

Fort Bragg, 2005

by Susan Muth

He lays on the couch
a heavy arm slung over the side,
like a child's balloon recently deflated.

I caress the familiar bald head my daughter held
onto last year as she sat atop his shoulders
cheering on the 82nd Airborne flying overhead,

that same smooth scalp now buried in a couch pillow,

his broad back clenches and writhes as I wrap
a cuff around his right arm, unflinching
as I watch a ticking clock face in my other hand.

His mucky tan boots by the front door
haven't seen the light of day in over a week.

And suddenly a groan rings out, reverberates
along the high ceilings—I've never heard an echo so loud.

My husband slumps on this couch with scenes
playing behind his eyes on repeat—

marching on the same desert sands he shit in,
pacing the camp to the rhythm of distant firearms,
a constant slow-moving clock, counting
down the minutes with outdated sitcoms.

My daughter peaks her head in from the stairs.
She won't know until years later
why her Dad always has his back to these walls.

Susan Muth is a first-year poetry candidate at George Mason University's MFA in creative writing. Before that, she graduated from Penn State with a BA/MA in English and world literature. She is from all over due to growing up in a military family, but chooses to call Burke, Virginia her home.