

Into the Cyclorama

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A RAG FOR MY FATHER

leisurely, not too fast

I say a man must see
his father's face at least
one time before he

learns to be the kind of man
who doesn't know what
man he wants to be.

♠

A father is a kind of trap
you could easily fall for.
A father is a type of map
you stupidly search for.

A man sets out to walk the barren desert of his father.
Finding nothing but the sand he says, *This land is cursed, my
father never lived here.*

A girl sets out to clear away the clutter of her father.
*On everything I own, she wails, but if I pitch his things my
attic would be bare.*

A father is a kind of trap
you easily fell for.

♠

What should we say? What can we write about
the men who are our fathers?

After the dinner plate that barely
missed my head,
after the epithets, the sketch he ripped (pastels
of the moonlit ocean)—

he would offer me a can of Coke,
pour it black and sizzling over ice cubes.
He would drink,

I would drink,
and so we downed our Lethe.

*What does it mean to be the daughter of
a man who doesn't know his father?*

He could tell
I hadn't thought like this before, the way
my face drooped, I crossed my legs.
The sun sets so late this time of year. As if
it still hasn't learned how to walk away.

♠

Forgive me Father for I have sinned I wished for
a different father

Forgive me Father for I have failed to wash away
my father's sins

CONFESSIONS OF THE SNOW

I was the sky
crumbling thick and fast

as a leper's skin,

I was the good disciple
who made up the story, the photographer
who fucked his model,

static on the radio.

What I conceal might hurt you.

So the night I let you watch me
paper everything, blot the streetlights, blur
the rooftops, fences, concrete—

nothing sharp anymore,
the world for one night complete—

call it my gift to you.

I am the pile
of shit no one wants to step in—
commuters, tourists, blind man tapping his
tennis-balled cane on the pavement—

I am the water
spreading like a stain.

CYCLORAMA

“We report one gunman
26 dead, mostly children.”
(Reuters Twitter feed)

To view the cyclorama, you must enter
the silo built for a single painting,
step inside—you step inside the painting—

gawk, swivel,
spin your head, climb up and down
the scaffolding, walk. You piece the story
as you walk. Memory,
that withholding stranger, doesn’t give us much—

half a horse, a bayonet,
dribbles of pink sunset in the corner,
a bare arm dragging through the grass—
so we stretch the canvas. Fill. Crop.

I admit I watched the interview—
she was beautiful. Six years old?
Describing gunfire pops & the screams...
articulate, composed.

Hanging from the ceiling,
a canopy of clean white cloth
to blur the canvas edge.

Paul Philippoteaux, lead artist:
“Where the actual material things begin and where
imitative art commences must be so well done that
the deception must be invisible.”
(*New York Times*, 1882)

I read the timeline on CNN—

Worst School Violence in American History
September 15, 1959: Convict Paul Orgeron explodes a suitcase
of dynamite on a school playground, killing himself, two adults
and three children.

An ad for Mont Blank—

FIND THE PERFECT GIFT

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

FREE SHIPPING UPGRADE!

Here's a young Confederate soldier
nearly our height, thrown from his horse,
looking straight at us. So close

we see the whites of his eyes
rolling back like pinballs, the O
of his lips mid-scream—
Elmer Fudd without his gun, trying to mime
a message like *Retreat! Retreat!* or
We shall not perish from this earth—

his flabby, painted skin
balloon-pink.

“Grown men wept.”

Brig. Gen. Henry J. Hunt, former
Union artillery chief, 1884:
“I never before had an idea that the eye
could be so deceived by paint and canvas.”

Days after: I notice every door,
cabinet, window. Every post
on Facebook. Do we
have a lockdown procedure?

Someone is playing Barber's
Adagio for Strings. If you
don't think it's time for gun control
you're dead to me! Someone launches
a 501(c)(3). Then another.

Ruins they piled
before the canvas base—

stones plucked from battered fences;

whole tree limbs, shaved;
a cannon (field-retired); torn broadcloth uniforms
dangling original brass buttons;
wet Gettysburg soil.

Buckled, ripped,
rolled up like carpet after a stint in Boston,
the painting toured in Newark, Brooklyn,
Baltimore, Washington;
sometimes in fragments, sometimes whole.

Rain. Wind. Two fires.

CLICK TO PLAY.

I click.

Pine trees in the parking lot
quickly looped for Christmas;
single-file on the pavement
long white daisies. At each head
they've laid a bright stuffed animal:
bears, dogs, a big yellow duck.

—Clumsy, categorical,
and like all makeshift memorials
made from things because we are.

And here I am crying
because I want to cry, I am at home here,
doing what my body wants to do—
flapping, shaking, leaking—

I'm the white balloon
bobbing slowly to the ground,
dirty, hungry, beautiful.

Night at the cyclorama.

Then love poured into
the restoration.

Five years' work
replacing the sky, all fifteen feet
from floor to ceiling.
Then stitching, swabbing,

archivists brushing
faint swords in the cannon smoke.

What's the point, we might ask, why
stitch this history of violence
so minutely?

I guess I mean the kind of love
that is attention mainly—
the way a cat claws
her mouse until the stuffing bleeds,

free of blame or hope
and therefore
capable of anything.

AUBADE, STILL

—Awake. The slap
of wet bamboo on windowpane.

It's that dream again where
all my teeth fall out, bones
spit into my palm like
wet crushed corn.

The machine of me
quivers. Think of Liszt

counting gondola strokes,
brooding over death, trying to
transcribe it. Maybe that's

the best we can do—
anatomically correct,
soul-challenged. Cue

my neighbor's chained-up dog,
men popping off fireworks.
All the registers of being

someplace at this moment
here, beneath this sky
which isn't black exactly—

swirly-eyed, like cream in coffee,
myself at twenty—

but rose, silly rose.

Two knees shining in the dark:
Still me. All accounted for,
unbelievably solid.