



FOLIO

Folio

Arts and Literary Magazine

2010

Southern Connecticut State University

FOLIO

2010

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John Cavaliere owns and operates Lyric Hall Antiques in New Haven, where he specializes in the restoration of gold leaf picture frames and antique furniture. He has done extensive work for Yale University and the Greater New Haven community. He has a BA in Fine Art from Connecticut College in New London.

Awards

Fiction

First Place	Erin Jones, "The Salesman"
Second Place	Amanda Gamache, "Naked In the Snow"
Honorable Mention	Jamie Conway, "Mania"

Poetry

First Place	Michael Bozzuto, "October 19th, 2009"
Second Place	Jared Coffin, "Discernment"
Honorable Mention	Luisa Caycedo-Kimura, "Like Salome"

Art

First Place	Benjamin Quesnel, "DJ"
Second Place	Alison Walsh, "Mama"
Honorable Mention	Neil Pascarella, "Reflections"

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Amanda Gamache

Face Sludge

I had this zit on my face. It was the kind everyone gets once in a while. The kind that bulges gently and pink, up from those big gaping pores that stretch from the skin of your nose to the skin of your cheeks. I popped it. Dermatologists as well as beauty magazines tell you not to. They tell you it takes longer to heal when you press two fingers together, pink bulge reddening underneath, and push and grit your teeth until there's that explosion of solid infection, spiraling in its own right, followed by white then yellowish clear, thick liquid. It's disgusting, and of course it always bleeds after that, but would you rather stare at a face with a bump of nearly bursting face sludge—that's what I always called the debris found in dirty pores—or a small scab that could be from a scratch or a mosquito bite or from the cat or the dog? I'd rather look at the scab. I like the mystery it brings with it.

I was staring at it in the mirror, the scab that is, and decided it needed to be pulled off. I don't know why. Perhaps it was the radio that got to me. Earlier I had been listening to the announcers. Are they even called announcers? The DJ's? I don't know. I'm not some big radio fanatic. Well I was listening to them talk about scabs, about how they were *nature's candy*. It was all men calling in, explaining how great scabs were. Grown men. I was nauseated listening to them regale the listeners with great scab sizes—one was pulled off hole at four inches long and half an inch wide—and scab tastes. Apparently they taste like bacon, *nature's bacon*. I didn't eat my scab. I just pulled it off because it looked too black, didn't blend well enough with my make up and stuff. I figured a lighter one would show up, be less noticeable.

When I pulled it off once again there was some bleeding. I pulled a tissue out of the box and pressed it to my cheek, bored. That's what staring in the mirror is most of the time, boring and self-deprecating. But when I pulled the tissue away, I noticed that the cut was in the shape of an "S". A perfect "S" with all the curves, nothing that looked fake or cut or something, it was like the Superman "S". That was my first thought, maybe it's a sign like Superman, a good

thing, a blessing. Then the real me kicked that thought in the junk and laughed as it winced away cradling its bathing suit parts, eyes wide and crying. It had to mean something grim. But all I could think of was silly or stupid or serious. Serious. That was something. My throat ached a little.

I sat in my room contemplating this, serious. I began popping blackheads on my shoulders. I like to pop things truthfully. I like to pick at things, and I'm really skin challenged, a zit-zilla, but it's all under the surface, like hell is supposed to be under the surface of the earth.

Then I started picking at my lips. I like doing that. I like the feel of the dead skin slowly tearing away from the newer, pinker, softer skin underneath. It's better than sex most of the time.

The "S" could have stood for skin, or serious skin. But my skin wasn't really serious. It didn't have those lines on the brow or around the mouth that gave me a serious, smart kind of look. It wasn't green—oh wicked witch!—or purple or anything. It wasn't silly.

I think it really was just stupid. The "S" had to definitely stand for stupid. I mean, stupid is dumb is idiotic is loggerheaded is doltish. That's my favorite word, dolt! But really my skin is stupid. I mean it looks alright from a few feet away. It looks clear and as white as a northern European descendant can look. But then if you get a foot away you can see the big pores and the greasy undertone. No one really looks any closer. Skin is stupid. It's stupid to look alright and then have all the face sludge boiling underneath.

I got up and went back to the mirror and stared at the "S". It really was perfect. I opened my mouth, deciding to look at my teeth. I check them for stains, because you know coffee leaves stains—not that I drink coffee—but tea does too, and I drink tea. That's when I caught sight of my throat. It'd been sore, but I always ignored it. I usually ignored small pains, but there was my throat, my tonsils, white and spotted. They looked like moldy bread. I tried to touch it and gagged myself. I almost threw up, moron, dolt! The "S" was serious. I suspected I had strep.

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Michael Bozzuto

*If Every Love Begins in the Desert, Where Does
Every Love End?*

Every love ends
at the bottom
of a coffee cup

the fragments
of broken beans
in a pool of cream

the sugar
long since gone

if love began
in the desert
it can't get
any hotter.

Bozzuto

October 19, 2009

Winner of the 2010 Folio Poetry Contest

I

orange is
both a color and a juice
what a strange feeling

II

today's coffee
a bit bolder than normal
dry mouth and dry day

III

catatonic stare
the computer screen glows white
do I even read?

IV

thousands of miles
text messages and pictures
between her and me

V

the courage to stand
while my words are not enough
does it get better?

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R. Scott Spaziani
Final Salute

We pull my Grandfather's gunmetal gray casket out of the hearse. I lift my corner and glance towards the family and friends gathered around the platform that will lower the case down into the earth. The funeral director, calm and in control, directs our movement with subtle hand gestures.

Three Marines stand at attention waiting for us to pass.

The grass is starting to turn brown.
It's cold and the clouds, same color as the casket, threaten rain.
We march across the field.

I stare at the metal and wonder if the young man who fought the Japanese on Saipan and Guadalcanal would have been more bold had he known he would die painlessly in a hospital bed Eighty-seven years old and surrounded by family.

I doubt it would have made a difference.

When it feels like I can't hold on any longer I look forward. The Marines stand ready, unmoving, unfazed by the dire events around them. The head of the casket begins to pass them. The first Marine slowly lifts his arm in a salute.

Forgotten

Adrift forever the hunks of steel, shattered
remains of the probe, float slowly
colliding and bouncing away again turning
and tumbling in the empty void of space.
A dance among the stars.

NASA engineers worked
tirelessly
to get Voyager into space. The most
advanced probe sent out to
explore our solar system.
Its job completed. Radios silenced.

Designed only to last till 2025 it will die alone
far away from its mother star.

The metals become asteroids of their own.
Gaining orbits,
falling back into the intricate machine of the
universe,
becoming the raw materials of planets
and stars.

Erin Jones

The Salesman

Winner of the 2010 Folio Fiction Contest

The doorbell rang, and Dave jerked awake. His head hurt and his mouth tasted like a mixture of ash and stale beer. It was about noon. He dragged himself out of bed to look out the window to see who was at the front door. He saw his friend AJ climbing back into his beat up station wagon. Dave pulled on sweatpants and rushed to his front door, but AJ had already driven away.

When he opened the door he saw a cage sitting on his front step. He stepped outside to see exactly what it was, but the sun was too bright so he had to close his eyes. He heard clucking. He shielded his eyes, squinted them open, and looked down at the cage. Three red hens huddled in the corner. On top of the cage was a note.

“Yours. Fair and Square.” It was scribbled on the back of a receipt in AJ’s sloppy handwriting.

He looked at the chickens for a moment. Their feathers gleamed a yellow tint in the sun. Every few seconds they twitched their head in a different angle, then let out a cluck.

“Mine?” he said aloud after studying them. The bald spot on his head was getting hot so he went inside. Dave was a man of short stature in his early 30s. He told people he was 5’8” but he was really about 5’6”. He had sad eyebrows that sat above even sadder light brown eyes. Ever since he started balding Dave dreaded getting in the shower and seeing the growing amount of hair that got caught in the drain each time.

By the time he had finished getting dressed he decided to bring the chickens back to AJ. He couldn’t figure out what the note meant or why AJ had given him chickens. He couldn’t remember much about the night before. He had gone to a bar with AJ, had a few drinks, and that was all he could remember.

The chickens had calmed down a little when he went outside again. Two were cleaning themselves. The littlest one slept in the corner, her feet tucked under her body, and her head buried in her wing.

“C’mon girls, we’re going for another ride,” he said to them as he bent down to pick up the cage. Their clucking got more frantic as he walked to his truck.

He put the cage in the bed of his truck. As he pulled out of his driveway the hula-girl on the dashboard shook her plastic hips. The toy had been a gift from Nancy, his ex-wife. He hadn’t talked about her since they had gotten a divorce the year before. Instead to deal with it he and AJ got a piece of particleboard, drew an outline of woman, wrote the name Nancy across the chest, and once in a while shot a potato gun at it while drinking Budweisers in the back of Dave’s house. But he liked the hula-girl, so she was the only thing of Nancy’s he kept around.

Dave pulled into AJ’s driveway and knocked on his door. AJ answered with a grin on his face. He leaned on the door frame, like he knew Dave would be paying him a visit. Dave thought he looked like a cocky bastard. AJ had a good eight inches on Dave, and he was lanky. He wore a wrinkled pin-stripe suit jacket over a gray, stained t-shirt and jeans.

“What the hell are those about?” Dave pointed at the bed of the truck.

“They’re beauties, right?”

“Why did you give them to me?”

“Hey, hey,” AJ shook his hands defensively. “You were the one that wanted them. I’m not the one to blame.”

“I never asked for them,” Dave said.

“You’re right. You won them.”

“Won?” Dave scrunched his eyebrows trying to remember the night before, but he still got nothing.

“Well fuck. You really don’t remember?” AJ chuckled. “You light-weight. This guy was in the bar parking lot last night. He was selling the chickens for five bucks a piece. I got him to lower the price though. You

took one look at those ladies and said you wanted them, that you had to have them.”

“Just take them back.”

“Can’t. You beat me. Poker.”

This jogged a little something in Dave’s memory. He could remember holding cards, puffing on a cigar, but he couldn’t remember anything about chickens.

“Oh shit,” Dave said, rubbing his bald spot. “And I beat you?” AJ was an avid poker player, and Dave knew his own skills were mediocre in comparison.

“Trust me. I was shocked too. You kept getting all these great hands. I can guarantee you’re never played like that before. You didn’t have a single hand I could’ve beat. Since you were in no condition to take the chickens last night I said I’d drop them off to you this morning.”

Whenever Dave and AJ went out Dave always ended up drinking too much, and he could never remember if AJ drank too much or not. But that was AJ’s way of dealing with things, bad or good.

They were both vacuum salesman. AJ was a far better salesman than Dave. AJ could go into a house that had no carpets and a perfectly working vacuum cleaner and be able to sell the highest and most expensive model Kirby Vacuums had to offer.

AJ trained Dave, that’s how they became friends. On their first trip together Dave was amazed at the precision lines AJ could create in a carpet: perfectly straight with perfect angles. And AJ had the ability to convince almost any customer—mainly housewives and old women—into buying vacuum cleaners that weren’t really any better than the ones they already had. Dave never had the ability to talk to the customers like AJ could, his selling point were the tricks he could pull off, like already having dust in the vacuum. He would do ten sweeps of the carpet with his model and open up the bag that was half full with dust. “I just replaced this bag this morning,” he would say.

The customer almost always looked with wide, believing eyes at the

dust particles in the bag. Then say “Oh my. I can’t live with all that dust. I’ll take it.”

His favorite trick was the cigarette trick. To show how soft the bristles were Dave would run an unplugged vacuum over a cigarette. “If it is this gentle on a cigarette,” he would say after the cigarette stayed intact, “imagine how nicely it will treat your rugs.”

But after Nancy left him he couldn’t perform the tricks with enthusiasm or selling power. He broke one of the cigarettes during a demonstration, and dragged tobacco all over the white carpet. Instead of playing it off like AJ taught him and showing how well the vacuum cleaner can pick up those pesky little particles like tobacco, he dug it in even deeper into the carpet with the heel of his loafer. “Is this part of the demonstration?” the housewife asked him. Dave didn’t say anything and walked out.

“Too much baggage,” AJ told him after the cigarette incident. “You’ve just got too much baggage. To sell a vacuum you have to be completely free. Or else the customer won’t believe you that this is really the greatest vacuum money can buy.”

Dave knew he shouldn’t have been surprised that AJ wouldn’t take back the chickens. All sales and bets were final with AJ.

“I really don’t want them,” Dave was getting mad now. “I was drunk, it doesn’t count.”

“A bet is a bet,” AJ said. “C’mon, I’m sure you’ll love them.” Dave could tell that AJ was trying to pitch these chickens to him. Trying to sell him the idea that these chickens would be a good investment. AJ walked towards the truck. “You’ve just got to get to know them.”

“I think I’ll be fine without them,” Dave said.

AJ hopped in the bed of Dave’s truck and crouched down next to the cage. “I already named them for you,” AJ said. He was on a roll now, consumed with making a good, convincing pitch. “The tall and skinny one, that one is Dorris. It’s an old lady name, I know, but doesn’t she look like an old bird.” AJ paused and laughed. Dave wondered if AJ had intentionally made the joke, or made the connection afterwards.

“Plus, she has that tuft of yellow feathers on her chest, so it looks like she is wearing an old lady pin. The one in the middle, her name is Candy,” AJ continued. “Of course the fat one has a stripper name. And the last one, oh the last one; she’s just a mother fucking doll. I named her Nancy.” Dave felt his chest tighten.

AJ smiled. “I’m just joking man. I know better than that. I don’t think this girl could handle a potato to the head. Her name is Frenchy, because she’s a French hen. Get it?”

Glancing at Frenchy, Dave noticed she was shaking. “Is there something wrong with her?”

“No, she’s probably still scared from all the traveling she’s been doing.”

AJ undid the latch on the cage and reached his hands in. He retracted them.

“Oh shit. I think you’re right.”

“What’s wrong with her?”

“Dunno.” AJ nonchalantly shrugged his shoulders then reached back into the cage and picked her up. “You never know what you get with chickens, though.” He climbed out of the truck with Frenchy tucked in his arms like a football. “They’re finicky and weak. They get sick easily.” AJ held Frenchy close to his chest. It was almost unnatural to Dave to see AJ show some sort of compassion.

Just as AJ pulled the chicken in a little closer a thin stream of yellow liquid dripped out of Frenchy’s mouth onto AJ’s index finger. He let go of her.

In a natural reaction her wings made an attempt to open, to cushion her fall, but they didn’t open enough. As she fell Dave dove out to catch her, but fell just short. She hit the ground, crumpled into a ball, and didn’t move.

“What the hell,” Dave said while standing up and brushing himself off.

“Damn thing threw up on me.” The top of AJ’s lip sort of snarled upwards. Dave thought he looked like a feral dog. He didn’t understand how AJ could be so uncompassionate towards another living thing.

“Shouldn’t we do something?” Dave asked.

“Definitely.” AJ bent down and grabbed Frenchy by one leg. He held her upside down. Her wings fell open and a thick steam of yellow poured from her mouth. A gurgle escaped.

AJ turned and walked in the direction of the woods.

“What are you doing?” Dave called after AJ.

“Something about this.”

“Put her down. She’s still alive.”

Dave could see that there was still life in Frenchy. Her wings still twitched. She made feeble attempts at clucks. His stomach turned. AJ got to the edge of the woods and turned around. Dave was pretty sure what AJ was going to do with her.

“Just let her be,” Dave pleaded again.

“That’s what’s wrong with you,” AJ said pointing at Dave. “You’re a pussy. When something is headed in the wrong direction, get rid of it. It’s the easiest way to fix it. Take this chicken for example.” AJ swung his hand around the chicken like a model trying to show off a product, or a magician trying to deceive the audience into thinking that the next act will actually be magic and not slight of hand. Like a vacuum salesman trying sell the newest model.

“This chicken, yes, is still alive,” said AJ. “But she won’t be for long. I think we both know this bird is dying. I’m not a vet, so I can’t fix her. Are you a vet?”

“No, but—”

AJ cut him off. “If I shake her does she try to get away?” He shook Frenchy up and down. Her wings bounced a little but she didn’t make any attempts to escape. Yellow continued to drip from her mouth. Dave wanted to reach out and take the chicken away from AJ, but he didn’t. AJ was too good at pitching.

Dave stood there, looking at AJ.

“Answer me. Is she trying to get away?”

“No.” Dave looked down and kicked at the grass.

“Good, so we’ve come to an agreement. This girl is not going to be saved. So we get rid of it.”

He really was a good salesman. Dave was starting to be sold on the idea that this chicken was dying and useless. He accepted the fact that there was nothing he, or anyone else, could do about it. So, when AJ wound up and threw Frenchy into the woods he didn’t reach out to save Frenchy.

Instead he watched. Just like had watched Nancy leave. Dave kept his eyes on the chicken as she spun in the air. He watched her flip over herself: head over feet, talons over beak. An arch of yellow vomit followed her. She hit the ground and started rolling down the hill to the bottom of the woods. Her feathers gathered leaves as she rolled. Once she made it to the bottom of the hill Dave looked for her but he couldn’t find her because he feathers blended with the autumn leaves.

Caycedo-Kimura
Luisa Caycedo-Kimura
Crematorium

We kissed her and left her to burn
at the crematorium,
amidst remnants of those who preceded,
to intermingle with those who would follow.

At the crematorium
her body went up in smoke
to intermingle with those who would follow
in a smoldering furnace.

Her body went up in smoke
holding our love-stained goodbyes.
In a smoldering furnace
we hoped we would get the right ashes.

Holding our love-stained goodbyes
they conducted the cremation.
We hoped we would get the right ashes
in a contraption of dust and absurdity.

They conducted the cremation
amidst remnants of those who preceded.
In a contraption of dust and absurdity
we kissed her and left her to burn.

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Luisa Caycedo-Kimura

Like Salome

Honorable Mention, 2010 Folio Poetry Contest

The Spanish onion
clothes herself
in amber veils
of crisp raw crepe
hiding her translucent,
multi-layered body,
strong, savage,
vanilla white.
A jewel born
of the earth.

Taste her raw nakedness,
bite the freshness of her flesh.
A playful mistress,
she'll bite your tongue
with gentle sweetness.

Succumb to her as would
a royal subject,
artist of culinary realms.
Remove each layer
of sunset tulle
or yellow-red mantilla.

Observe her nudity,
admire her girth,
cradle her whiteness.
With an exacting knife
separate her.
She'll yield willingly
crescents and rings
of moonlight.

Place her in a heated pan.
Overcome by heat
she'll sizzle her exotic dance,
intermingle with warmest olive oil,
loosed red tomatoes,
wildest garlic.

She'll entice you
with the perfume
of a well-seasoned lover,
finally offering
her surrendered body
on a plate.

Jasmine Wilborne

Marlie

Marlie ran the pad of her thumb under the elastic band of his boxers. He smelled like the after shave her father used to wear. Breathing deeply she pushed her body closer into the natural crevice of his body. He clutched her tight and the smell encapsulated her. Her heart surged with elation, though nostalgia bloomed beneath it. A crisp breeze funneled through the building's shattered windows. The fire fed by discarded cardboard, cigarette butts and swigs of bourbon reached high up from within its metal cage, and the firelight flickered against his smooth brown throat. Marlie's kisses followed after them, chasing the aroma of that spicy smell.

"You been out here long?" He asked, his mouth pressed to her ear. Marlie giggled flirtatiously.

"Just a few months." His tongue traced the curve of her ear. She shrieked playfully and pulled him closer.

"How a pretty girl like you end up out here?" His voice was deep and charming. His eyes were a muddy brown and a blanket of freckles settled on his nose and cheeks. Marlie wanted to lick them off, maybe they tasted like cinnamon.

"Just had to leave," she forced out, nestling her nose in his white cotton t-shirt. The building was decrepit and neglected. Earlier, she had peed in the corner quickly, afraid something might bite her. There were long strips of paint curled up like cradles on the floor. Graffiti ate up wall space and deep puddles of water pooled in the puckering bowls of the damaged wood.

"You don't seem like the bad type." She drew her large eyes up in mocked offense.

"What are you trying to say?" she probed with a smirk.

He chuckled. Her brain swam and abdomen clenched in lust. She spread her fingers wide beneath his jeans. She could feel the sculpted cut of his hips, chiseled abdomen, and the cusp of pubic hair. His jaw flared and

his lips pressed onto her forehead passionately.

“You don’t seem like the bad girl type...” He paused to look down at her bright brown face. “More like daddy’s little angel.” Her heart throbbed. She didn’t want to remember.

“I don’t believe in angels,” she said as he knelt to unbutton her jean shorts. *One...two.* He rose a brow but said nothing. “It’s stupid to believe in something you can’t see.” She ran her fingers over the waves in his hair.

“What about guardian angels?” he questioned, lifting her tank top to embellish her stomach with kisses. *No one was guarding my father.*

“Who?” A soft smile. Her heart fluttered with uncertainty.

“I guess, heaven’s a no-go?” *He’s cute even though he’s stupid.* The fire crackled. The wind howled. She shivered. *You know better than that.*

“Nope, we’ve got to live now, ‘cause there’s nothing later.” He lead her down to the floor. She kissed his lips, hoping to staunch his questions. There was yelling in the background, the deep growl of men’s voices paired with the sound of tires cutting across asphalt.

“Then this shouldn’t bother you.” He implied shimming her underwear off. She wrapped her leg around him.

He entered.

She left before the sun peeked through the horizon with ripples of oranges and pinks. Marlie moved quietly as soft snores bubbled from his lips. She shoved her clothes on, picked up her backpack and with greedy fingers snatched up a small vial of coke, a few dollars and a bottle of liquor. She left his jacket, to be nice. When she was far enough down the street she stopped. Opened her bag and dropped the contents inside. She carried very little. A gnarl-headed toothbrush, a skinny silver of soap and a few dollar store tampons. There was a pair of dirty socks, undies and a thin summer dress. There was also the photograph of her father, Marcus.

The picture was taken by accident. It was one of the few weekends her father was able to spend time with her. His high ambitions at success often pulled him away from home. But he would make time to spend with her, even if it were for a few days.

Marlie remembered how her father had grabbed her into a side hug. Her hair was a wild mass of fro and blemishes spotted her forehead. Her fingers clawed playfully at his bulging arm. In the picture his shirt sleeves rose just enough to see the intricate lines of his tattooed crucifix. Her face was contorted with annoyance, lips pulled wide. Her big eyes flared with disgust. But her father had managed to plant his lips to her forehead and snap the picture. She swallowed hard and tucked the photo away.

Marlie's stomach growled. The neighborhood around her looked like it depended upon food stamps and Section 8. She made her way to the subway, heading downtown. *I can always find something down there.* She walked down the street sluggishly, the last tendrils of liquor clouding her mind and wavering her steps. She waited for the next rail car.

Marlie wandered around the silver and grey metropolis, alone. She picked around the trash cans searching for half eaten pizza, plastic wrapped sandwiches, anything. She moved like a dog without an owner. Cool beads of sweat settled on her shoulders, withdrawal lit up her insides. Her stomach folded in upon itself. It begged with sharp electric cramps. Her fingers went to her pocket and fondled the small vial. *I'll need this later.* Corner stores had begun unsheathing their metal storefronts and readying for business. Cars prowled along the road. *I feel sick.* Marlie shuffled through the silent city.

Hopeful, she ducked behind a bakery shop to try her luck at salvaging baked goods. The morning breeze wafted the aroma of baking bread cracking its delicate crust. Her stomach grumbled. With weak limbs she toppled over into the dumpster. She crouched low in the pit, closed her eyes, as her sight diminished into a dizzy kaleidoscope of color. She felt vomit crawl up her throat, but swallowed it down. It was easy for Marlie to become careless and feral. Had nothing to live for, she thought. When the feelings came back, sometimes it was the bitter, fiery tendrils of alcohol. Often her tongue searched for the remaining drops of grain in the smooth mouth of the bottle. Other times it was the boys she allowed to invade tight crevices and delve half moons into her sides.

More frequently she would weep in the back of a hookah bar. Trembling as she stanchd her nose with a napkin. Marlie would weep incessantly; long, slow, slippery sobs for her father. She remembered the cold metal bars dividing the space between them. How his lips were a grey cracked line of suffering. How his eyes flickered rapidly beneath the translucent film of his lids. And her. Her hands felt raw from the cheap hand soap. And the murky aura of death clung to the corners of the room like a spider's web. There was a part of her that wanted to sling her sleeve over her nose and mouth. The other wanted to lie beside him and die too.

An irksome fly grazed her cheek and she slapped it away. *I don't feel good.* Her insides moaned. She reached forth and began rifling through garbage bags, famished. There were shredded cardboard boxes, burned unrecognizables and what looked like the maroon stain of dried blood. The high rises cast dark shadows across the alley and pigeons congested the air. Finding a roll, Marlie brushed it off with her fingers and bit into it. The inside was still fluffy, the outside flaky and buttery. She savored it. With shame she dipped lower beneath the bin's meniscus. Then it was gone. Defeated, Marlie slumped against the wall as burning tears pried at the corners of her eyes. *Why'd you have to go?* She tipped her head back against the rusty wall and allowed the tears to force their way out.

Despite her father's irregular presence, they were close. One weekend her father had given her an hour to pack for a camping trip. Her father's impromptu creative spurts excited her. She remembered the feeling of the night. How cathartic it was to just talk. Every evening seemed to be full of reminiscing, playful banter and questions.

"Not everything has meaning. What about the sand?" Marlie said, digging her toes into the cool earth. Her father laid beside her, staring up into the clear dark blue sky. She was just playing around, really. The air smelled like fire.

"Say some guy decides to take away all the sand on earth. What would prevent the ocean from drowning us all? What about the minuscule creatures that thrive from the microorganisms? And the large ones that feed

off of them? Consider the even bigger fish? They would have no food. Say there's a population of people who needed those fish, who needed those organisms." He paused, dramatically. "They'd die."

"Oh my god. I didn't want a lecture." Marlie rolled her eyes and showered her father's leg with a handful of sand. He smiled.

"Everything has a meaning and purpose."

"Sure Dad."

"I'm serious." His voice dipped low. A breeze enveloped her with after shave.

"Right." Marlie chewed on a fingernail. *I have that stupid paper to write. God.*

"Mar, if we had no meaning, we would have never come to that realization. A fish does not know it is wet. Nor birds know they can fly. We would be living in a world that was."

"You say that all the time. I'm not a fish." She shot back. *I think I left my iPod at home.* Her father pulled her close. She resisted and yanked her shoulder away.

"If the world had no meaning, why do people seek to find it? How is it that there are seven different planets around us, but ours is the only one supporting human life? Why do I love you?" She seethed inside. *I want to go.*

"I'm hungry." She said standing up and brushing the sand off of her legs. She began walking away. "What's for dinner?"

Startled, Marlie heard voices. *Oh fuck.* She sidled down deeper into the bin. There was nowhere to go.

"Wait Joel; let me throw this piece of garbage away." Shuffling feet. Marlie couldn't help but breathe loudly. They were close. She was tired of people with their questions and gawking faces.

"I'm tired of them dropping this shit by. I 'aught a-"

"Yeah, yeah, ya big pussy. Ya bake cakes for a livin'. What are you going to do?" An Italian-voiced-man chided. Marlie waited and then suddenly something sharp stabbed her temple. She forced back a yelp.

“I hate you, you know that?” The other man chuckled and their voices grew faint until, silence. Marlie rubbed her forehead and looked around quizzically. She groaned as her fingers traced the raised form of a knot. She jerked her body to the right, then left, until she spotted it. It was a scratched dark blue container with *LTL* burned on top. She scooped it up and with angrily and opened it. *That shit hurt*. A metro card, pack of granola and a folded piece of paper toppled out. Marlie blinked hard, her lips gaping. With deft fingers she plucked the items from the trash and shoved the contents back in and then flung the backpack over her shoulder and scrambled out of the dumpster. Then she was gone. Joy surged through Marlie’s chest. Her heart pounded with anticipation as she stopped by a park bench and sat.

Her chest rose and fell as she took in the cool air. With a smile she looked again. First she examined the metro card and held it before her face. There was only one ride left. One ride. Her face brightened. *The world is full of opportunities, the most vital piece is the opportunity*, her father would always say. The next thing was the folded piece of paper:

We want to listen to you:

Are you sick? Mourning? Just need to rant without interruption? Here at *Love to Listen*, our focus is on providing support. Please come visit us at Uptown 1139 Avenue where we will provide a free warm meal and a quiet ear. Feel free to stop by and be prepared to be treated with care. You are never alone.

With care,
Joshua Christii
Founder of *Love to Listen*

Marlie read the note more times than she had intended. She appeared concerned, quizzical, stunned. Her jaw bulged and relaxed. Questions riveted through her brain like a school of fish maneuvering a channel. “I don’t need help. I’m not retarded or anything,” she said half-heartedly.

With a forced chuckle she shouldered her backpack and walked

towards the subway. She descended down the stairs, the sudden heat forming prickly beads of sweat under her arms. People clustered on the terminal. Some dangerously close to the edge, peering around the pillars anxiously. The crowd was thick with working people. Marlie tightened the straps on her backpack and ripped open the granola and chewed. A man in a navy suit shouted into his phone. A Hispanic woman in scrubs eyed the floor. A teenager sipped at a water bottle. Marlie ripped off her nail, looked around at the whirling subway, chewed at the skin in her mouth, clicked her fingers, finished the granola, twiddled with her shorts and shuddered. *Something's wrong.*

Someone was watching her. Her heart heaved and thundered in her ears. It was like her entire flesh was contracting and releasing. Her eyes focused and unfocused, she felt faint. Her palms began to moisten and she shivered, cold. Her throat tightened and her tongue felt dry and useless. Her eyes widened and she tried to look around discreetly. She scanned the crowd slowly, rather painfully. She looked into the crowd's faces, was someone out there? She tightened her grip on her bag, when she felt someone behind her. Her face dropped with horror. *Who is that?* Before she could move there was a tight grip on her wrist and an arm across her waist. She couldn't move... a voice. She flinched.

"Act like something is wrong and I swear I'll fuck you up." That voice. She shuddered. She said nothing as the crowd folded and unfolded itself. Perhaps they looked like an intimate couple, embracing before a sad departure. Doors opened people came out. People came in. Moving like a flood through a valley. She couldn't feel her legs, didn't know how she was standing, mouth dry, ears buzzing. It smelled like rubber and musk. He smelled still, like that after shave.

"You took some things that belong to me." A fact. His hand clenched her wrist harder, she gasped. *Oh god.*

"It's in my pocket."

"Fuck dat shit. I'ma teach you a valuable lesson." He began pulling her backwards. Flabbergasted, she resisted. *Be good, he won't hurt you.*

“Stop!” She said firmly, but softly.

“I will beat da shit outta you if you pull a scene.” The threat rang loud in her ears. The next subway screeched to a halt. People pushed themselves out. Others bullied their way in. Instinctively, Marlie brought her head back and slammed into his face. A sickening crack resounded. He released. Vulgarities flew from his mouth and she ran, slid through the closing doors and grasped onto the pole to steady herself. The car lurched forward. She looked back and saw that he was no longer there. Her heart racked itself against her rib cage in trepidation. *Oh god.* She sat down and peered at the board. She was going in the wrong direction. Headed Uptown. Indifferent and terrified she allowed herself to consider meeting with the Love to Listen group. *I’ll just see what it is and if I don’t like it...* She got off at the stop closet to the avenue. *I just won’t come back.* Trepidation surged through her frame. *Is he following me?* She scuttled up the stairs, nearly scraping her knee and scampered down the street fearfully.

The two story brownstone building loomed on the far end of the block. It rose dauntingly over the rest of the buildings. Marlie observed it with care, straining her eyes to see if it had any inscriptions on its side. But she found none. It looked well manicured and clean. She walked with slow measured steps, her eyes wandered along the various cracks in the cement. Cars crammed the sidewalk, leaving mere inches between them. With brown twitchy hands and meandering eyes Marlie leaned over to peer into the cars. A coffee stained cup, a coloring book page taped to the dashboard, crumbs resting in the driver seat. *A disheveled over-bearing mother,* she concluded. With every step, her heart fluttered and her eyes flashed back and forth. She picked her way down the street, resting to run her fingers along a black iron fence rising above some bushes, took time to pluck leaves and stop to pinch trash from the ground. It approached slowly, the building. And Marlie paused before it and scrutinized the door. It was green and appeared fresh, with clean even strokes. Up and down. Up and down. Above the door rested a sign: *Love to Listen.* Marlie’s fingers trembled as she reached pushed her thumb into the doorbell and snubbed

the light out. She could hear faintly, a brief chime. Her heart beat like a trotting horse and her head spun. There was the near inaudible click as the door was unlocked and a soft creak as the door was opened.

“Hello.” Her voice was high and she had a pleasant smile. She looked about sixty, with her graying hair pinned up in a bun. Her brown eyes looked friendly. *Like a grandma.* “Come in and sit down in the waiting room.” Marlie sat down. The woman disappeared behind a door to sit behind the receptionist desk. The room was tiny with light blue walls donning framed pictures. A child with paint slathered on her hands. A snapshot of two men reading from a piece of paper. A staff photo of about twenty with matching shirts and large grinning faces. Marlie jiggled her knee and looked from the pictures to the woman, and absentmindedly rifled through the magazines. She couldn’t help from shivering, but it wasn’t cold, the room was pleasant and warm. *I should leave.*

“Sweetie? Can you come here please?”

Marlie’s stomach felt finicky and her ears seemed to be stuffed with cotton balls. She nodded and got up to approach the desk. The woman grinned and slid the glass away to hand her a clipboard. “Hi, love.” She retrieved a pen from a small tin. “I’m Mrs. Laurane, the secretary here at Love to Listen.” Her eyes were set in the fine lines of crow’s feet. *She’s pretty,* Marlie observed. She relaxed took a deep breath and leaned against the counter.

“I’m Marlie.” Mrs. Laurane’s eyes brightened.

“Pleasure to meet you.” She offered her hand. Marlie clasped it weakly. “Is this your first time, Marlie?” She nodded slightly. Laurane straightened up in her chair. “Great,” she chided. “Here at Love to Listen we provide a warm meal and an opportunity to meet with one of our many staff and just talk.” She said, finishing off the sentence rather proudly. “We have a No-Questions-Asked policy. Meaning we don’t prod your past history or ask for your Social. We work with the ‘you’ you are now. Sound good?” Marlie thought about it briefly. *I don’t know what I’m going to talk about. Even if I did have something to say what would be the point?*

“Yes.”

“Wonderful, fill out this brief form.” She pointed to the one before Marlie, who looked it over and then placed pen to paper. “This is just to get some information on you, if you were to come back.” When she finished, Laurane took it and scanned over the paper.

“...Oh, Joshua Christii!” She beamed. “He is one of the best here. Please take a seat and someone will be with you shortly, for lunch.” Marlie nodded once again. After a few moments an older woman with two strand twists and a Southern accent led her to a large dining cafeteria. More pictures. More photos. More faces. Marlie sat where offered and was handed a small menu to choose from. She anxiously picked out the Caesar salad with the turkey, cranberry and cheese Panini and waited. The food was delivered to her warm and Marlie quickly thanked the woman before eating. Everything was delicious. She had to refrain from running her fingers along the bottom of the bowl to finish the Parmesan cheese sauce. She wiped her fingers with a napkin and licked her lips.

“Marlie?” A male’s voice inquired. She lifted her head to see a young black man with an earring glinting in his lobe. She smiled politely.

“Hi.” He smiled back, extending a hand.

“I’m Joshua.” He shook her hand. “Come follow me.” He gestured to the hallway. “Let’s go to my office.” She picked up her bag and obeyed. It wasn’t far; she turned into a cozy room with two comfy chairs. She sank into one, almost emitting a sigh of relief. He followed and pulled out her file and read it quickly.

“So what’s new in your life?” His voice was smooth and sincere. He held her gaze patiently, running his fingers along the rim of the chair’s arm. He reclined deeper into the seat, kicked off his shoes and then settled his eyes back on her. Marlie copied him and got comfortable. She let her hand go of her bag and rested her fingers in her lap. The question was so inviting, so revealing. She mulled it over, the silence in the room neutral. She ran the words through her mind, trying to catch them on one particular moment, one phrase, one situation. But couldn’t. It was all too much to talk about. *What’s new? What isn’t new?* She made to open her mouth, but didn’t. Her eyes danced around on the carpet floor. It was a pattern of various colored

squares intersecting against black. *Why should I talk to him? I don't even know him... why does he care?* She rolled her lips. *That's stupid. You're making excuses.* Marlie scrunched up her eyes.

“Nothing,” She said loudly. Joshua smiled and scratched his head.

“Hmm. That's hard to believe.” Marlie shrugged her shoulders and began playing with her earlobe. More silence. *I don't need this.* “I mean is there anything that is weighing on your chest?” *No.*

“Well,” she began, twirling a string around her finger. “My dad died just recently,” she said. *Stupid. Why did you say that?* She kneaded her teeth into her bottom lip. *Don't cry.*

“How do you feel about it?” His tone was compassionate; the sound of his voice was soothing. When she opened her mouth, she couldn't stop from talking. She wailed about her father's death and how close they had been, how unexpected it was. How she didn't know what to do so she left home and hadn't been back since. She revealed the innocent feelings of her heart. Abandonment. Hatred. Guilt.

“I mean. How does a normal person just go, get sick and die?” she asked, sniffing into a tissue. Joshua held her gaze steadily as if returning the question. Marlie took the cue and replied. “Shit happens.”

Joshua shifted in his seat, pulling a leg underneath him. “Would you have ever been ready for your father's death?” Marlie looked up at him with disgust.

“What kinda question is that?” Her voice was shrill. He placed his hands out in front of him quickly, as if to ward off an attack.

“Don't get me wrong, but could you have ever picked a day when you would have been like “He can die now. I'll be okay.”?” Marlie's chest rose up and down furiously.

“Are you saying that I'm being too sensitive?” She yelled, getting to her feet. Fury coursed through her veins as she clenched her fingers tightly. He shook his head.

“No, I'm not saying that all. I --,” She cut him off vehemently.

“You can’t prepare for death. God just smites people down for fun!” She screamed. Joshua stood to meet her furious stare.

His voice remained calm. “Four years ago, my older sister was murdered on the eve of her twentieth birthday.” Marlie’s face relaxed, slightly. “It took three years for me to really confront my problems. I felt the same way you feel now.” He offered her another tissue, she didn’t take it. “I always thought that if she had just died a few days later or when I was older or when I wasn’t so mad at her or when I didn’t need her anymore...” He paused and stared past her. “That I would be... okay.” His eyes reconnected with hers. “I know how you feel.” Marlie stared at him, blankly.

“I want to go.” She said maliciously.

He reached down to gather the clip board and wrote out a few words. “Here.” He handed it to her. “If you wanna talk, here’s my number and office hours.” After a moment, Marlie reluctantly took it. He led her out of the room and down the hall to the front desk.

“Stop by if you want to talk, or something.” He opened the door for her. She stepped out into the dark night. She began walking away. “Bye Marlie, The Lord has blessed you.” She looked over her shoulder abruptly, but the door was closed.

She crumpled the paper into a ball and tossed it on the ground. The heels of her shoes scraped the cement as she stormed away. Then she stopped. Paused and turned around to look down the street. The streetlights were burning a soft and pale yellow out in the night. She could hear the trees rustling as the wind caressed them. Just barely, Marlie could see the balled up paper lying discarded on the ground. *You should go back and get it,* she thought.

Folio 2010

Jared Coffin

Discernment

Second Place, Folio Poetry Contest

In our youth we hang
drinking the cool sweat of sunlight,
naked
in a Swiss vineyard,

blossoming into fragile,
pink lungs,
meditating on the white faint
hieroglyphic Alps.

There is a train that runs this way
shuttled out the end of a tunnel
so much like a roll of film
shuttled through a camera,
with its square viewports
superimposed with final faces.

Groping the air with our blind
hands, all docile and finicky,
queer and avuncular,
lolling in gently sensuous shapes
each globe of our existence wonders
at your frail powers of recognition.

Perhaps it is our thousand faces
each grown large and calm
as the eyes of a blind horse.
No matter – you forget.

Coffin

Pressed and stomped into
the indistinguishable existence
of liquidity,
left to age in the tight hips of a bottle
exiled to darkness for the sake of elixirhood –

we are furious upon our liberation,
rushing from glass to glass
to be judged by the color
of our collectively obliterated skin.

Please, enjoy our velvet burn
on the pink gill-walls of your throat.
Soon we will course through your maze of veins
conspiring with your own blood
to make you rage.

You will trod the streets shouting obscenities,
forcing tourists to change names and seats,
paces and facial expressions.

In the third person
you will see yourself
your quick, garbled voice informing a child:
J'ai besoin d'un ami!

You will hear each syllable un-nestle
from your pink gill-throat
and will struggle
to discern which of your thousand
inseparable faces has spoken.

Lies My Father Told Me

When I was a child, my father told me
many wonderful things which I did
not understand. He said one hundred
copper pennies were worth the same
as a single dollar –
I knew he was lying.

When he took to writing, disappearing
to his office to make sounds
that had no meaning, I would imagine
the letters each clink might be.

When the sounds stopped,
he reappeared, kneeling to whisper
a secret: words, he said, only live so long
the more they're used the faster
they die, but with people,
it's the opposite.

I thought he was lying
again, but mother said it was true.
I believed her, told her I wanted to get dad
some new words since so many of his
must be dead,
with all the sound he makes.

Coffin

Rummaging in the shadows and cedar smell of my father's desk, I found some abandoned letters. Mostly consonants, a few nubile vowels. That winter, I incubated them in the warm palms of a dictionary, hoping to coax them into fresh new words.

Each night, I would read to the letters from a thesaurus, showing them all the fabulous words they could become. As they got older, and I could feel their small bodies warming the dictionary, mother read poetry to them, the way she would sing to me in the womb, tricking me to come out.

In the next room, she was growing notes between layers of blank sheet music, and she would play songs for them much the same way I read to my letters, yet both refused to be born.

I asked mother, at what point do letters become words? How long must they remain in the dictionary? She was honest and said she did not know. One day I listened to my letters through an old stethoscope, excited to hear the bone-scrape of consonants and the faint groaning of vowels.

The next morning, they were gone.
My dad's round face greeted me with a blind
smile when I ran to his office
with questions and tears.
He had already buried some within
the many sentences of a story;
a few were born adverbs and
he had aborted them, left them inky
and decomposing in the trashcan.



Adam Komosinski
Clam Corn Cup



Adam Komosinski
Clam Hunt Mug



Allison Walsh
Mama ~ **Second Place, Folio Art Contest**



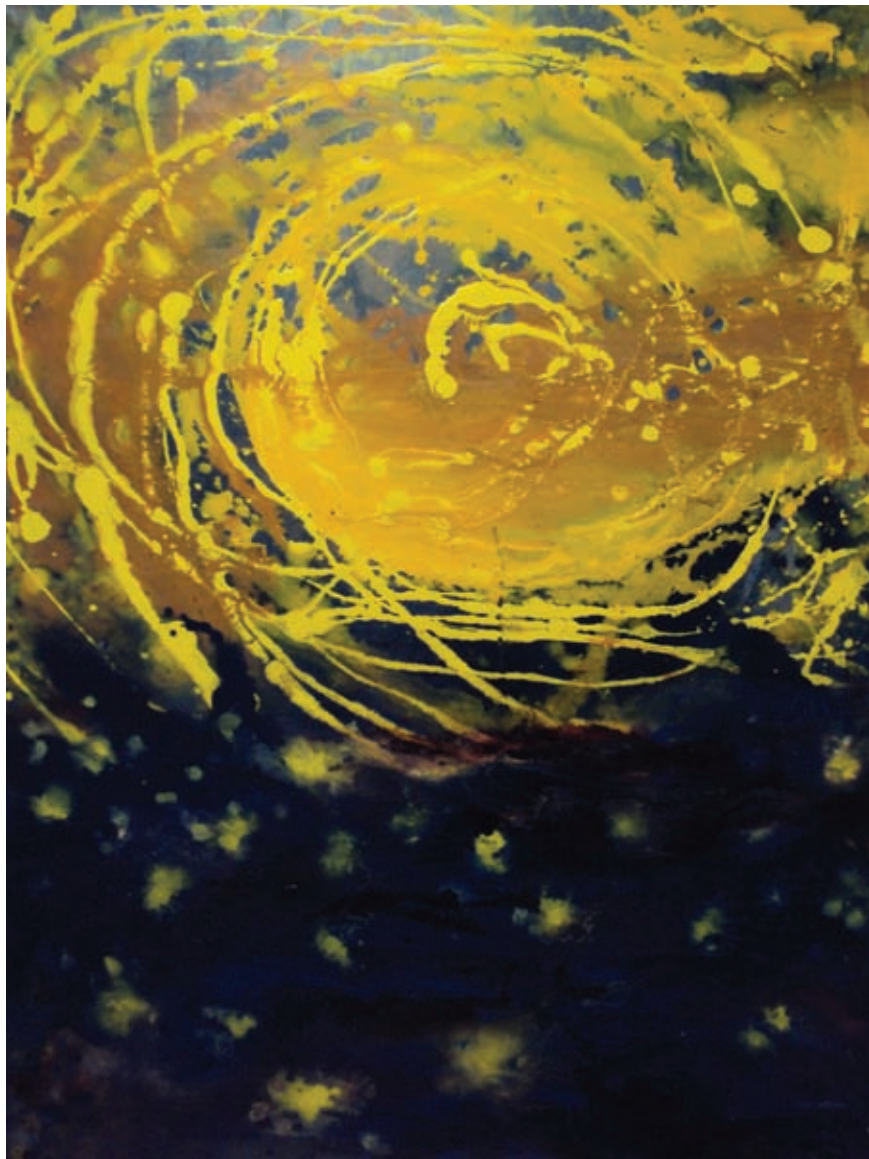
Allison Walsh
Rust



Allison Walsh
Untitled



Lisa Turso
Untitled



Tammy Miller
Untitled



Sean Sullivan
Split Decisions



Sean Sullivan
Self Portrait



Becky Schaffrick
Life & Death



Jessica Halliday
Alice



Neil Pascarella

Reflections ~ **Honorable Mention, Folio Art Contest**



Haley Smith
Rolling Petals



Amber Lewis
Untitled



Benjamin Quesnel
DJ ~ First Place, Folio Art Contest



Benjamin Quesnel
Lollipop

Coffin

Shadows

Black mitten stitched to your spirit –
what a novel invention.
you think I leave you to join the fabric of the night –
I do not
that silhouette, following you as some say
God does,
in the womb, brackish urn
of the unborn,
when you were the coalescence of two cells
a fish-slippery embryo
a thump:
a hidden metronome.
You –
an upset stomach,
imageless and formless
and unabashed,

Me listing dumbly at my mooring
a tired flag
weighed down by black water
and blood.
When call of the world finally reached your ears
with its blue notes of longing,
and the body coughed you flesh to air,
fresh as an un-invented word scraping out
of the throat in a thick bruise of sound,

I was birthed,
blossoming in a dim aperture beneath
your new, fragile body,
formfitting and full of life.

Now a souvenir of birth –
vestige of a land irretrievable as a dream.

I cry,
dark cousin to the belly button,
I will never cease
to overprint your ground with my flickers.
I am an obstinate tattoo
I am the earth's mascara:
sable, fluid, and unwashable.
Carry me across your rough surfaces of land
and I will skim them lightly as a ship.
In water I will shiver over pulses
of waves glistening like fractured mirrors
but do not be deluded;
though you call me a fracture of once-coherent light,
I am whole.
In all your freedom
you cannot kill me
though you fuddle about under the white
coin of the moon, hoping to cover your darkness
with darkness.

Knox

Galen Knox
Nothing Terribly New

From the box of glass and Astroturf, I watched Emmit roll up and down the slanted yard as Ian and Geoff smoked and talked shop. Shop for them was munitions and deployment, why Geoff had a plate in his head, and why Ian didn't get clearance for nuclear weapons stacking. My mom and I talked about health care, and why her family members are dicks only if politics (or one of an assortment of other topics, for that matter) are mentioned. I was on to my third of some strange pirate-themed beer when my mother declared the chili to be edible, and we moved five feet to the dining room.

I looked out over my mother's front lawn, which consisted of a spiraling stone stair case and a forty-five degree lawn, both connecting neatly against a highway. Ian, my brother and my ride, had his car parked in what served for a driveway, a small nook of pavement conveniently carved into the arduous slant of grass and weeds. Since he had moved out he had to drive an extra hour to bring me.

My mother's chili has always been essentially ground beef with a few beans mixed in, unless I'm mistaken. It's been a constant, enough so that when my mother asked after my dad, I couldn't think straight.

"Well, he's got dentures now, still smoking, same shit job, y'know? Nothing terribly new."

"Oh."

I tried not to mention how much happier he seemed, how he finally stopped killing himself with overtime, how his wife actually bothering to help financially seemed to be the only thing that made this possible. I began to poke her in the cheeks until she complained, as was the custom in moments when I hadn't a clue what to say to her. Geoff saved me from this by changing the topic to bitching about how his son, Emmit, would only eat hot dogs.

“Well I guess he’s just at that fucking age where he won’t eat shit, eh?” he laughed.

I stared at Emmit, who shook his head with some strange snorting gurgle I rarely hear people produce.

“I won’t eat this today, maybe in about five weeks. January seventh, I eat it then.” Emmit stuttered.

“You see, he always does this. He won’t eat things, an’then he makes weird excuses about it.”

“Least he doesn’t just throw it at me like you did,” joked my mother.

“Yeah, well, he should just eat his fucking food or else he’s going the fuck to bed,” insisted Geoff, staring Emmit down, who capitulated with a spoonful.

I stared at him, tight lipped, ignoring his father. I assumed he wasn’t all there. I wasn’t either, at seven. I mustered what little defense I cared to state and uttered, “So, I learned something in one of my classes about how punishment only makes it worse, and a structured reward system encourages improvement.”

While Emmit silently fork-poked his chili, Ian retorted, “Someone should tell that to my boss! The closest thing to a reward I get is knowing that the G.I. Bill is going to let me quit, eventually.”

“Oh? That’s great to hear! Are you going for art like you wanted?” replied Mum, coupled with, “Geoff, could you just make the kid a fucking hot dog and send him to bed already.”

“Alright you little shit, I’ll make you a hot dog. Cool to hear about art school Ian. Y’hear I’m working on a nursing degree now?” Geoff said, getting up and stepping to the fridge to help Emmit out.

I sighed, turning and inquiring, “So Mom, why haven’t you started going for your RN? It’s been, what, twenty years now? Even Dad is getting one so he can retire.”

The room was staring at me, even Emmit, hot dog in mouth.

“Well, you see, Geoff and me are taking turns. When he finishes,

I'll go to school." she said, smiling, eyes darting from Geoff and me. I selfishly hoped she was as awkward as I was about this.

"So you're the breadwinner then, eh Mom?" Ian joked.

Unable to help myself, I added, "Quite revolutionary of you."

Geoff protested, "Woah, I just can't handle all those damn sales jobs anymore. Too much rushing and god damn people. So your mom was nice enough to help out."

"So you went into nursing?" Ian prodded, where I could not.

"Yeah."

"To get away from the rushing. And the people."

"Well yeah, I know there's a bunch of that shit in nursing too. But at least I'll be helping people."

There was a pause. My mother smiled at me, seeming proud of Geoff. Ian and I shared doubtful looks. Emmitt poked an empty plate.

"I can, can I go to bed?" Emmitt pleaded. Geoff stood up with a low sigh, saying with utmost compassion, "Alright, com'ere shitbox, let's put you to bed."

Geoff and Emmitt stepped out of the room, and my mother smiled, silently excusing herself to the bathroom. I turned to Ian, taking the precious moments to conspire.

"Didn't mom leave because she was tired of doing work?"

"How is dad doing?" Ian said, dodging.

"Oh, um. He's almost done remodeling the house. Actually been sleeping, down to a pack a day, stuff like that."

"Cool, you had me worried a bit before. Last time I was there he seemed alright."

"Yeah, didn't you two jam for a while then?"

My mother slid back into the room, sitting next to Ian. Hugging him, she said brightly, "So your father's picked up the guitar again, has he?"

"Yeah, he just fixed up that '73 Les Paul."

"Wasn't that a bass?" spoke my confederates, in unison. Geoff, continuing the procession of interruptions, returned to the room.

"Bass?"

The three of us just smiled at him, each slightly less gleeful than the last. It was my mother's place to broach the subject, I thought. I wasn't about to talk to Geoff for hours about my mother's ex-husband's vintage music equipment. He shrugged, taking his place at the foot of the table. Well, the head realistically.

"Whatever."

The previous stilted conversation and consumption gone, and Geoff having quietly sent Emmet to bed, the air was slightly more free. Slightly. It lacked that subtle harshness that watching a younger you get derided brings, anyway. Geoff likely felt more free now as well, as he declared "So yeah, this whole education thing's a sham anyhow. They just take all your money for a piece of paper, and don't teach you any shit you need. After all, I've got a degree, and it doesn't help me at all with finding a job. God, I'd hate to be you, trying to find a job with a degree in English."

I didn't feel like pointing out how often he gets fired. Or concepts like networking. Or not yelling at customers until they get you fired and being unable to find a job because you burn every bridge. Or how he was about to make the best nurse ever, considering how fantastic a parent he was. I just stared at my sea-thief themed brew as it rapidly lost appeal.

"Well, yeah it's a sham, but if you can't even pass the basic shit, how are you worth a damn? I can't believe people are making it through college without even knowing..." One of Ian's rare political tirades, which are generally iconoclastic and rarely unheard of, sent Geoff and him into a rant, safely distant from me and my mother's ears on the other side of the table.

My mother just smiled at me. I pressed the cold of my beer bottle against the side of her cheek, she glared, but didn't stop smiling.

"I miss these dinners. You should drop by more," she insisted.

I smiled thinly and got some more chili. It was, after all, one of the only constants. Even if I hadn't had any for five years.

Williams

Kayla Williams

Pasted Together

She was sloppily put together.
Flaky bits
of flesh hodgepogged onto dense,
pearly bones.
Her mother and father pasted on
ringlets of blonde hair
and blue, googly eyes
that circled white sockets in shock.
She was their best Arts and Crafts project,
and their child.
She grew and learned how to wield
a strong adhesive.

At work, she burns a grisly steak
and has to start again.
Her boss yells at her to
hurry and serve the customers.
A blue, tear-stained, googly eye peels, unfastens,
and plops into pea soup.
She should have used super-glue mascara.

Her stiff, crusty hands
feel like flypaper against the
outside of her apartment door,
and she sees the sticky post-it
from the landlord who wants rent.
Her hand unfurls and drops
from her crusty wrist.

When her weak fingers dial
an unsteady, on-and-off-and-on-boyfriend,
a girlish shriek answers the phone
instead of a throaty baritone.
Her eager smile curls, shrivels,
and pulls away from her ivory skin.
It won't stick
without the Elmer's.
So she picks it off and leaves
thick, dry scabs of white.

She searches for a quick fix,
more squelching globs of
milky molasses
to cure her,
but it's too late.
Her cemented arm loses
It's cohesion.
It thrashes on the floor.
Her legs unhinge
from their joints of putty.
Her torso is left unbalanced
and it falls sideways.
Her head loosens,
unfastens from her
breaking neck, and pitches forward.
It rolls next to her detached arm.
She is a messy mosaic
of limbs left strewn
across the shaggy carpet.
Faded, splitting pieces
of herself wait for
someone with an adhesive.

Conway

Jamie Conway

Mania

Honorable Mention, Folio Fiction Contest

Bi-polar. Manic depression disorder. No matter what you call it, it sucks. Constant mood swings. From feeling like you want to die to feeling like you're on top of the world. Most people say the "depression" part is the worst. I mean, it makes sense. Who wants to constantly feel like killing themselves, never wanting to get out of bed, not caring about anything? I think the manic part is the worst. Your mind feels like a ball of tangled yarn where you can never quite find the beginning or the end. You feel like you're on an innumerable amount of drugs, all affecting your body in ways you never expected. Pure euphoria, yet so much pain. Thoughts come and go. Complete chaos.

All my thoughts are fleeting. I can't control my mind. I can't control my actions. I write this story to detail my life in the best way I can: in small snapshots from different times throughout my life. I blame it on the mania - the fact that I can't concentrate on anything long enough to write a beautiful detailed story filled with metaphors that make the readers ponder their own lives. I say it's the mania. Or is it because I try my hardest not to focus on these things for too long?

My mother, Linda Spinelli. I seem to call her that more often than I do "mom." We lived in six different apartments in ten years, and each apartment had the same couch. An old, worn out brown, almost corduroy couch. The stuffing was falling out of each arm due to our cats using it as their personal scratching post. My mom always called it our "sick couch." If we stayed home sick from school, she would promptly lay us down on the couch and cover us with our favorite blanket. She'd lay with us until we fell asleep, fighting off whatever fever or illness we had. I fucking loved that couch.

Slowly, my mom started spending more and more time on that couch. She hardly ever slept in her own room with her boyfriend. Day and

night, she would be on that old, now becoming gross, brown couch. I would worry about her. Why was my mom always sick? What could I do to help her? First, my mom told me she had migraines, which is why she needed to lay in the dark. After a few years of that lie, she told me that she was depressed so she wanted to sleep a lot. She was getting closer to the truth. As time went on, her time on the couch became filled with unconsciousness, and when she was awake, mumbled speech with her eyes rolled back in her head. I started to realize what the truth really was. This was when she became “Linda Spinelli” to me. But still, I knew I had to take care of her. I sat with her from morning until night, hoping one day everything would change.

Apparently ten years of praying that my mother would change her life didn't do a damn thing. There she was, in the ICU connected to what seemed like every machine the hospital owned. Those machines were keeping her alive. Nobody knew how she got there. Nobody could tell us what the hell happened to her. All I knew that my 55 year old mother was on the verge of death, and it definitely wasn't due to natural causes. I suspected what had happened to her. I had been having dreams about it for weeks before this even happened. I constantly dreamed about her ex-boyfriend, coming to her apartment, and giving her the variety of drugs that she loved - coke, heroin, and her favorite: OxyContin. These were the drugs that he got her addicted to. Once the nurses told us a man brought my mother to the hospital, I knew it was time to go to her apartment and try to put all of the pieces together.

She lived in a government housing apartment building. Large, broken down brown building surrounded by metal fencing that people had cut through. People sat outside and watched who was coming in and out of the building. It was what their life had amounted to. My mom always told me it was for people who were mentally ill or physically disabled. She said she got to live there because of her depression and agoraphobia. It was all bullshit though. That building was for crackheads and alcoholics and everybody knew it.

I found the manager of the apartment complex and told her the situation. Once I mentioned the name “Linda Spinelli” she let out a long sigh, apologized for what had happened, and put her arm around me. She gave me the keys to my mother’s apartment and tried to tell me anecdotes about my mother. I wanted to shout in her face that I didn’t give a shit. Instead, I thanked her and walked up to the sixth floor.

I could smell her apartment the second I exited the stairwell, the stench of cat litter and cigarettes. But when I opened the door, I was more disgusted than I usually was upon entering her tiny one room apartment. Her mattress was flipped over, stripped of blankets, covered in her own waste. The floors were covered with only God knows what; I could barely walk anywhere. The entire apartment was turned upside-down. Empty pill bottles and liquor bottles were scattered across the room. My instincts were right. My mother had overdosed. Someone played a part in it. They watched her ingest a mix of OxyContin, vodka, and heroin and then left her to die. And we all know who it was.

He moved into our house when I was three years old, just months after my dad left. My mom met him at work, the Radisson Hotel, before he got fired. He was incredibly over weight, greasy hair slicked back, with pink tinted glasses. He was also eighteen years younger than my mother. She introduced him as Zippy, her new boyfriend. I knew he was gonna fuck up my life; he was gonna fuck up all of our lives.

I was ten when all hell really broke loose with Zippy. I was sitting on the couch, trying to hide under my blanket while he was screaming again. He had my mother by the collar of the shirt, yelling in her face, tossing her around the room. I didn’t even know what half the names he was calling her meant. She was saying some words that I didn’t know either. Our big, blue house situated between the woods and the highway shook as he chased her around. My brother stayed in his room with his friends, getting high.

My mother finally stopped yelling. She sank into the corner, crying in fear of what he would do to her next. He grabbed her again. I couldn’t

bear to look. I called 911 and pleaded to the operator to send someone as quick as possible. I knew it was going to take forever since our town didn't actually have cops; we'd have to wait for the state troopers. I hid under the table, my hands covering my ears, rocking back and forth, just waiting for someone to save my mother.

The fight got so loud that my brother finally came downstairs. He raced down the stairwell, past the walls that were filled with holes that he had caused in other fits of rage. I heard my brother screaming at Zippy, telling him to get the fuck away from our mother. I heard glass shattering followed by a shriek from my mother. I ran into the living room to find my brother with a broken wine bottle in his hand, swinging it around like a weapon, threatening Zippy. He hit it against the television, causing both the screen and the bottle to shatter, leaving shards of glass everywhere. Zippy picked my brother up by the throat and threw him into the wall. He was only fourteen, just a little over 100 pounds, trying to defend himself against a 300 pound man. Zippy held him against the wall until my brother finally gave in. He could no longer breathe. He collapsed to the floor.

At that moment, the troopers showed up at our house. They made Zippy leave. They told him to pack an overnight bag and to call and find somewhere else to stay that night. No handcuffs, no arrests, but I still hoped that he would be gone forever. I hoped that my mother was going to be strong and finally move us out of this horrible place. 10:00 AM the next morning, he was back.

This was when I saw my brother beginning to change. Michael, four years older than me, became angrier and angrier. He hid in his room getting high while I took care of our mother and the house. Just a few months after his first true altercation with Zippy, it was apparent to all that David had changed.

We all called it "Downtown" as a joke. Higganum Center. It had anything anybody in that town would need: two pizza places, a drug store, and three package stores. David and his friends used to spend most nights walking around there. There was nothing else to do in that fucking town.

They all pretty much lived at my house: five of Michael's friends, who would sneak through the windows and stay at our house more often than not. They were doing their standard walk around the Center, around midnight. From behind the aptly named Higganum Drug Center, the only pharmacy for miles, came a group kids armed with knives. They cornered Michael and all of his friends, threatening them. My brother had sold them LSD and apparently they weren't happy with the product. In Higganum, that was a sin; you didn't fuck around with people's drugs.

Matt, who was like a second brother to me, was being choked by one of the rival "gang" members. He wrapped the strap of his backpack around Matt's neck and wouldn't let go until Matt was on the ground, gasping for air. That's what set Michael off. He was still only about fourteen, 100 pounds. That's why he carried around Rojo – the red lead pipe that lived in his backpack. My brother expected an event like this to arise and he knew he would never be able to defend himself on his own. Michael took Rojo and hit the ringleader with it, in the head. One quick blow and he was on the ground, screaming in pain, blood everywhere.

The infamous state troopers showed up. They knew Michael and all his friends. This wasn't their first run in with them. They had no chance this time. David was sent to jail, waiting for my father to come bail him out.

A few months later the troopers were at my door yet again. I pretty much knew all of them by then. This time, however, they were accompanied by some other men. Two men in suits with briefcases and a lot of paper work. They were from DCF. The day we feared for months had finally come. DCF came to take my brother away from the unstable environment that was our mother's house and bring him to live with our dad and his new wife. His new wife, Sharon, had called DFC on my mother on countless occasions. She would call my mother and threaten her, saying that she was no good of a mother and she didn't deserve to have us anymore. Finally, they weren't just threats anymore.

Behind our house were woods that spanned 20 acres. My brother escaped out his window and tried to run into the woods. He didn't want to be taken away. The troopers caught him and dragged him down the hills

and pulled him back into our house. He tossed a bunch of his shit in a garbage bag, and was pulled down the stairs forcefully by the troopers and tossed into the back of a car. We were only allowed quick goodbyes, and then he was gone. We didn't know if we would ever be allowed to see him every again.

My brother and I had never gotten along. I knew he was part of the reason my life was such a mess. But that night, I cried when he left. My mom and I packed up his room and cleaned up to make sure there wasn't anything illegal that the troopers could come back that night and find. My mother cried - she thought she was a failure. I cried because my family was being ripped apart and I was stuck in the middle.

Later, I cried for another reason. Why did my dad want my brother and not me? I began to think back to the first memory I had of my dad. Actually, it was the first memory I had of my life.

I was about two years old. I laid on the couch, burying my head in the brown fabric - the beginning of the sick couch. I tried to keep my eyes closed tight, but I would sneak little glances as often as I could. I wanted my mom and dad to think that I had fallen asleep and that I didn't hear what was going on. Even if I was asleep, did they really think I was going to stay asleep? I was five feet away from them and they were screaming. They were too involved in their fight to know I even existed, so I just kept pretending to sleep in case they did eventually notice me. Even without my eyes open, I could figure out almost exactly what was going on.

They fought all the time; yelling was a constant in my life. I had never really seen my parents get along. I don't have a single memory of my mom and dad together, laughing, enjoying one another's company.

My mother threw the keys at my dad's face and shoved him at the door. He said he would fight for us. What little attempts he did make were denied by the courts. Apparently, Tom Reynolds was not a fit parent.

Fifteen years later, I finally moved to the upper-middle class town that is Berlin. I moved in the cute little house at the end of the cul-de-sac with my dad and step-mom, who were now apparently the perfect parents. The courts never decided to take me away from my mother, but once our

only household income was from drug dealing, I decided it was time to go. So I moved in with Tom and Sharon Reynolds and became a model citizen: spent the summers doing community service, getting straight A's, working at least two jobs at a time. I wanted to be their perfect child. After a few years of living with Tom Reynolds, a name that comes out much easier than "dad" lately, I started to remember that my dad wasn't always this perfect father and human being. What happened to that guy who used to drink until he blacked out and would smoke a joint after putting me to bed?

He started going to the same restaurant every Friday: Puerto Vallarta. A Mexican restaurant on the Berlin Turnpike that was actually pretty legit. My dad became a part of that family. He became a "Rodriguez" once the owner started referring to Tom and Sharon as his parents. I constantly asked my dad if he wanted me to teach him Spanish. I was desperate to be involved in this life. He told me he knew the words *cerveza*, *carne*, and *mas*, and that was all he needed. He had a new family now and I wasn't even needed.

He would stumble home drunk every Friday, reeking of fajitas and tequila. Finally, I turned 21 and I was legally allowed to join my father. I would sit at the bar beside him and take the free tequila shots that were constantly being thrown our way. I used to hate Fridays because Tom's drunken ass would come and yell at me for some absurd reason, usually calling me dumb or saying that I wasn't going to succeed in life. But now....I was right there beside him, conversing in drunken words that didn't make sense to anybody who wasn't 6 deep by then.

He was no longer "Tom Reynolds: World's Best Parent. Superhero. Save the lives of his children one at a time." He was back to the Tom Reynolds that the courts deemed was not a fit parent 15 years earlier. Just this time, he had his wife's money.

I no longer had to impress him. We were equals. Just two drunk Irish people at a bar talking about the Yankees.

Folio 2010

Erin Jones
Forty Years

Forty Years
and Elaine can still see
her first pet stumble
into the kitchen, woozy
with Diphacinone; (maybe
the tin can looked like a snack,
and Nico--the Maltese--
gulped the rat poison down
with satisfaction)
and she can still remember
inquiring, petting, at the moment
he started kicking out, as if
chasing a tabby in his dreams,
but she knew it was over
when the green foam from his
mouth spilled onto linoleum.

Gamache

Amanda Gamache

Naked in the Snow

Second Place, Folio Fiction Contest

I was lying naked in the snow, but did I ever tell you that I tried to kill myself? No joke, I did. The boy I loved stopped talking to me. He had kissed me, held me close to him—gripping my hips, pulling me close enough to smell his cologne. It wasn't really cologne though. It was some cheap stuff he got in a spray can at the grocery store. He had run his fingers through my hair; even lied to me and told me I was beautiful, very beautiful. He even said it in Spanish to make it more romantic. Then he went on vacation with his girlfriend. Told me he'd be back in a week. I didn't say anything. I waited the seven days. He came back and didn't talk to me. I stopped him before he left work one day, he said he was busy. He'd just been busy, really busy. I drank vodka that night. I cried so hard that I felt the death ache in my stomach. I did the death roll up the stairs, dragging myself like a crocodile kills its prey. I ended up in my bathroom. I was alone. There was a small piece of glass on the tiles. I didn't know how it got there, but I took it up and ran it along my arm once, just a little ways, just a test to see if it would work. It did. My skin parted but it didn't bleed. It was just red, a deep red.

Then, my stomach heaving, I made the big cut—the 'let's finish this' cut. It was high up on my arm where the veins were thicker and carried more blood. I thought it'd be over sooner if I cut myself up there. It wasn't too long of a cut, maybe three inches. It didn't hurt. That's what they asked me. Why would you hurt yourself? I didn't hurt myself. I made myself happy. The cut didn't bleed much, just parted, displaying that same deep red. It kind of oozed too, a yellow reddish color. I had failed. I wasn't really bleeding at all. That sent my body into the death spirals. I held a tissue to my forearm and made my way to my bed. I laid there crying and eventually got a headache and cried at that pain. My mother came in and lied down next to me. She held me for a while, and then asked why I hurt myself. I didn't, I said. I didn't hurt myself.

I quit work the next day—my dad wouldn't let me go back to that job with him. I went back to my therapist that night. There were lots of long stares. She had stringy brown hair and a long narrow face. I had seen her outside of the practice once; I was working as an inventory specialist—which basically meant I could count—and she was there in the Guilford CVS looking at face wash. I was lying on the floor counting some generic brand when I saw her and met her eyes with mine. I smiled and was about to speak when she walked away. That's when I knew she didn't care about me. I had been seeing her for over a year. She knew everything and she didn't care about me. I felt like I had been raped. I felt like my mind had been raped, like she had stuck in her fingers and ripped my mind apart, writing my embarrassing thoughts on her pad to laugh at later.

Why did you do it? She asked me. I sat lamely. Her eyebrows pushed together making her look older. I didn't even know how old she was. I didn't know anything about her. My body felt heavy, limbs aching and all that, while she went on about the dangers of cutting yourself. Accidents can happen you know. But that's why I did it.

I went to my other therapist later, like ten minutes later. And she prescribed me a higher dose of antidepressants. She explained to me how my brain was wrong, that it was just chemically wrong and that's why I had all these thoughts. Did I think about suicide a lot? Why yes, ever since they told us not to think about it in the seventh grade it's been all I can think about. Don't think about bananas. What are you thinking about now? Bananas, guaranteed. But how many times a week would I say I thought about it? Why every day lately. More anti-anxiety pills too, she said, a higher dose ought to do it. She didn't care about me either. I went to the pharmacy and they didn't even make the pills at that dose, and there really was no way to break them up and take half or something since they were slow release capsules. She gave me two bad prescriptions, couldn't even do her job, and this was the woman that I was supposed to be getting help from. This was the woman that was supposed to care about my well being. You would think she'd know what she was doing. I felt raped. My head, my mind, I felt mentally raped.

Gamache

I got home and trudged up the stairs. I wanted my bed. I felt nauseous. My dad came in my room after a few minutes. Why'd you do it? I shrugged. It was none of his business really. Maybe if he hadn't threatened physical repercussions to my wrong-doings as a child I would have grown up and not been so afraid, so afraid of him or anyone. Maybe I would have opened my mouth in high school, in college. Said I didn't want to leave home, maybe I would have grown courageous. Maybe. But I waited for him to hit me always. To call me a name worse than the last—what was I this time? A dip shit I think. He ought to choke me. He did almost hit me once. I had been grumpy and fighting with my Grama because she misplaced my anti-anxiety pills, and when I found them I yelled at her. She had put them well within reach of the dog. I didn't want him to get them. She was so mad she went outside, the breath steaming from her nostrils. My mom was lying in the hospital bed in the living room. She had fallen down some bleacher stairs and broken both of her feet—and no my father hadn't pushed her. She's just clumsy when it comes to feet. She's always hurting her feet. This time she did it good. But I was sitting there next to my mom and my dad came in, face as maroon as his shirt. Go apologize to your grandmother. You have no right to treat her this way. I held up a finger, not the middle one, the index one, the give me a moment one. I was too mad to make any kind of sincere apology, and I wasn't sorry. She shouldn't have touched my pills. When we were looking for them she said she didn't know what a pill bottle looked like. My dad said to her, what kind of fucking idiot doesn't know what a pill bottle looks like? He should have apologized for that. I didn't say that to him because as soon as I put my finger down he charged at me like a bull, head down and everything. I dodged that attack and hastily was making my way towards the door when he grabbed my arm. He didn't hurt my arm, but I saw his other hand raised and balled. I screamed not to touch me, but his teeth stayed gritted and his eyes mad and locked. My mother screamed from the bed. I don't remember what she said. I don't think I heard the words, just her voice as he let go and I ran out of the house. It was March, and I didn't have a jacket or my purse or anything. I walked down my driveway in socks and called my friend. She picked me up and I left.

My parents didn't trust me anymore since I sliced myself so my Grama came to stay with me. One particularly bad morning—after I had been staring at his picture all night on my phone—I was crying steadily and my arm was aching. It didn't sting; it ached. It felt like I had torn the ligaments or something because whenever I flexed, it ached. Not that I really know what torn ligaments feel like, but I suppose I can guess. My Grama heard me and came into my room. Stop it, she yelled. Then she started dancing, chanting about devils being gone or something. I screamed when I realized she was actually performing an exorcism on me. The old hag, old crazed religious hag was nuts enough to believe in all that nonsense. I wanted to throw my biology book at her. Read that old hag, read about Darwin and then tell me about Adam and Eve. I screamed at her to get out but she ignored me. She just stomped and waved her arms like Hitler—hands flexed with stiff straight movements. Her boobs swung around. It was disgusting. After a while I let her dance without complaint, but I could never stop crying. She gave me a wooden cross and kissed my forehead, told me I was free of all this now. When she went back downstairs for a nap I burnt the cross.

She left after a week. My parents told me to take the summer off. It was June, after all. I needed a break. I met a boy. He wasn't great looking, but he wasn't bad. His hair was cut too short and his clothes too big and sort of tacky, but I let him kiss me and hold my hand. I still loved the boy who caused my suicide line, but what could I do, really? After a couple months this new boy told me that he loved me. I didn't say it back at first. But then I did in a spur of the moment kind of thing. I don't really know if I loved him, but I said it so I tried to make it true. He was so different, almost too different. He didn't like to hear about my therapists and rubbed my suicide line with his thumb but never asked about it. I loved my suicide line. I was proud of it. It was a nice scar, protruding and white like a strange sliver. I liked people to see it, to question in their heads if I was one of those. You know, those, those people you avoid because deep down you don't want to hear their sorrows, real unhappiness right there in the flesh. You'd rather watch *Hamlet* or *Romeo & Juliet* or *Titanic* or some other fictional thing and feel that sadness, feel that kind of longing then empathize with some-

one real, physical. You don't want to hear the pain day after day. You say get over it, talk to someone else. Or, like the champion you are, you avoid that person altogether. I'm one of those, the people who you would write off to go to a therapist or go to a mental hospital. I like being that, I like seeing the lingering question in people's eyes.

One day when we were sitting, sweltering in his apartment, I told him I tried to kill myself. Yeah right. No really I did. He just nodded, stroking my suicide line. I did it because of boy, you know. I loved him before you. He nodded again. I could see that gleam in his eye. He was wondering if I would try to kill myself when he left me. He was picturing me so madly tormented by my love for him that I would hang myself, or, or could it be possible that I'd do something more dramatic? Cut my wrists in a tub full of rose petals; overdose surrounded by his picture. I was insulted by these gleams of thought, but I liked him to think them. It had been a year and we didn't really speak of it, and even after this year I wasn't sure if I loved him. I knew I loved him, but I didn't know if I was in love with him, the way Juliet loved Romeo or Isolde loved Tristan or Helen loved Paris. We had gotten into a fight, and in my rage—which is really just an agitated state of crying—I finally told him that I always thought about suicide. He promptly broke up with me. Said he couldn't be with someone like me. Said he wouldn't be the cause. Said he couldn't deal with it. Not anymore, he wanted no part of it.

When I hung up the phone I took off my clothes and grabbed my dog. I turned on the shower. I needed the heat. I stepped in, puppy in my arms, and then my legs gave out. Well not gave out, but they stopped working at least. I slid down to the tub floor, my face being pelted by the shower. I held onto my puppy and cried. He licked my cheek continuously, never really uttering a word of protest even though he hated water. I cried until my cheeks went numb and my teeth felt tingly and my stomach was sore. When I started breathing hard, fast, I turned off the water. I needed to be cold. I wanted to feel snow. I lay on the bottom of the tub, my feet high up, resting on the shampoo wrack, the puppy lying beside me. I let the water turn cold. I let its heat go away, and in the blissful coolness I fell asleep.

I woke up because the dog was shivering. I wrapped him in a towel and dried him off. Tears were still pouring out of my eyes. He left me and I went back and lay on the bottom of the tub. When I put my legs up again my shampoo fell down. It fell, bounced and somehow knocked a naked glass baby off a low shelf. The baby shattered. I took a piece of glass and fingered it carefully. Its edges were tugging at my skin. I took it and looked at myself in the mirror. Even through the fading fog I was a hideous shit. I should have never come out of the womb. I fingered the glass again. I imagined it running down my arm. It would be a long enveloping line this time. It was still too hot in the bathroom. I needed snow. I opened the window above the toilet and crawled out onto the roof. There was still a light layer of snow that hadn't melted, and here I was lying naked in it. I could see my neighbors staring at me, at my breasts and my crotch. The snow was blissfully cold. My fingers were numbing as I fingered the glass. My arms were numbing as I passed it back and forth. I started to shake a little as my toes went numb, and then the back of my head began to throb from the snow. Oh the beautiful snow. I kept playing with the glass. I was one of those. I wondered if any of them thought I'd lie naked like this, play with my toy. I closed my eyes as I fell asleep.

Knox

Galen Knox
Cake Box

“She was always like that,” the old man insisted. “All flighty and depressive and shit.”

I squinted hard, trying to make out his face in the bright sun. Cotton stuck to my skin, sweat cooled only by the breeze from the open door.

“Well don’t just stand there and ask dumb questions boy, come on inside, sit down or something. And put that crap somewhere,” he barked, tapping the coffee table with his cane as he passed the nearby La-Z-Boy. As I stepped in, I placed my “crap,” a greeting card and a stale cake, on the table next to stacks of old magazines and a number of yet-unfinished alcohol bottles. I tried to sit opposite from the old man, taking position on the end of a couch. He continued to mill about, never sitting.

“So, how did you know Ms. Cuthbert?” I asked. Probably a good place to start, I thought.

“We were, old friends, that’s all. For a while though, we were coworkers. That was nice,” he trailed off, tapping his cane against table and chair legs, staring out the windows. From where I was even his mailbox was obscured by distorted light bouncing off the pavement. I wiped my forehead against my sleeve.

“This place is listed as her last known address. Your home, that is. Do you actually expect me to believe you two had nothing to do with each other besides a professional relationship?” I asked, picking at the my pants, hoping the sweat hadn’t vacuum sealed them to my legs yet. Regrettably, he continued dithering, passing his hands over the mantle piece and stopping to glance at picture frames. I couldn’t tell if he was reminiscing or just had never been there before.

“Oh, oh right. She moved out years ago, I think. Or months, all the same to me. I actually bought the place from her. Needed a place after coming back into the country, and she needed a buyer to help her leave. I’d say it’s more of that professional relationship shit, yeah.” As he spoke, he closed

his eyes slowly, opening them only in the last words. He swore more when he made eye contact. I peeled my collar away from my neck and looked around the room for a door into the kitchen. Kitchens had fridges, which contained water. I felt stupid for having a tie on in the weather, but not as dumb as I did for not knowing who the hell this guy was.

“This isn’t one of those ‘sorry for your loss’ visits, is it? If so, I ain’t giving you any water, and Im’a keep the cake.” he said. He was sizing me up, grinding his teeth visibly.

“Oh lord no, I just was in town and hadn’t visited her in years. Thought a cake, you know, it being today and all.”

“Ain’t her birthday. You one of her kids? Buggers never remember shit.”

I was a little caught off guard, figuring he’d fall for that. Guess he did know her. The house was decorated like she still lived there though.

“I’m sorry sir, perhaps I’m being strange. Would it be a terrible imposition to ask for some water, perhaps as you tell me how you and Ms. Cuthbert met?” By the time I worked up the nerve to ask I was audibly panting. It was almost worse that he didn’t seem bothered by the heat at all. Just watching him pace, and staring out the windows at the crisped grass made me thirstier. He pointed his cane to the back of the room, at a doorway that escaped my notice until now.

“Water pitchers in the fridge. Taps finicky today. Grab me a beer and I’ll tell you about it,” he directed. Little made me feel more like a child than pouring myself water and handing him beer.

“The beer wasn’t in the fridge, are you sure that’s alright?” I asked, answered by the old man before I finished speaking.

“Nah, it’s fine. Cold beer is for sissies and Americans,” he said. I wasn’t sure if that meant he wasn’t American, or if he was just being a prick. It was both, I suppose. As the cold of the glass nearly stung my hand, I could think of nothing better. It was so refreshing, even if it was gritty. I pretended his beer was cold too, just so I didn’t pass out from thinking about it.

“I still remember that day like it was yesterday,” he continued, “to be cliché about it. It was brisk autumn, you know, the kind where you can

smell the cold. Leaves had any damn color they pleased, and went wherever they felt like it. We were in high school then, gym class I think. I can still remember the taste of her lips.”

If it wasn't so needed to survive the sweat-box of a living room I was in, I would have spit out my water. There was at least a couple things wrong with his story. Namely thinking of Ms. Cuthbert in that way.

“Wait, so, you knew her before the surgeries? If you're not lying you're about the only one who does. That's...” I was interrupted by his smile. It was snake like, predatory, made me feel like I just made a grave mistake.

“So you knew Lisa that way, huh boy? You are one of her kids, eh? Adopted or from her classes?” he asked, laughing in the way only old men and murderers could. I guess that's all it was. I let some info slip to him. He was starting to creep me out, though.

“Well, either way. Lisa and I met on the first day of gym class my sophomore year of high school. Trees bustling, shimmering lake, all that crap. I guess I went to a nice school or something if there was a lake, but I could have just imagined it. Either way, I remember seeing her first on a swing set in one of those scenes. You know, out of place, young woman on a swing set, wind and falling leaves, single crack of light pouring in from the sky to illuminate only her and all that rot. I knew around then nothing was ever going to happen between us. It was too perfect. And lo and behold, I'm talking to her kid, who I never met before, in what used to be her living room, and not a one of us know where she is, right?”

“That's about the sum of it, sir. So, what was she like back then? I heard she was...”

“She passed well. The bob-cut wasn't flattering though. Total waste on such a bombshell of a redhead. She talked a mile a minute, and next to no one could keep up, save me, or so I liked to think. Always nervous, protecting herself with strange ticks and well timed excuses.”

“Excuses?”

“Yeah, you know, leaving the room for the bathroom rather than answering a question, that kind of stuff. Was hard to pin her down though. I guess I lucked out that first time.”

“So you two, actually?”

“Nah, never. I fucking wish. I got a soft pair of lips one or twice in the first decade, and nothing for the next bunch. Hell, didn’t get so much as a ‘hey how are you’ for the middle bunch. I think she only remembered me because everyone else died or moved away by then. Best for last, eh?” he laughed, then coughed, swigging his room temperature beer in the considerably higher than that room. I shifted in my seat a bit, the sun and awkwardness of discussing the old man’s love affairs making me uncomfortable. I gave him a polite smile and a less than polite sarcastic laugh, sipping at my water. More than half of it had poured out onto the table from condensation by then. He walked to the barren fireplace, resting his back against the mantle.

“Great blue eyes, too. Like crushed diamonds. Pretty sure she still had those when you knew her though. I remember one day, snow up to our waists, and all I could make out was those eyes and a lock of that hair against steel gray skies. She was an ice-queen for a while. All toothy grins and no affection for anyone. Well, not for me anyway. I think I was boffing one of her friends out of desperation at that point,” he finished, with a laugh like sand paper. My water was empty, and the condensation taunted me from its puddle on the coffee table. My greeting card got a little wet. I think at this point it’d be better to buy her a new one whenever I find her.

“So, to the point,” I interjected, before he could tell me another fragment of a story, “you don’t know where Ms. Cuthbert went, right?”

“I stopped stalking her at least twenty years ago, boy. Didn’t get me nowhere. Though if I knew where she was right now, I wouldn’t be drinking fucking sand and talking to a mouth-breather,” he barked, suddenly flopping down into the ignored La-Z-Boy. “So what now? Just here to taunt me into remembering and running off without letting me whine at you? Or are you gonna talk some?”

I fought the urge to just tell him I was there to taunt him, and leave. It was tempting, but I think I was more taken aback by his sudden

emotion than anything. I could see the grip on his cane was tighter, shakier than when I walked in. I think he was actually starting to sweat now too.

“I figure I’d just let you whine some more, if I find Ms. Cuthbert, I’ll let her know you care though,” I said, smiling. He tightened the grip on his cane. It felt too rude to leave, but messing with him seemed like it could help me get an easier exit. Besides, I owed him a little more attention for giving me water, at minimum. I actually dreaded the thought of getting back into my car to leave at this point. Why did I buy leather seats? As my thoughts trailed off, I noticed the old man get strangely calm.

“I’m sure she’s aware,” he stated plainly. “It wasn’t all one sided, you know. Lisa had her times chasing after me. I was just too busy being far far away at the time. Funny thing is, I was usually far away cause I was running away from her.” He chuckled and wheezed, resting his cane on the table in front of him. “There was one occasion where I had taken her to a charity or something, as a favor, I guess. I was seeing someone else at the time, and Lisa got pretty smashed. She spent half the night trying to tell me my fiance was no good for me, and that I deserved better. I was too much of a gentleman to pay any mind. Fucking stupid.”

I didn’t really believe him, but there was something about the way he stared idly at the table while he talked, hands folded over the lap of too-tight khaki slacks. I opened the cake box, and gestured at it with the prepackaged plastic knife. He denied it with a timid hand wave. After what seemed like a minute of watching the moment grow stale, I decided I should say something.

“So, you mentioned there was a decade or so where she wouldn’t even talk to you. Um, what’d you do?”

“That’s presumptuous.”

“Well.”

“Nah, it’s alright. Just like before, I was trying to get away from her, and she suddenly decided to not be a bitch for once. I didn’t even know she was in town. It was spring, warm, the snow was melting just a bit and the streets smelled like sewage because of it. I was in the local pub, being a brat,

and yelling up a storm about how I didn't need her. More precisely, about how I wanted kids, so I shouldn't even pay her any mind."

I cringed, apparently visibly. He stopped his story to give me a sympathetic nod.

"That would do it. So how did you get in touch with her since then?"

"I waited a year or two. Tried to find out where she moved to. Wrote but never sent apologies. Until one day, about twenty years later, by chance, we were working at the same school. We had a professional relationship from then on."

I took it from his long gaze into the distance that I shouldn't bring up that I never heard of him before. I mean, I might of, but never in any way more interesting than a name without a face. I might have mentioned that I was kind of bored, and only morbidly curious to have him go on. I might have told him stories about my mother, and how we came to separate, and why I called her by her name. I might have. But I didn't.

Scucci

Rob Scucci

What Would Jack Kerouac Do?

This poem is shit. I'm reaching too far once again.
Another cluster of mundane metaphors.
I'll hide myself behind tropes and allusions,
a half-baked version of myself.
I'm a pussy, concealed behind false diction.
Thoughts are seldom important and often premeditated.
I can't think on my feet,
only on paper with
fancy five dollar words.
A fictional melody with a familiar hook.

The tale of the tortured soul complex.
"Woe is me," and such.
Do you believe any of this?
I sure hope you don't.

Unrequited love is for suckers
who lack persistence.
Keep dreaming, you jerk-offs.
Clichés exist for a reason.
"Nice guys just plain never finish."
They're too busy being pushovers.
I'm a pushover.
I'm a poet.

I vent against all conventions;
a bitter twenty-something
who probably drinks too much.
I probably smoke too much pot.
Let's get abstract, man.
Go to mars, dude.
I just quit smoking cigarettes,
I'm tired of looking cool.
You might call this "inspired,"
but I call it pathetic.
I'm pathetic.
I'm a poet.

I'm sure I have exciting prose inventions.
About inane events that you have no care for.
Luckily for me, flowered language
can make the mundane sound like such wonderful bullshit.
These words are from nowhere special.
They mean nothing to me.
My sense of self will never
break past the conventions of fiction.
Always one step behind my ideal,
I'll never be good enough.

I hope you hate this poem.
I'll be glad so long as I never inspire you.
Find your own way.
Stop depending on the advice of others.
Fucking vultures.
Nobody becomes anybody.
We all rot in the same ground.
It's all a hungry worm conspiracy.

I can't make myself numb anymore,
but I can pretend. I can pretend.
Graphite gives me solace.
I hope it gives you nothing.
I hope these words never last,
torn out of whatever paperback.
A new tissue for old poets.
I'm a poet.
This is my art,
and I can't get over myself.

Michael Bonaldo
Memorial Day

Jack returned from the Port-O-Potty and sat next to Abby on the tailgate of their Trailblazer without saying a word. He'd opened the tailgate so they could watch the parade from the shade, and Abby's fair skin wouldn't burn. Though the back of Jack's trunk wasn't particularly comfortable it was better than dealing with a sunburned wife for the next week. The crowd was beginning to gather and people who hadn't seen one another for a while said their usual hellos and engaged in mindless chit-chat. Jack looked into the small crowd of around a hundred and recognized almost half the people there. The Greens, whose daughter had gone to high school with Jack, were talking to the Smiths, who lived next door to Jack and Abby. The Fitzgeralds, who owned the local garage, sat in fold out chairs two sizes too small for their oversized bodies and held a conversation with their youngest daughter.

Little old ladies dressed in their Sunday best strolled down the road with their husbands, selling poppies to help raise money for the local VFW. Jack reached into the back pocket of his cut off cargo pants and pulled out his worn wallet. He grabbed a crisp five dollar bill. He would refuse to take a poppy. He'd much rather just give the money than take the worthless piece of metal wire and cray-paper. "You don't have to give them a five you know," Abby said to Jack.

"I know," Jack replied, "but it's going to a good cause."

Ever since Jack had gotten back from Iraq, not much mattered to him, not even money. Jack folded his wallet back up, leaned forward, and put it into the rear pocket of his shorts, where it fit so perfectly. He looked to his right, hoping that the parade would start at any minute. He and Abby had been camped out in the parking lot of the old firehouse for the past half hour and he was getting restless. He looked to his left and saw the swarm of people migrating to the nearly full lot. Poor bastards, he thought to himself, they'll have to stand for the entire parade. Though he was happy that he was able to have a somewhat comfortable seat for the parade, Jack wished he

could be one of them. He wished he could be one of those people who showed up just in the nick of time and not forty-five minutes early. The Marine Corps had distorted his sense of being on time. If your ten minutes early, you're five minutes late they always said. Jack had always gotten pissed when Abby would take an hour and a half to get ready. How could it take anyone that long to get ready? He could be ready in five minutes if he had to be. His heart began to race. His eyes darted back and forth. He couldn't concentrate on any one particular thing for more than a few seconds.

"You all right?" Abby asked.

"Yeah, I'm fine," Jack replied.

"You look like you want to be somewhere else."

"I'm just ready to get this parade started. There's a ton of stuff to do at home before the party." Jack and Abby decided that since Jack was now a combat veteran it would be appropriate to have a Memorial Day picnic. They needed to get home immediately after the parade to start setting up. There was macaroni salad to make, ziti to bake, fruit to slice, and Jack had to get the grill started and make his special cocktail. Two parts vodka, one part light beer and a couple packets of Crystal Lite pink lemonade. Jack refused to tell anyone what was in it before they drank it because he knew they would never try it if he did. But once they tried it they were hooked. Jack wouldn't be drinking any of his cocktail today. He had gone out and gotten a keg of Sam Summer for this occasion.

Jack heard the whining sirens of a fire truck and knew the parade was heading his way. The parade proceeded like any other parade in any other town in any other state throughout the country. The local fire department, led by Abby's uncle Warren, who was dressed in his over-starched blue and white uniform, crested the hill and began their descent towards a new set of families, including Jack and Abby, that had now grown to a few hundred people. The procession of fire trucks had all made their way over the hill and past the Presbyterian Church when the local middle school's marching band appeared. The pre-teen musicians played the "Star Spangled Banner", "The Marine Corps Hymn", and several others that Jack knew the tunes of but wasn't sure what the names were.

As the band passed he felt the rumbling of attack helicopters that no doubt had flown over multiple other parades that morning. He looked up towards the crisp blue sky that was partly scattered with perfectly formed cumulus clouds. He scanned the sky from left and right, trying to figure out which direction they were coming from. Before he could, he saw them coming directly down the path of the parade and instantly he knew they were Cobras. The same kind that had supported his mission in Fallujah. Jack closed his eyes and sat there silently, the distinct thump, thump, thumping of the rotor blades reverberated through his truck and his legs began to tremble with the vibration. Explosions in the not so far distance shook the surrounding buildings as bits of loose concrete fell from above and landed on his Kevlar helmet. The acrid smell of freshly burnt flesh stung his nostrils. The sounds grew in intensity as the jets passed directly over his head and Jack could feel a tingling running throughout his body. The orders of his squad leader telling him to get down echoed through his ears; there was a 500 pound bomb about to be detonated a few blocks from his position. All at once the vibration ended, the jet passed, and the band faded into the distance. Eerie silence, the same silence Jack had experienced after a firefight. A silence so quiet that the voices in his head sounded like shouts. He opened his eyes and released his vice like grip from the bumper. Jack pretended to glance around calmly, though if anybody could see his dilated pupils they would surely know that he was anything but calm. He knew he couldn't be here now. "I'll be right back. I gotta go to the bathroom," Jack said to Abby.

"Ok," she replied.

Jack hopped out of his truck and weaved his way through the crowd toward the Port-O-Potty. He got about halfway there and looked over his shoulder to see if anybody was watching him, and when he was sure they weren't, he made a hard right and walked to the back of the abandoned firehouse. He picked up his pace, each stride longer than the next, hoping that no one would catch him. He reached the middle of the long brick wall, sat on the ground facing the motionless forest fifteen feet away, rested his elbows on his knees and placed his forehead in his hands.

was the first time Jack had experienced anything this intense since

his return. He had moved back to Connecticut with his wife who had already rented one of the few apartments in their rustic New England town, and life resumed as it had before he left. He had started school in the spring, and as far as Jack could tell, everything was normal. He had met with a counselor at the VA and after a 45 minute question and answer period it was determined that Jack didn't have PTSD, and that the feelings he did have were normal for war vets. He told himself that today too was normal. That it was normal to have triggers that reminded him of being Iraq. He just hadn't been sure what they were yet, or how bad he would react when he was reminded, but now he knew at least one.

Jack reached into his pocket and pulled out an unopened tin of Copenhagen. He dug his nail into the side and slid it around the edge to break the seal. Jack snapped the tin between his fingers, opened the lid and pinched the fine black granules between his thumb and forefinger. He placed it into his lip and sat there. Jack could instantly feel his body start to relax as the nicotine wove its way through his veins. He sat there for a few minutes, decompressing, knowing that if he took any longer Abby would get suspicious that he really hadn't gone to the bathroom. Jack stood up, spit his Cope out, and began walk back to the crowded mass of people wearing red, white and blue. As he arrived back at his truck, Abby's father, who was standing beside Abby asked, "When are you going to ride in the parade?"

"Maybe next year." Jack had been asked this question by a few people when they found out he wasn't. Every time he was asked, he responded with the same stock answer, though he had no intention of ever riding in the Memorial Day parade, or any other parade for that matter. Jack didn't feel right riding in the parade.

"Come sit down," Abby said to Jack. Jack walked over to the back of his truck and took his seat next to Abby. He looked at her and saw the fake, forced smile that he had been accustomed to. She had known that he hadn't gone to the bathroom, but he could tell that she didn't want to discuss it, at least not at this moment. "Perfect day for a parade and picnic, huh. We sure lucked out."

"I know, right," Jack said. "I just can't wait to get the party started."

Jack knew that once his party started and people were having a good time he wouldn't have to think about Iraq for a while.

"You're not gonna drink too much are you?" Abby asked.

"Me? Drink too much? Of course not." Jack and Abby sat next to each other for the next half hour in a comfortable silence. He sat there watching all the veterans pass in their convertibles thinking to himself how lucky he was that he didn't have to fight in any of their wars. The WWII, Vietnam and Korea vets were the real heroes to Jack. They were the ones who had faced nonstop fighting for months on end. They were the ones who had watched half of their platoons get killed. They were the ones who had come home just to be called "Baby Killers." All Jack had to do was really only one month of fighting. He had never witnessed any of his friends get killed, though he had seen a few of their dead bodies. He came home to parades and open arms. Jack was just happy that he was alive to throw a party in honor of all those who couldn't be there. The parade wound down when the last state trooper drove his cruiser up the hill to the community school and the people in the crowd gathered up their belongings and headed home.

"Ready?" Abby asked

"Yep." Jack opened the driver's door, jumped in, and turned the ignition.

Jack walked into the kitchen, past the overfull grocery bag and straight into his bedroom. He needed to change out of his parade garb into his party outfit. He walked over to his dresser and opened up his shirt drawer and pulled out his favorite. The shirt was drab olive green with his unit logo on the front left chest and a bloody warrior holding a double sided axe on the back, above the phrase:

"People spend an entire lifetime wondering if they made a difference in the world.

Marines don't have that problem."

He knew the bloody warrior wasn't really appropriate, but he didn't care. It was the phrase that mattered most to him.

Jack walked back into the kitchen to help Abby unpack the groceries and saw his Mother-in-Law, Janet.

“Hi sweetie,” Janet said with her usual smile.

“Hey. I didn’t even hear you come in,” Jack said as he kissed her on the cheek. He walked over to the table and helped Abby and her mother unpack the groceries. Abby had insisted on going all out for the party. For her, that meant that there wouldn’t be your normal picnic food. There would be macaroni salad of course, but her macaroni salad came from some fancy recipe from the Food Network and consisted of foods Jack had never heard of before.

“Jack, once you’re done unpacking I need you to start some water boiling for the macaroni salad, then I need you to...”

“Woah,” Jack interrupted. “I have stuff to do too ya know.”

“Yeah, but this stuff needs to be done now.” Why is her stuff so much more important than mine, he thought. But he didn’t want to start an argument this early in the afternoon, so he kept his mouth shut. Jack and Abby weren’t a couple that argued a lot, but since his return from Iraq, he felt like she would nag him about every little thing he did, or didn’t do. He knew that she would probably be on his case later for one thing or another. He might as well save himself a little bit of trouble if he could. He reluctantly grabbed a pot from under the counter, filled it up with water and continued following Abby’s orders until the first guests arrived

“I gotta get the grill started. People will be showing up soon and they’re going to be hungry,” Jack said.

“What about all the rest of the food in here?” Abby asked.

“Listen, it’s not my fault you chose to do all the fancy recipes. It wouldn’t have taken so damn long to make if you just realized that people would be happy with hot dogs, hamburgers and some other normal food, not all your fancy shit.” He grabbed a pint glass out of the cabinet, turned his back and began his walk outside. Jack walked through the living room and toward the small section of fenced in yard that, although it was for everybody in the apartment to use, nobody but Jack and Abby ever did. He

opened his little shed that contained all his outdoor equipment, grabbed a bag of charcoal, a lighter and the tap for his keg.

By mid-afternoon the party was well underway. People were enjoying themselves, catching up with friends they hadn't seen in a while, playing bocce while debating whose ball was closer to the poleen. Jack manned the grill with his constantly full glass of beer, talking to Larry, his brother-in-law about the new tattoo that he wanted to get. "I've been thinking of expanding the tattoo on my leg. Make it a full leg sleeve. All Marine Corps stuff, whadya think?" Larry was a cop near the local casino and a few years older than Jack. He was also a bit of a redneck, so Jack figured a full leg tattoo would be cool to him.

"That would be sweet. I've been thinking of getting a new one myself." Larry turned around and pointed to a spot on his left shoulder blade. "Something like a shield and all the names of my buddies who died while on duty."

"How many?" Jack asked.

"Oh...Probably not as many as you... four."

"That's more than me. Only three people I really knew died. I knew a bunch more that died, but only knew 'em a little bit."

"Yeah, but you still knew them."

"True, but it's different. You know. It's like if a cop from a nearby town died. You probably met him a few times, but you really didn't know him."

"Yeah, you're right." Larry took a swig of beer and after an awkward silence asked "How you doing today? It must be tough"

"I'm doing all right." Jack turned around and flipped over a couple of burgers that didn't need flipping and threw a couple of more hot dogs on the grill.

As the sun was beginning to set most of the older guests had left, and Jack was refilling his glass when Abby's uncle stood up. Warren, who had had a few too many beers, was one of those guys who always never knew when to keep his mouth shut. He would always make inappropriate comments at inappropriate times.

“Everybody...Everybody listen up...I just want to take a minute and remind everybody why we are here today. So...here’s a toast to Jack. We couldn’t be more proud of you for all that you’ve done, and we are so happy that you are home safe and sound.” Warren raised his glass and slammed back the rest of his drink. Everybody else raised their glasses, took a sip and clapped. Jack raised his glass and swallowed every last drop he had just poured. He was never one to like attention especially this day. Jack didn’t think this day was for him. It was for all the veterans who died while serving. If people wanted to praise him on Veterans Day then fine, he would accept it and move on gracefully. But today was a day to remember the fallen. And for Jack it was a day to remember Morgan, Brian and Byron, his friends who had died. All of a sudden the feelings that had been suppressed by nearly a gallon of beer came swelling up through his body. It started in his legs with a slight weakening of the knees, kept moving upwards through his chest and right into his eyes where his pain always seemed to escape.

Jack poured himself another and walked into his apartment and straight into his bedroom. He sat on the edge of his bed, flipped open his phone and pulled up his contact list. There it was. Leon. Leon and Jack had become friends during their first deployment. They weren’t in the same company, but while they were on ship together they became bonded through a common love for poker. They would spend Friday night through Sunday morning playing, only getting away to eat and use the bathroom.

While in Iraq Jack and Leon didn’t see each other often, 3 or 4 days if they were lucky. But if they could visit each other, they did. They passed time by playing poker, talking about what they would do when they got back stateside and even occasionally drinking some bootleg whiskey that they had smuggled back into their battalion base.

Jack hit send on his phone and the line on the other end began to ring. Each time the phone rang, Jack got more and more anxious. “Hello.” Leon finally answered.

“Hey, it’s Jack.”

“Oh man, what’s going on?” Leon asked. Leon had a distinctive

southern drawl that was even more prominent now that he had been stationed in Louisiana about a month ago.

“Nothin. I just called to say happy Memorial Day.” Jack thought it was odd to say happy Memorial Day when it made him so sad.

“You too. What are you up to today?”

“I’m having a little party, what about you?”

“Nothing much, getting settled in down here.”

“How have you been?” Jack asked, hoping he knew what he meant.

“I’m doing pretty well. Today’s tough. I keep thinking about Brian and Byron.”

“I know. I keep thinking about Morgan. Especially today.” Morgan Strader and Jack had been in the same squad but had gotten separated when they were ambushed in Fallujah. Jack had ended up several buildings away and couldn’t help him when he was shot in the head. “Everybody wants to say thanks to me and all that shit. That’s all fine, but they don’t realize what this day means to us. It’s tough seeing everybody having a good time and whatnot when all I can really think about is Iraq and all the memories it brings with it.” Jack could feel himself starting to breakdown. He tried to hold it back but knew inside that that was the reason he called. “All these people, and nobody even knows what today is for. I just wish...” his voice trailed off into silence. He tried to take a deep breath, but his nose was clogged and he had to breathe through his mouth. “All these fucking people...” once again his voice went silent. Tears started to flow down his unshaven face. Jack rested the phone on the bed as his neck went limp and his head fell forward.

Several seconds passed. “JACK,” Leon yelled into the phone.

“Yeah, sorry. I’m here. It’s just tough man, you know.” Jack didn’t know what else to say.

“I know. I think about those guys all the time,” Leon said. Jack wiped the tears from his face and tried to compose himself before he began to speak again.

“Oh, man. Sorry about that, I’ve had a few today.” Jack felt embarrassed and better all at the same time.

“No worries man. Sometimes shit gets to me too.”

“All right. Well...listen. I gotta get back to my party. I’ll call you in a few days though. Alright?”

“Yeah. Definitely,” Leon said. “Later.”

“Later man.” Jack turned his phone off, stood up, and put it back into his pocket. He strolled over to the bathroom to compose himself. He wanted to make sure nobody knew he was crying. He stood at the sink for a few minutes, and washed his face. Every time he looked into the mirror he saw his dead friends. He imagined Morgan’s body laying in a pool of blood on a rooftop with a single, small hole in his forehead. He remembered Byrons’ body laying face down just outside of a doorway in the “Hell House” of Fallujah. A single bullet to the head also did him in, just like it had done to Morgan. He looked into the mirror one last time and saw his own face. He mouthed the words “I miss you,” into it, dried his face and left the bathroom.

He walked outside, back into his party, and ran into Abby. She was the last person he wanted to see. No matter how well he thought he had composed himself Abby always had a knack for knowing when something was bothering him. “Hey,” Jack said.

“Everything all right? You were inside for a while,” Abby asked in an unexpectedly pleasant voice.

“Yeah, Leon called. He wanted to say happy Memorial Day.”

“How’s he doing?”

“He’s doing well. Where are you going?” Jack questioned.

“We need more cups. Do you know where there are any more?”

“In the cupboard above the sink.”

“Ok. Thanks.” Abby turned around and headed inside. Jack wondered why Abby didn’t say anything to him about the way he looked. Maybe she’s just really caught up trying to make sure everyone is happy, he thought. Jack continued his march back to the grill. There were still a few burgers left.

As the end of the night came only a few of Jack’s buddies from school were around. His school had quite a few veterans, and a lounge that

was only for the vets. Jack had become good friends with a few. They sat around a fire one of them had built, one-upping each other with stories about Iraq or Afghanistan. Jack broke into the conversation with a story about Fallujah. “My squad got called to assist another squad from my company that had gotten ambushed and had gotten trapped inside. We had to support them and fight our way through the building. I think there was something like ten Purple Hearts and two Navy Crosses awarded from that firefight. Two Navy Crosses! That’s how bad it was. One guy died and two more almost died. If the two that almost died did die, they probably would have gotten the Medal of Honor. That’s how fucking bad it was.” Jack didn’t want to tell the others that that was also the house where Byron was killed and that he helped drag his lifeless body out the front door.

Behind them, Abby quietly cleaned up the empty cups and plates of half eaten food. She folded up the unused chairs and went back inside where she was most likely about to clean the kitchen. Each story the guys told kept getting louder and louder with each beer that they drank.

Around one in the morning the last of the crew left. Jack walked back inside after the usual “get home safe” speech and peered into the bedroom to see Abby clutching her pillow sound asleep in their bed. The outside light shone through the window and Jack could see the blankets wrapped tightly around her body like a cocoon. He stood there for moment, resting his head against the doorframe and wondered what she was dreaming about.

He walked into the yard and poured himself another beer. He lifted the keg from the ice to gauge how much was left. Only 4 or 5 left, he thought, I can finish this before the night is done.

Jack walked back to his chair and slumped down in it. He embraced the heat radiating from the fire and enjoyed watching the embers flying upwards toward the starry sky; it reminded him of the night just before he went into Fallujah. That night he had been sitting in a foxhole just north of the city. He and the rest of his battalion sat and watched as planes, helicopters, and artillery dropped so much ammunition they wondered if there was going to be anything left for them the next morning. They watched as

white phosphorous illuminated the sky and rained down on insurgents. They watched as buildings and cars were blown up, and listened so they could hear the destruction several seconds after it happened. He draped his arm over the side of his chair and sat there, mind drifting between two worlds. He thought of the morning he entered the city. How the early morning sun hadn't yet burned off the fog. How when he exited the back of his armored vehicle it all seemed like it wasn't real. How the AK-47 and M-16 rounds cracking in sporadic volleys a few blocks away seemed too far away too hurt him. He stood up and shook his head to clear his thoughts, as if he could just shake away the memories, and walked over to the gate in the white fence that led to the rest of the communal backyard. Jack walked along the stone wall that barricaded the yard from the road. He followed the wall as it turned left at the edge of the property. The wall continued until it ran into the treeline, where the backyard ended and the woods began. Jack followed the treeline behind the house, his hands in his pockets fidgeting with his keys. He walked around the house and into the gravel parking lot, continuing back around the house, past the grill that earlier had been the center of attention, but now as was left open and unused, only to end up at the fire. By now the flames had died down, but the embers were still red hot, even hotter than before. He chugged his beer and poured himself another. Again he sat back down in his chair.

Jack flipped his phone open and pulled up the call log. The last call: 6:38 – Leon Sheely. He sat there thinking about how good it felt to talk to someone, not that they had much of a conversation. Why do I always do this to myself? he questioned. Jack was halfway through his beer when he heard the screen door open. He closed his phone and put it back into his pocket while he used to the sleeve of his sweatshirt to rub the wetness out of his eyes. He didn't want Abby to see him like this.

"Jack," Abby whispered.

"Yeah," Jack said back.

"It's almost two o'clock. What are you doing?"

"Nothing. Just sitting here." He heard the door close. Abby was on her way over. She walked up beside him, grabbed a chair and pulled it close

to his. She sat there beside him and rubbed his back, just like a mother would do to a child.

“What’s the matter?” she asked.

“Nothing, why?”

“Because you’ve been out here for over an hour.”

“So I guess you weren’t sleeping?” Jack asked. He didn’t want to look at her.

“Well it’s kinda hard with you and all your buddies practically screaming at the top of your lungs.” Jack hadn’t realized how loud they had been. But then again Abby was a light sleeper anyways. Then Abby’s tone changed. “Why don’t you ever tell me the stories you tell your buddies?”

Jack looked up at Abby. He turned his body so her arm could no longer reach his back, took a deep breath and said, “Because you never asked.”

Abby sat there for a brief moment, silent. “Well. I’m asking now,” Abby said. “I want you to be able to tell me whatever you want to.”

“No you don’t. You don’t really want to know what happened over there.”

“Yes. I do. I want to hear these things,” Abby replied.

“I can see it in your eyes. You don’t really want to know.”

“I just want you to be okay, that’s all.”

“You want me to be okay? So I’m not okay now? How am I not okay?”

“I...I don’t know. I just don’t think that anybody can be okay once they’ve been over there.”

“I’m fine. I’m the same person that I was before I left, I just need a little time to readjust to being back in the states. That’s all.”

“I just think that you need somebody to talk to. You have all these feelings and all these emotions boiling up inside you. It’s not healthy Jack.”

“Who am I going to talk to? Nobody here understands the shit I went through.”

“There are people at the VA. They’re trained to help you there.”

Bonaldo

“I’ve been to the VA. It didn’t help. Those people have never been through what I have. All they’re gonna give me is some psychoanalytic bullshit. How do they know what it’s like to get shot at? How do they know what it’s like to have your friend die, and you can’t think about it right then?”

Jack placed his head in his hands and took a deep breath. When he looked back up at Abby, tears were flowing freely down his face. Abby bent forward and wrapped her arms tightly around him

“We’ll get through this. We’ll do whatever it takes.”

Folio 2010

John Denver
Reverend Nathan Zillionaire

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Bulthuis
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David Nathaniel Bulthuis
Nathan Zillionaire Bulthuis
Chinese Trigonometry Teacher
Downtown Chicago Clark and Belmont
Scitzo-Effective
10 Million Dollars Cash From Geico
Elmhurst Illinois
Hillside Illinois
SSI SSDI Medicare
NP Nehemiah Psalms NP Native Pride
NP New Plants
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Trillion Years From Now.



Folio Staff, Denver, CO 2010

(Left to Right: Mike DeSanti, Heather Frodsham, Paul Johnson,
Jared Emerling, Peter Cunningham, Andrzej Dutkanicz)

A Note on John Denver

The author of the poem on the opposing page is named John Denver (no relation to the late singer). Though largely ignored by the literary mainstream, Denver's impact on American poetry is impossible to overstate. Born in 1900, he is the author of over seventy books of poetry and a dozen novels, and he has directly influenced writers as diverse as Charles Bukowski and Toni Morrison. The staff would like to thank Mr. Denver for submitting his poem "The Reverend Nathan Zillionaire," (from his chapbook, *Gumballs!*) for publication. It is our honor to include it in this volume of *Folio*.

Folio 2010

Special Thanks

WE THE STAFF WOULD LIKE TO THANK...

Jeff Mock, Tim Parrish, Robin Troy, Vivian Shipley, Tom Dorr, Josh Gister, Jerry Dunklee, Jeffrey Voccola, Grey Jacobik, John Cavaliere, Illianne Corona from the Student Center, Brianna Marron, Bob and Gayle Emerling for the rides, coffees, and munchkins, Dan Sharoh, The Coen Brothers, Adam at Pour House, That guy Pete confused into giving up his double-breasted jacket, The Colorado Symphony Orchestra for bringing the New World to life, Mayor Big Blue Bear, Jack Gilbert, BarBar, Sci-Fi Burlesque at Bender's, Adam Nesteruk, Will Shortz and the NYT Crossword, Mexican Food (the restaurant, not the genre), Loretta Lynn, Ghost and Nimbus, Everyone at the Captain's House, Calvin Frodsham, Pizza on the East Coast, Jules Bakes and Elliot Pep McGuillicuddy Murderface Murderface Murderface Future Car, Big Wheel Matt, Charles Everett "The Virginia Woolfman" Taylor, Everyone who read at the monthly Folio events (you know who you are), Gay Enya, Shaw's, Kyle Tegler, Mr. and Mrs. Stephen Johnson, Oh Hell, All of Our Parents, Magical Realism and the Marquez/Borges/Calvino Triumvirate, Tom Dorr again, The Southern News, Delaney's, The all too often taken for granted durability of leather, Cat Stevens, Beer, Kentucky Straight Bourbon Whiskey, Xhenet Aliu, The Reverend Nathan Bulthuis Zillionaire, That super-friendly dude at the Convention Center, Pauline Lefevre and all the other Frenchettes we come across, the staff of Foster's Restaurant, Sam Calkins, Federal Reserve Chairman Ben Bernanke for doing the best he can damnit, the Dancing Statues in Denver, Bob, all the Dwarves except Snezy (he knows why), Newcastle, Guinness, Dogfish Head, Miller High Life, Jeff Bridges, Ourselves, and all the writers who submitted their hard work. Thanks.

BONALDO ~ BOZZUTO
CAYCEDO-KIMURA ~ COFFIN
CONWAY ~ CUNNINGHAM
DESANTI ~ DUTKANICZ
EMERLING ~ FRANK-HUTCHINSON
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