

Cassie and Ty

He must know how her eyes stare at him.
From his unmistakable crew cut on down
each brass button to polished patent
leather and back up crisp starched
creases and confetti breast of patches
finally landing on his nametag.
Only sometimes do they make it back
up to his square jaw and on rare
occasions they might meet his gaze.
But his eyes are faded, smoldering
like mortar shells gone screaming
through hell, sights stored in memory
reflex sense of smell. She wouldn't dare
ask, if he didn't want to tell. It drips
off him, wanting someone to understand
the first born son raised in an upper
class subdivision turned college drop
out left without meaning as a man.
Searching for approval he landed
in Afghanistan. Pride weighing heavy
as the machine gun in his soft hands,
He wonders, "How did this happen?"
Together they ask the same questions.
Too many limbs lost to a cause explained
only in catch phrases. Too many bullets fired
over rubble alleys of misinformation.
Too many graves dug to bury baby faces.

Sometimes she wishes the two of them
could trade places because he must know
how his eyes stare at her. From her unmistakable
knotted up locks on down each protest slogan
button to scuffed and muddied marching
boots and back up pants of patchwork trails
finally landing on her unbound breasts.
Only sometimes do they make it back
up to her square jaw and on rare occasions
they might meet her gaze. But her eyes
are faded, too long jaded by underestimated
significance of her countercultural presence
in the face of a leader who would rather
see her own brother die than admit to lying
about why the U.S. went to war. This is not a battle
over who loves our country more. This is a battle
to preserve our nation's values, conflicted as they are.
Hers is exactly the type of freedom he set out
to defend, yet believes is a too futile means to an end.
His is exactly the type of freedom she can never defend
because she believes it is a too brutal means to an end.
To be American is complicated, to say the least.
To err is human. We all make mistakes.
We all wonder why it takes so long to learn from them.
I learn from my friend and her peacemaking process
with her next of kin. Together around the dinner table
mediated by two loving parents they reconcile conflicts
that have baffled and plagued the greatest of nations.
God bless these heroes that they may lead my
generation.

Erin Livingston