

penelope
s.g.t. grasmuck

They were half-way through their six month deployment, though it felt like a lifetime. she had received two letters since he deployed; she read them both hundreds of times. he hadn't mentioned her letters, but she kept sending one a day—two on Sunday, even though she had been told it took a month for them to get there. after putting the kids to bed (she hadn't cried since the oldest prayed, *God, please don't let daddy get killed,*) she worked on a blanket, sewing different patches of old cammies together. in one corner she had stitched *God bless . . . we love you* in red. her father, a vietnam vet, would probably fuss about the color, claiming it too bright. *don't want al queda to see him.* but she was wrong. he said it was a fine blanket and would keep him warm and would probably get to him just in time for winter. then the evening news came on and shepard smith looked right at her; he wasn't talking to the english speaking world, he was talking to her. *good evening mam, twelve marines died today in the battle of fallujah and your husband was probably one of them.* before she could wonder whether or not she had heard shepard correctly, her mother came out of the kitchen. *they'll get him for sure if you send him that, honey. you've used green and he's in the desert. maybe he could pretend to be a bush,* she laughed. Before leaving her father hugged her a long time. she closed the door behind them and in a fit of tears pulled the whole damn thing apart until it lay in a heap, just like one of the fallen warriors they kept showing on tv. it lay there all night. before the kids got up the next morning she had finally cleaned away the pyre. after dropping them at school she went straight to saigon sam's and brought ten used, extra-large desert cammie tops. that night she started over.

two months later she had pricked her finger over three hundred times sewing *God bless . . . i miss you* into a blanket the color of sand that would never reach her husband in time.

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.