called her. he called the night before and the night before that. they talked about the things all married couples do, like the bills, the kids, the pregnancy. he talked to his three-year-old and reminded him to pray every night and to be good for mommy. then the sat phone rotated to a different platoon, and a different company. a month or two past and when they returned from their patrol he planned to call her. he loved the excitement in her voice when she heard his *hey, baby* over the line. but ares came and tricked him down by the river gods' edge. the gunfight was quieter than usual, so quiet he lay his rifle down and walked to the end of the dock that he was certain had not been there before. he found two gold coins in his pocket and waited for me—while she waited for him to call, any day now, any minute. she stayed up late after putting the kids down and finishing the dishes. she kept washing the counters over and over to be near the phone, but he won't call, he's in river city, baby, he's in river city

zeus

he was leaning against a hummer
a .45 holstered at his side
he looked at me, eagle-like through crow's feet
i marched by, weapon at the ready
prickly heat burrowing into my skin
lips parched, throat cracked like a desert ravine
tired and hungry—for combat
he told me to *get some*
his olympian voice proud
full of authority

garcia asked if he had any water
took a gulp from the old man's canteen
i kept wondering about his .45
and the dirty .9mm
i'd lifted from a medivaced marine
that was tucked into my cargo pocket and
half joking wondered if he'd trade

i continued to peer into windows,
to maintain 360 degrees of security
eyes scanning the rooftops
i wondered over my shoulder
who in the hell was that

after we had everyone accounted for
insurgents laid out on the street
bare feet exposed to the sun
staff sergeant asked if i'd seen general mattis

no, the only person i saw on the road to al'kut
was some old guy with a .45
who told me to get some
and shared with garcia
a drink from his canteen

s.g.t. grasmuck served as a sergeant in the invasion of Iraq and in the Battle of Fallujah, all with 3rd Battalion, 5th Marines. He is currently a stay home dad raising six children while continuing his writing.