

## So I was a Coffin

They said *you are a spear*. So I was a spear.  
I walked around Iraq upright and tall, but the wind blew and I began to lean. I leaned into a man,  
who leaned into a child, who leaned into a city. I walked back to them and neatly presented  
a city of bodies packaged in rows.  
They said *no. You are a bad spear*.

They said *you are a flag*. So I was a flag.  
I climbed to the highest building in the city that had no bodies and I smiled  
and waved as hard as I could. But I waved too hard and I caught fire and I burned  
down the city. But it had no bodies.  
But they said *no. You are a bad flag*.

They said *you are a bandage*. So I was a bandage.  
And I jumped on Kyle's chest and wrapped my lace arms together around his torso  
and pressed my head to his ribcage and listened to his heartbeat. Then I was full,  
so I let go and wrung myself out.

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And I jumped on Kyle's chest and wrapped my lace arms together around his torso  
and pressed my head to his ribcage but there was no heartbeat. They said *no*.  
*You are a bad bandage*.

They said *you are a coffin*. So I was.  
I found a man. They said he died bravely, or he will. I encompassed him in my finished  
wood  
and shut my lid around us. As they lowered us into the ground he made no sound because  
he had  
no eyes and could not cry. And as I threw dirt upon us we held our breaths together and  
they said, *yes*.  
*You are a good coffin*.

—Gerardo “Tony” Mena, Marine Recon

(For Kyle Powell, who died in my arms 6 November 2006)

This poem was written after his return from deployment to Iraq and discharge from the Marine Corps, while he was attending college. It won the 2010 “War Poetry” contest sponsored by Winningwriters. A voiceover video rendition of this poem can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IdYJuY0ZRjU>.