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Soldier's Disease

Joshua Corson

I have very poor and unhappy brains for drinking.
—Cassio in *Othello*

O Cassio, there isn't a wedding, get-together, or dinner date where I'm not explaining myself: the weak constitution governing my lips, liver, and lungs—impulse's drum-line mobilizing my bones: a revolution in the blood. If only you'd been born 400 hundreds years later to Google our history: learn that soldiers coming home from the Civil War would lick their wounds with tongues covered in Laudanum. Addiction's first pseudonym: *soldier's disease*. Sweet, Cassio! I can see it in your eyes—the shores of Turkey dissolving into the sea, each dawn a harbinger of burnt flesh, the stench strung out across the Mediterranean—another tab another Venetian bar. I admit I wasn't at Gettysburg or Bull Run, but I wander this necropolis all the same—calling the names of comrades lost in the cross-fire. My war is one of dosage, prolonged surrender, my pride's stubborn handshake over a table made of gun powder. The battle-field's littered with half-men, grain growing through the holes in their heart where the snooter's bayonet cut them like wind. The friends who lived, wax poetic the house parties: the k-holes we fought our way out of, the medics we called captains—sometimes, it was just fun wasn't it: to throw oneself on the fire, watch all the selves inside you flash in the fish scale: son, junkie, general. Cassio, I don't blame you for taking the bait aged in barrels. You and I deserve a medal, if for nothing else than trying to save ourselves.