

**COFFEE AFTER THE STORM** by Lavonne Mueller

**OLIVE WIGGINS, just home from Desert Storm, considers herself a hero.**

**SCENE: A coffee shop.**

TIME: Shortly after Operation Desert Storm.

OLIVE: *(Speaking to an unseen waiter.-)* Coffee. With cream.  
*(She slaps money on the counter.)*  
Yah.....yah. I was in Saudi.  
*(She drinks)*  
What?

Sure I'm a real Corporal. You're not the only one to ask me that. A lot of people want to know what it's like being a woman soldier. Are you a token, they ask? A puppet? A crumb thrown in the mouth of war? Well, I'm as much a warrior as Ike ..... Westmoreland

Schwarzkopf .....or any of the others.

*(She salutes the waiter. She holds the salute.)*

The name's Corporal Olive .....Olive for peace,  
Wiggins. *(She drops the salute.)*

I used to date some Arab from Paw Paw, Illinois, before the war. Bahiaddin Ali Faris Ketsaraa Abdul Chuheep. I called him Dul for short. He worked in a Taco Bell at the I-94 Truck Plaza, and he always gave me free coffee even before we started going out. Dul was really nice for an Arab. He didn't wear a dish-rag with tassels on his head or do chants from one of them parachute towers. You know, pretty ordinary. He did have a "prayer bump" just below his hairline from pressing his forehead to the ground in pious meditation. I got him to wear his bushy eyebrows combed up over it so nobody could really

tell. And occasionally I'd get aggravated with the "Mecca -indicator" on the ceiling of his Honda. We'd go for a simple drive in the country ..... and this fancy compass gadget kept reminding us which way to bow our heads in prayer when Dul didn't even have automatic shift.

Dul was sweet, though. He gave me a tape of Bluegrass II for my birthday. With the war and all, he's not at Taco Bell anymore and I wouldn't wanna get it on with him now, anyway. But sometimes when I was walking in the Kurdistan mountains dodging our own A-V8 jump jets or in the desert with a full moon out feeling lonely with only camels and cute little oil-slicked cormorants, I'd think of him.

I was proud to be in Saudi on the historic day the war started. I was PX Supply Clerk at the time. It was my job to help our Saudi allies understand instructions on various boxes and jars of stuff given out freely by Special Services. I didn't speak Arabic, of course. And none of them Gulfies spoke English. But it was my lucky break to act-out how to use a hemorrhoid suppository for a member of the Afghan Mujahedeen. I want to tell you that Afghan was so grateful he gave me the helmet of a dead Colonel from the Republican Guard. I got it hanging up under my Elk's head in my kitchen in Shabonna.

This high-impact magic marker I wear around my neck was used for bomb-signing. The men wrote their thing on a bomb or missile, whatever, and then their personalized weapon was forklifted across a pontoon bridge to me in a quonset at the Port of Jubail. "Cram-it Saddam it." Stuff like that. I went over each word carefully in permanent black. Then I signed my own name like the famous painter Norman Rockwell. It was very spiritual to think of my "name" maybe slamming into Tikrit, Hussein's home town, and his forty wives diving under a prayer mat for cover. You know, like *them* blasting Kennebunkport.

Don't think I was in the rear. I want you to understand there were a lot of missiles and 50-caliber tracers around me all the time. Of course no real people got wasted. Just..... Sheiks, bedouins, Ottoman ..... stuff like that. It got kind of bloody sometimes. I've seen a lot of death. And I want to tell you, the Iraqi give off the yip of a dying dog. Death for a pagan is not quiet.

Well, I gotta get up early. I'm being air-lifted to the Strait of

Hormuz tomorrow. To a huge desalting plant. The Army feels all that discarded salt can be stockpiled in case we go to war with another one of them Mesopotamian countries. Putting salt back in the enemy's drinking water is okay by the Geneva Convention.

I'll probably be back in Illinois in a year or so. No doubt you'll see me driving around DeKalb County in one of my Humvees. Thank god around here you can always pull any time into a station for gas as nobody in this country closes in the middle of the day for prayer.

*(A beat as she responds to the waiter)* Oh, I'll be glad to give you an autograph. It'll be fun to sign a napkin for a change. I'll even use my bomb-marker. *(Saying as she signs:)* Corporal..... Olive .... Olive for Peace Wiggins. *(Hands napkin to the waiter and exits.)*