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K.I.A.

Jon Vanzant Stevens

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K.I.A.

Abstract

So here I am, lying in dirt, near the skeletal bushes on the outskirts of this village I always mispronounced the name of. Or here's what's left of me...

Cover Page Footnote

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K.I.A.

Fiction by Jon Vanzant Stevens

So here I am, lying in dirt, near the skeletal bushes on the outskirts of this village I always mispronounced the name of. Or here's what's left of me. Some fucker taped an IED underneath the glovebox in my Jeep. A private in my platoon was supposed to be keeping watch. Guess he didn't. Within twelve hours, two men in uniform will come to the door of my parents' house, tightly folded flag in hand, and say an IED took my life. My parents are smart folks; both hold PhDs. They'll know that took is phrasing meant to be vague and kind.

I got absolutely *grated*.

It was already a scorcher, not even a single wispy cloud overhead, and that bomb cooked the yolks of my eyes to over-easy, charred the side of my face back to the scaffolding. A thin wire was hooked from the door to a loose pin in the device. If I'd kept the windows clean, they're low enough so maybe I could've seen it. I opened the door, and my left arm retracted the second I noticed the packing tape stuck to the plastic, but still it got blown clean off—just below the glenohumeral joint, if that AP anatomy class still serves me. It doesn't feel very "humeral," let me tell you. Though it reminds me now of when I used to change up the armor on my action figures, pulling plastic appendages out of their sockets. Except that even though I felt my arm severing from my body for a fraction of an instant, there was no accompanying *CLICK* or *SNAP* or *POP*—just emptiness and air.

* * *

In a gruesome way, there's a silver lining to all this. It's hard to explain, really, this omnipresent stuff. I'm like every pixel in a video game all at once. When the guys in my platoon toast my body back at base, sweat pooling between their asses and camouflage, picking their cans of Coors Light out of a cooler chest, I'll be in the condensation rolling off the aluminum onto their T-shirts.

My brother will eventually make an enemy out of gravity, trying to slalom down the great hill in our town on his skateboard. He'll twist along the pavement and scream, the skin peeled back from his elbow, exposing blood and cartilage and dairy-white bone. When the EMT raises him into the ambulance on the gurney, I'll be in the morphine that leaks from the needle's tip.

Days or weeks from now, I'll be pinned to felt or displayed behind glass that Mom will never allow to meet a speck of dust. Moisture will shimmer at the rims of her eyelids. Dad will pull open the desk drawer to take out a glass and a bottle. He'll yell and spit "Why?" at God or at the floor. There will never be an answer. Instead, there will be a fourth set of plates and cups in our kitchen that nobody will use. Doors will slam in our house.

If I could still talk, I would tell my family not to listen to all those people, the ones who will try to comfort them by saying I'm somewhere beautiful even though I'm not here.

That's bullshit, I would tell them. I am here. I'm just not there.

Jon Vanzant Stevens is a writer and musician from Maine. His stories have appeared or are forthcoming in *The Emerson Review*, *Fugue*, and *r.kv.r.y quarterly*. He also received an Honorable Mention for *Glimmer Train's* "Family Matters" contest. He's currently at work on a novel about war, anarchists, love, change, a bakery, celebrity culture, Bruins hockey, and everything in between.